



## Thinking the Earth: Critical Reflections on Quentin Meillassoux's and Heidegger's Concept of the Earth

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Quentin Meillassoux's call for realism is a call for a new interest in the Earth as un-correlated being in philosophy. Unlike Meillassoux, Martin Heidegger has not been criticized for being a correlationist. To the contrary, his concept of the Earth has to be understood as un-correlated being, as it is opposed to the world as correlated being. First, this interpretation of Heidegger's concept of the Earth solves various problems of interpretation that are present in the secondary literature. Second, Heidegger's characterization of the Earth in the end remains unthought in his work. Third, in the age of global warming Meillassoux's call for realism can help to conceive planet Earth as the ontic-ontological origin of the Heideggerian strife between Earth and world.

### INTRODUCTION

In *After Finitude*, Quentin Meillassoux criticizes philosophers since Kant for being correlationists and calls for realism in contemporary philosophy. According to Meillassoux, correlationism means that "we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other."<sup>1</sup> The idea that the world only appears within the framework of human thought is criticized because it cannot acknowledge the empirical fact of the emergence and evolution of the world around 4.3 billion years *before* the appearance of humans on Earth, i.e., the emergence of the world as *un-correlated* to human thought.<sup>2</sup> Meillassoux's speculative realism can be seen as part of a larger movement in contemporary philosophy, such as ecological studies and animal studies.<sup>3</sup> In this article, I take his call for realism as a call for a new interest in the Earth as un-correlated being in contemporary philosophy.

An example of correlationism is the philosophy of Martin Heidegger. In his *Zollikon Seminars*, for instance, Heidegger discusses the contradiction between

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<sup>1</sup> Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency* (London, New Delhi, New York, and Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Gratton, *Speculative Realism. Problems and Prospects* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), p. 14.

his fundamental idea in *Being and Time* that there cannot be the being of beings *without* the human being and the natural scientific assertion that the Earth existed long before human beings appeared on Earth: “At the very least, the being we call Earth was already here long *before* human beings appeared. Therefore, beings and the manifestness of being, and therefore being can also exist entirely *independently* of human beings.”<sup>4</sup> Heidegger rejects this idea of a time before the appearance of humans on Earth. Only according to clock time is the Earth present at hand before humans emerged on Earth. Our calculation of the age of planet Earth is only possible, according to Heidegger, “insofar as *we* stand in the clearing of being.”<sup>5</sup>

According to Meillassoux, the scandal of contemporary philosophy is the dominance of such a correlationism and the ignorance of what he calls the *ancestral*, i.e., the emergence of planet Earth as un-correlated being, which inspires his call for *realism* in contemporary philosophy. In this article, I do not raise the question of whether Meillassoux’s criticism of correlationism is legitimate in the case of Heidegger.<sup>6</sup> Rather, I ask whether Meillassoux’s own account of the Earth is appropriate. On the one hand, Heidegger’s reflections on the Earth as un-correlated being in *The Origin of the Work of Art* can help to criticize Meillassoux’s conceptualization of the Earth (subsection one). On the other hand, Meillassoux’s call for realism can help us to criticize Heidegger’s conceptualization of the Earth (subsection two). Contrary to most interpretations of Heidegger’s concept of the Earth, my view in this article is that even where Heidegger explicitly reflects on the Earth, it remains *unthought*. In subsection three, I argue that in the age of global warming, Meillassoux’s call for realism can make us sensitive to the idea that planet Earth is the ontic-ontological origin of the Heideggerian strife between Earth and world. In this respect, his call for realism helps to articulate a question of the Earth *after* Heidegger. This question has fundamental consequences for my conceptualization of subsection three.

#### (1) MEILLASSOUX’S CRITICISM OF CORRELATIONISM AS A CALL FOR REALISM IN CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHY

As noted above, in *After Finitude*, Quentin Meillassoux criticizes philosophers since Kant for being correlationists and calls for realism in contemporary philosophy. Meillassoux defines correlationism in the following way:

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<sup>4</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Zollikoner Seminare. Protokolle, Gespräche, Briefe* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klosterman, 1987), pp. 222–23; *Zollikon Seminars, Protocols, Conversations, Letters*, trans. Fanz Mayr and Richard Askay (Evanston: Northwest University Press, 1987), pp. 176–77. References and quotations to Heidegger’s work refer to the standard English translations of his work, followed by the reference to the original German text in the *Gesamtausgabe* within parentheses.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 177 (p. 222).

<sup>6</sup> For more on this question, see Vincent Blok, “Realism without Speculation: Heidegger, Meillassoux and the Question of Philosophical Method,” *Studia Phaenomenologica* (forthcoming).

Correlationism takes many forms, but particularly those of transcendental philosophy, the varieties of phenomenology, and post-modernism. But although these currents are all extraordinarily varied in themselves, they all involve, in my view, a more or less explicit decision: that there are no objects, no events, no laws, no beings which are not always-already correlated with a point of view, with a subjective access. Anyone maintaining the contrary, i.e., that it is possible to attain something like a reality in itself, existing absolutely independently of his viewpoint, or his categories, or his epoch, or his culture, or his language, etc.,—this person would be exemplarily naïve.<sup>7</sup>

Correlationism considers the Earth as something we are always already intentionally involved in and is understood—correlated to human thought—and Meillassoux criticizes correlationism because it cannot account for the emergence and evolution of the world around 4.3 billion years *before* the appearance of humans on Earth, i.e., the emergence of planet Earth as *un*-correlated to human thought.<sup>8</sup>

This period of being of the Earth without thinking is called the *ancestral*, i.e., “the great outdoors, the eternal in-itself, whose being is indifferent to whether or not it is thought.”<sup>9</sup> According to Meillassoux, the correlationist is not able to perceive this ancestrality, i.e., the temporal emergence of planet Earth. This is “a time in which the given as such passes from non-being into being.”<sup>10</sup> The correlationist would argue that he asks for the transcendental conditions of the *experience* of the temporal emergence of the Earth, but Meillassoux argues that he asks for the temporal emergence of such transcendental conditions of the possibility: “. . . when we raise the question of the emergence of thinking bodies in time we are also raising the question of the *temporality of the conditions of instantiation, and hence of the taking place of the transcendental as such.*”<sup>11</sup> The emergence of planet Earth is not the emergence of the correlation of being and thinking, but

<sup>7</sup> Quentin Meillassoux, “Time without Becoming,” lecture at Middlesex University, London, 8 May 2008, [https://speculativeheresy.files.wordpress.com/2008/07/3729-time\\_without\\_becoming.pdf](https://speculativeheresy.files.wordpress.com/2008/07/3729-time_without_becoming.pdf), p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, p. 9. In the secondary literature, it is discussed whether Meillassoux’s criticism just has an epistemological interest or not. Robert Gall, for instance, argues that Meillassoux raises primarily an epistemological thesis: “Meillassoux’s point is not simply about the mind-independent existence of things; like most presentations of (scientific) realism, his realism is also committed to arguing that scientific claims are literally true (or false) and that they give us true or approximately true descriptions of a mind-independent world” (Robert S. Gall, “Knowing, Counting, Being: Meillassoux, Heidegger, and the Possibility of Science,” *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 28, no. 3 [2014]: 338). In his article, he opposes Meillassoux’s epistemic thesis to Heidegger’s ontological thesis about being, and argues that Heidegger’s emphasis on ontology is superior because it is a better explanation of our thinking about things in themselves. In this article, however, I follow a different strategy. Meillassoux himself is not *only* interested in *knowing* ancestrality—i.e., how mathematics describes “the great outdoors” in the natural world—but also in the ontological status of un-correlated being itself. Although the methodological questions how we can have access to the ancestral in general and the epistemological question and how sciences can make legitimate statements about the ancestral in particular are relevant for Meillassoux, I argue that these epistemological questions only make sense if they are embedded in an ontological interest in ancestrality itself, i.e., in an interest in un-correlated being itself.

<sup>9</sup> Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, p. 63.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25 (emphasis in the original).

the emergence of the Earth as capacity to engender factual correlations between being and thinking, i.e., the era of humanity and terrestrial life which in the end will disappear again.<sup>12</sup> This Earth is not correlational, but the factual correlation emerges, unfolds and expands out of this Earth and goes back into the Earth again, and not the other way around. This means that the singularity of the emergence of planet Earth is temporally prior to the emergence of these transcendental conditions of the experience of the temporality, in which being and thinking are correlated.

The singularity of this emergence not only concerns the ontic origin of planet Earth, but also its coming into being at an ontological level, according to Meillassoux:

. . . the time at issue here is the time wherein *consciousness* as well as *conscious time* have *themselves emerged in time*. For the problem of the arche-fossil is not the empirical problem of the birth of living organisms, but the ontological problem of the coming into being of givenness as such. More acutely, the problem consists in understanding how science is able to think—without any particular difficulty—the coming into being of consciousness and its spatio-temporal forms of givenness in the midst of a space and time which are supposed to pre-exist the latter.<sup>13</sup>

For Meillassoux, the question is how we can think the Earth without assuming the Earth as correlated to thought. This question has a certain content—what do we mean by the Earth as object of philosophical thought—and a methodological component—how do we have access to the Earth as un-correlated being. For Meillassoux, it is science that has primarily access to the time in which planet Earth emerged and into which it will disappear again.

Science reveals a time that not only does not need conscious time but that allows the latter to arise at a determinate point in its own flux. To think science is to think the status of a becoming which cannot be correlational because the correlate is in it, rather than it being in the correlate. So the challenge is therefore the following: to understand how *science can think a world wherein spatio-temporal givenness itself came into being within a time and a space which preceded every variety of givenness*.<sup>14</sup>

This is the speculative realist question Meillassoux raises in *After Finitude*.

While I focussed on the second aspect in another paper,<sup>15</sup> I here ask about the content of Meillassoux's concept of Earth as the ancestral. For Meillassoux, ancestry is any reality before the emergence of humans on Earth. Materials indicating the existence of this ancestral reality are called arche-fossils or fossil-matter.<sup>16</sup> This does not mean that Meillassoux presupposes direct or "naïve realist" access to fossil matter. The materiality of the ancestral has to be considered as the absolute. The absolute is "a being whose *severance* (the original meaning of *absolutus*) and

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 21–22; Meillassoux, "Time without Becoming," p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, p. 21 (emphasis in the original).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 22 (emphasis in the original).

<sup>15</sup> Blok, "Realism without Speculation."

<sup>16</sup> Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, p. 10.

whose separateness from thought is such that it presents itself to us as non-relative to us, and hence as capable of existing whether we exist or not.”<sup>17</sup> This does not mean that Meillassoux assumes a necessary being as in dogmatic metaphysics—an absolute being like God or an *idea* that is claimed to exist: “*we must uncover an absolute necessity that does not reinstate any form of absolutely necessary entity.* In other words, we must think an absolute necessity without thinking anything that *is* absolutely necessary.”<sup>18</sup>

This absolute is found in the contingency of the factual correlation between being and thinking. Strong correlationism rejects metaphysics as the assumption of a necessary being—the absolute—and stresses our human finitude, i.e., the *fact* of an inescapable correlation between being and thinking.<sup>19</sup> This *facticity* of the correlation has to be seen as the condition for the possibility of experience as such; the facticity of the correlation between being and thinking structures which guides our experience of the world. Examples of facticity are such oppositions as subject-object, nature-culture, fact-fiction, that structure and guide our experience of the world. They are indeed fixed in the sense that we cannot change them—in this sense, they are factual—but this does not mean that they are absolutely valid. While facticity concerns the *fact* of the actual variant of correlation, rather than another variant, the contingency of this facticity means that the correlated structure of being and thinking could have been different and is not necessary. An example is the law of non-contradiction; it is a factual structure that guides our actual experience, but this factual structure is not necessary but contingent; the only thing that is given to us is the fact that we cannot think anything that is self-contradictory.<sup>20</sup> Contingency means that the correlation could have been otherwise, and Meillassoux finds here a non-metaphysical absolute; “everything must, without reason, be able not to be and/or be able to be other than it is.”<sup>21</sup> Because the necessary contingency concerns the absolute necessity that everything could have been otherwise, reality is ultimately found in hyper-chaos in which virtually anything is possible.<sup>22</sup> The factual correlation between being and thinking is *groundless*, but with this, it remains *possible*, and as a consequence remains embedded in the Earth as hyper-chaos which created the material world *ex nihilo*. In the end, this absolute necessity is found in the *mathesis universalis*, i.e., in the idea that the Earth is fully mathematical; the mathematical character of the Earth is Meillassoux’s concept of un-correlated being.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 28 (emphasis in the original).

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 34 (emphasis in the original).

<sup>19</sup> See Gratton, *Speculative Realism*, p. 16.

<sup>20</sup> Meillassoux, “Time without Becoming,” p. 39.

<sup>21</sup> Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, p. 60.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>23</sup> In this respect, one can argue that Meillassoux follows his mentor Alain Badiou, who equated mathematics and ontology (Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham [London: Continuum, 2005]). It is interesting to note here that Meillassoux is criticizing phenomenologists such as Husserl and Heidegger for being correlationists, while Husserl would have criticized Meillassoux’s focus on the *mathesis universalis* for being an extreme example of the crisis of modern philosophy, in

But to what extent can Meillassoux's speculative realism still claim to be a *realist* position, if it does not take seriously the ancestrality of planet Earth as we perceive and experience it—the mountains in the South of France, the Earth layers we experience when we walk along rock walls, the depth of the North Sea—and limits itself to the mathematical character of the Earth which is only accessible via an *intellectual intuition*? To the extent that the Earth as the zone we live in does not manifest itself as mathematical, and the mathematical is only accessible via an *intellectual intuition*, one can argue that Meillassoux's own position is *anti-realist* as well and therefore unable to articulate the Earth as un-correlated being.<sup>24</sup>

To conclude, while Meillassoux makes us sensitive to the call for realism in contemporary philosophy and to think the Earth as un-correlated being, his own speculations about the mathematical character of planet Earth can be seen as anti-realist and as calls for a new round of reflection on the Earth as the zone in which we live.

## (2) CRITICAL ASSESSMENT OF HEIDEGGER'S CONCEPT OF EARTH

Is it not precisely Heidegger's concept of the Earth which can help develop a more "realist" approach to thinking the Earth, as is suggested by several environmental philosophers?<sup>25</sup> In this subsection, I reflect on Heidegger's concept of the Earth and especially on the question to what extent Heidegger's concept of the Earth can provide an answer to the call for a new interest in the Earth as un-correlated being in contemporary philosophy.

First of all, it is clear that Heidegger would support my criticism of Meillassoux's anti-realism in the previous subsection. According to Heidegger, the reduction of nature to the mathematical ordering of the world by modern science is one of the two processes that *denatured* nature (the other one is Christendom).<sup>26</sup> More important for my purposes in this article, however, is that Heidegger developed his own concept of Earth in the *Origin of the Work of Art*, which is neither nature nor

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which the crisis of the modern sciences is embedded (Edmund Husserl, *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie* [Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2012]). A further exploration of the Husserl-Meillassoux controversy is beyond the scope of this article (see Blok, "Realism without Speculation"), partly because Meillassoux himself postponed his demonstration of the *mathesis universalis* to future research (see Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, pp. 110–12; Jussi Backman, "Transcendental Idealism and Strong Correlationism: Meillassoux and the End of Heideggerian Finitude," in Sara Heinämaa, Mirjo Hartimo, Timo Miettinen, eds., *Phenomenology and the Transcendental* [New York: Routledge, 2014], p. 288).

<sup>24</sup> Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, p. 82; see Gratton, *Speculative Realism*.

<sup>25</sup> Bruce V. Foltz, *Inhabiting the Earth: Heidegger, Environmental Ethics, and the Metaphysics of Nature* (New York: Humanity Books, 1995); Kenneth Maly, "Earth-Thinking and Transformation," in Ladelle McWhorter and Gail Stenstad, eds., *Heidegger and the Earth: Essays in Environmental Philosophy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), pp. 45–61; Hanspeter Padрут, "Heidegger and Ecology," in *ibid.*, pp. 17–44.

<sup>26</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymns "Germanien" und "Der Rhein," Gesamtausgabe Band 39* (Frankfurt Am Main: Vittorio Klosterman, 1999), p. 195; Martin Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymns "Germania" and "the Rhine,"* trans. William McNeill and Julia Ireland (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), pp. 178–79.

world. In this essay, Heidegger rejects the metaphysical concept of the Earth as matter that can be impregnated with a form. As a first step in his characterization of the Earth, he reconceptualizes this metaphysical distinction between matter and form in his concept of serviceability (*Dienlichkeit*), which he mainly developed in *Being and Time*.

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger argues that we first and mostly exist in association with innerworldly beings which we use and take care of. In our dealings *in* the world—writing, hammering, opening, building etc.—and *with* entities within the world, things become accessible and are understood as useful things or equipment; they encounter our “practical” behavior in dealing with the world “in-order-to” hammer, write, etc.<sup>27</sup> One of the main insights of *Being and Time* is that our dealings with equipment constitute the world we are always already familiar with in our being-in-the-world. In this respect, things primarily appear within the horizon of the world of practice, namely, as useful and serviceable for our practical dealings with them in the world. This “understanding of being” of the world of practice, in which we are always already intentionally involved (*Seinsverständnis*), is what I called correlationism in the previous subsection.

When Heidegger in *The Origin of the Work of Art* reconceptualizes the metaphysical distinction between matter and form in his concept of serviceability, he means that the particular meaning of matter and form is dependent on their serviceability in the world of practice. Heidegger takes a pair of peasant shoes as an example.<sup>28</sup>

Matter is not just materiality and form is not just a general form impregnated in this materiality. In order to be what they are—dancing shoes or work boots for instance—matter and form have to be distributed in a particular way; matter has to be flexible and/or impermeable, while form has to be feet-like: Serviceability is the basic trait from out of which these kinds of beings look at us—that is, flash at us and thereby presence and so be the beings they are. Both the design and the choice of material predetermined by that design—and, therefore, the dominance of the matter-form structure—are grounded in such serviceability. A being that falls under serviceability is always the product of a process of making. It is made as a piece of equipment for something. Accordingly, matter and form are determinations of beings which find their true home in the essential nature of equipment.<sup>29</sup>

This means that Earth is not just materiality, but is primarily a useful thing or equipment in-order-to. . . .

<sup>27</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, Gesamtausgabe Band 2 (Frankfurt Am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1977), pp. 90–94; Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008), pp. 95–99; Vincent Blok, “Being-in-the-World as Being-in-Nature: An Ecological Perspective on *Being and Time*,” *Studia Phaenomenologica* 14 (2014): 215–35.

<sup>28</sup> Although it is the case that Heidegger extends his concept of world to politics in *The Origin of the Work of Art*, compared with *Being and Time*, this extension does not contaminate the line of reasoning in this subsection.

<sup>29</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Holzwege*, Gesamtausgabe Band 5 (Frankfurt Am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1977), p. 13; Martin Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, trans. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 10.

Subsequently, Heidegger reflects on the nature of this equipment by “reversing the process of the broadening and emptying” of the terms *matter* and *form* in order to rehabilitate their “power of definition.”<sup>30</sup> Following the example of the serviceability of a pair of peasant shoes, he asks for this serviceability of equipment—working in the field, dancing, etc.—as that on which we always already rely in our everyday dealings with the world around us. The scope of this world of useful things or equipment becomes clear if we take an example.

The work of a shoemaker—a new pair of peasant shoes, for instance—is itself a useful thing for ploughing and sowing, for instance. First of all, *what* this equipment is useful *for* belongs to the world we are always already intentionally involved in; the ploughed land is useful for a rich harvest, the harvest is useful for the animals, the animals are useful for their hides, the hides are useful for the production of work boots, etc. All these items of equipment belong to the world of practice we are always already intentionally involved in. Second, the materials the equipment are produced from belong to the world we are intentionally involved in; work boots are dependent on leather, leather is produced from hides, hides are taken from animals, animals are raised by farmers, farmers are dependent on footgear, and so on. All these items of equipment belong to the world of practice we are intentionally involved in. Also human beings belong to this world of practice, as the ones who wear and use this equipment. According to Heidegger, this world of practice includes the whole of nature, i.e., the Earth as a whole.<sup>31</sup>

This means that the Earth belongs to the world of practice we are always intentionally involved in and we always already rely on in our practical dealings with the world.

In virtue of this reliability [as the essential being of equipment] the peasant woman is admitted into the silent call of the Earth; in virtue of the reliability of the equipment she is certain of her world. World and Earth exist for her and those who share her mode of being only here—in the equipment.<sup>32</sup>

Heidegger’s concept of the Earth and world can be seen as a new conceptualization of matter and form, in which the original power of the definition of the terms *matter* and *form* is rehabilitated from the perspective of the world of practice we are always already intentionally involved in.

Let us consider now whether our being-in-the-world provides a first characteristic of Heidegger’s concept of the Earth. The Earth we encountered until now concerns the Earth in its serviceability and usability, i.e., the Earth as nourishing soil. This is confirmed in *The Origin of the Work of Art*:

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<sup>30</sup> Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 9 (p. 12).

<sup>31</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 100 (p. 95); Blok, “Being-in-the-World as Being-in-Nature.”

<sup>32</sup> Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, pp. 14–15 (p. 19).



Because it [the “work-material”] is determined through usefulness and serviceability, equipment takes that of which it consists into its service. In the manufacture of equipment—for example, an axe—the stone is used and used up. It disappears into usefulness. The less resistance the material puts up to being submerged in the equipmental being of the equipment the more suitable and the better it is.<sup>33</sup>

On the one hand, it seems to be the characteristic of the Earth in its serviceability which is at stake in the “the silent call of the Earth, its silent gift of the ripening grain, its unexplained self-refusal in the wintry field.”<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, to the extent that the Earth, just as the world of practice, appears here in its serviceability and usability, namely, as nourishing soil, it is part of the world of practice we always already have understood and rely on in our practical dealings with the world. And if this is the case, this conceptualization of Earth does not concern un-correlated being; as part of the world we are always already intentionally involved in, the Earth is always already *understood*, i.e., correlated to thought. Can we conclude that the Earth as un-correlated being remains the unthought in Heidegger’s work because he conceptualizes it from the perspective of the world of practice? Along a similar line of thought, Levinas already criticized Heidegger: “The structure of the *Zeug* as *Zeug* [equipment as equipment] and the system of references in which it has its place do indeed manifest themselves, in concerned handling, as irreducible to vision, but do not encompass the substantiality of objects, which is always there in addition.”<sup>35</sup> According to Levinas, Heidegger’s concept of our being-in-the-world is one-sided because the serviceability of things in the world does not exhaust the “elementary,” which he associates with the “wind, Earth, sea, sky, air.”<sup>36</sup>

Yet, Heidegger’s concept of the Earth cannot be reduced to the world. Referring to the Greek word *phusis*, he opposes the coming forth or rising up of a world in which we are at home—and we can consider this world we are intentionally involved in as correlated to human thought—and the Earth in which everything that arises—i.e., world—is brought back and is sheltered:

What this word [*Earth*] means here is far removed from the idea of a mass of matter

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 24 (p. 32).

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 14 (p. 19). In his famous book, *The Song of the Earth*, Michel Haar distinguishes four characteristics of the Earth: (1) the Earth as self-concealing dimension of the *phusis*; (2) nature as it appears in relation to the world of practice, namely as nourishing soil; (3) the materiality of the artwork, which is related to the strife between Earth and world; and (4) Earth as native ground (*heimatliche Grund*) (Michel Haar, *The Song of the Earth: Heidegger and the Grounds of the History of Being* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1993), pp. 57–63). The first characteristic of the Earth I consider here clearly corresponds with Haar’s second characteristic. As I show below, however, this characteristic of the Earth is in fact no characteristic of the Earth, but of the world of practice. I build on but also criticize Haar’s characteristics of the Earth, in order to articulate a concept of the Earth as un-correlated being.

<sup>35</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity. An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), p. 133.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 132; see Gratton, *Speculative Realism*.

and from the merely astronomical idea of a planet. Earth is that in which the arising of everything that arises is brought back—as, indeed, the very thing that it is—and sheltered. In the things that arise the Earth presences as the protecting one.<sup>37</sup>

In *The Origin of the Work of Art*, Earth is not understood as matter which is lacking form, nor as a horizon of our understanding of being (world),<sup>38</sup> but *physis* is the coming forth or rising up of a world in which we are at home, its endurance and finally its decay in its inclination toward the concealment and self-closedness of the Earth from which the world arose. This does not mean that Earth is identical with *physis*, but is understood out of the *physis* as the inclination toward concealment and self-withdrawal. This is the first characteristic of Heidegger's concept of Earth.<sup>39</sup> How is this Earth further characterized? Earth is the *origin* of every arising of a world, but is itself not a world. On the contrary, it is called the region (*Gegend*) of the closed, i.e., an "open expanse,"<sup>40</sup> which sets such a horizon for our understanding of being (world) free, lets it come forth<sup>41</sup> and is in the end also brought back and sheltered again. Although in *The Origin of the Work of Art*, Heidegger limits himself to the rising up of a world which is brought back and sheltered in the Earth, as it is established in a work of art, we receive indirectly a further indication of the Earth as open expanse:

As a world opens itself up, it puts up for decision, by a historical humanity, the question of victory or defeat, blessing and curse, lordship and slavery. The dawning world brings to the fore that which is still undecided and without measure and decisiveness.<sup>42</sup>

Here we encounter the Earth as region of the *undecided*, of that which is without measure—the Earth as wildness (Hölderlin)<sup>43</sup> which is at the same time that which

<sup>37</sup> Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 21 (p. 21).

<sup>38</sup> Cf. "What has the character of a horizon is thus only the side turned toward us of a surrounding open, an open which is filled with outward views into outward looks of what to our representing appear as objects. . . . This open seems to me to be something like a region, by means of whose enchantment everything which belongs to it returns to that in which it rests" (Martin Heidegger, *Feldweggespräche*, Gesamtausgabe Band 77 [Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1995], p. 112; Martin Heidegger, *Country Path Conversations*, trans. Bret W. Davis [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010], pp. 72–73).

<sup>39</sup> This first characteristic of the Earth corresponds with the first one distinguished by Haar, *The Song of the Earth*.

<sup>40</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Gelassenheit* (Stuttgart: Günther Neske, 1959), p. 39; Martin Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, trans. John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), p. 66.

<sup>41</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Parmenides*, Gesamtausgabe Band 54 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1992), p. 211; Martin Heidegger, *Parmenides*, trans. André Schuwer and Richard Rojcewicz (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), p. 142.

<sup>42</sup> Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, pp. 37–38 (p. 50).

<sup>43</sup> Zimmerman convincingly shows the connection between Heidegger's concept of the measurelessness of the Earth and Hölderlin's concept of nature as "holy wildness": ". . . *physis* corresponds to the overwhelming stream of origin, holy wildness. Heraclitus realized that this originating stream required boundary and limit. *Logos*, in Heidegger's view, was Heraclitus's name for the 'fire' which illuminates

bears all and requires boundary and limit, i.e., which bears the decidedness and measure of a world, without being exhausted by such limits.<sup>44</sup>

Although Heidegger connects this concept of the Earth as open expanse or wildness with the pull of the weight of the stone, the dumb hardness of the wood and the dark glow of the colours,<sup>45</sup> it does not concern matter as primal matter or substrate as in the metaphysical tradition.<sup>46</sup> The Earth primarily concerns the striving to preserve measurelessness and undecidedness, i.e., to preserve the *dumbness* of the hardness of the wood, the *darkness* of the glow of the color. This Earth as open expanse can be conceived as the boundary condition of any rising of world (measure, decision).<sup>47</sup>

All the things of the Earth, the Earth itself in its entirety, flow together in reciprocal harmony. But this confluence is no blurring of outlines. What flows here is the self-sustaining stream of boundary-setting, a stream which bounds everything that presences into its presence.<sup>48</sup>

But is this measurelessness of the Earth not in contrast with its characteristic as boundary condition? This boundary of the Earth does not have to be seen as *constraint* of the world, as it is often taken in discussions about sustainable development, but the world is *released* by the boundary conditions of the Earth. The Earth as open — measureless — expanse and boundary condition for the emergence and decay of a world is the second characteristic of the Earth.<sup>49</sup>

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and gathers all entities. *Logos* is, in effect, 'the same' as primal poetic 'saying.' The illuminating and gathering *logos* brings *physis*, nature, holy wildness 'to stand.' Holy wildness or 'nature,' then, calls upon the poet to delimit that wildness in a way that enables all things to appear in their proper outline and measure" (Michael E. Zimmerman, *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity: Technology, Politics, Art* [Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1990], p. 125).

<sup>44</sup> In this respect, Heidegger's concept of the Earth is much closer to Levinas' concept of the elementary. For Levinas' concept of the elementary, see the eminent study by John Sallis, "Levinas and the Elemental," *Research in Phenomenology* 28 (1998): 152–59.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 38 (p. 51).

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Haar, *The Song of the Earth*, p. 58.

<sup>47</sup> This boundary condition of the Earth does not concern an *intrinsic quality* of wood, stone, etc. which allows some sort of measure (making a temple) and others not (making a shoe) as Zimmerman suggests (Zimmermann, *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity*, p. 123; cf. Haar, *The Song of the Earth*, p. 58). These characteristics take the serviceability of the Earth as point of departure, and therefore concern the world and not the Earth as un-correlated being. For this reason, both Haar and Zimmerman do not recognize the Earth as open expanse and boundary condition for the emergence and decay of a world, but focus on the materiality of the boundary conditions of the Earth. We may call this the materiality of the Earth, but it is definitely not an intrinsic quality or something world-like like that. This confusion may explain why Zimmerman thinks that "Heidegger had difficulty in thinking through to a definition of both 'world' and 'Earth,' as well as the relationship between them" (Zimmerman, *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity*, p. 121).

<sup>48</sup> Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 25 (p. 33).

<sup>49</sup> Because of this characteristic of the Earth, Johnson argues that Heidegger's Earth is "entirely inert" (Andres Tyler Johnson, "A Critique of the Husserlian and Heideggerian Concepts of Earth: Toward a Transcendental Earth that Accords with the Experience of Life," *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 45, no. 3 (2014): 234). As I show below with regard to the third characteristic of the

As such an *origin* of the arising of a world in which we are always already at home and which we always already have understood, the Earth itself is *not* understood. It is in this respect that Heidegger speaks of a *silent* call of the Earth. This not only shows that Earth cannot be reduced to world, but, as such, Earth is an indication for the existence of un-correlated being. I can even argue that Meillassoux's concept of the Earth as un-correlated hyper-chaos (1) returns in Heidegger's second characteristic of the Earth as open—measureless—expanse. But contrary to Meillassoux, Heidegger does not turn to mathematics in order to further characterize the Earth as un-correlated being. In order to see this, I raise the epistemological question how we can ever have access to the Earth, according to Heidegger, if it is self-closed. While the world concerns the horizon of a meaningful world we are always already intentionally involved in—i.e., the world as correlate of human thought—the Earth withdraws itself from this understanding of being; it is precisely un-correlated being that withdraws itself from our control. In this respect, Earth and world are radically opposed. But because the Earth as un-correlated being is understood from the perspective of the *phusis*, the Earth and world are not completely disconnected:

The world is the self-opening openness of the broad paths of simple and essential decisions in the destiny of a historical people. The Earth is the unforced coming forth of the continually self-closing, and in that way, self-sheltering. World and Earth are essentially different and yet never separated from one another.<sup>50</sup>

Here not only the first characteristic of the Earth as un-correlated being—its inclination to concealment, self-withdrawal, or self-closing—is confirmed, but the *coming forth* of the Earth also shows the unbreakable connection or even interdependency of world and Earth. This unbreakable connection, on the one hand, prevents Earth from being taken simply as the closed or sealed-off.<sup>51</sup> But this does not mean, on the other hand, that the Earth in the end *appears* as self-closing and self-sheltering, because the Earth would then belong to the world which is understood and precisely no longer self-closed and self-sheltered. But how can the Earth *come forth* without appearing to us, and how can we have access to the Earth as un-correlated being, if it is self-closed in this way?

The nature of the coming forth of Earth as self-closed becomes clear if we reflect for a moment on Heidegger's concept of truth as un-concealment. Earth and world are not only conceived from the perspective of the Greek word *phusis* in *The Origin of the Work of Art*, but also from the perspective of the *essence* of the *phusis* which remained unthought in Greek thought, the essence of truth as *a-letheia* or un-concealment.<sup>52</sup> The *alpha privative* in the word *un-concealment* (*a-letheia*) is not just a *negatio* of concealment and in this respect un-concealment, but indicates

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Earth, however, Earth is not primarily inert like the Aristotelian *hylè*, but highly dynamic from the point of view of the truth of being.

<sup>50</sup> Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 26 (p. 35).

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31 (p. 42).

<sup>52</sup> See Haar, *The Song of the Earth*, p. 57. It is remarkable that most interpreters do not take the fundamental role of the essence of truth in *The Origin of the Work of Art* into account in their interpretation

a brokenness or concealment—un-concealment—which remains always related to this concealment.<sup>53</sup> Seen from this perspective, we can say that the concealment (self-closedness, self-withdrawal) of the Earth as un-correlated being is at the *heart* of the un-concealment of the world we always already have understood (correlated being). In this respect, Earth is more original than world.<sup>54</sup> Here, not only the second characteristic of the Earth as open—measureless—expanse and boundary condition for the emergence of a world is confirmed, but we receive also an indication of a third characteristic of the Earth.

According to Heidegger, there are at least two kinds of concealment, i.e., two kinds in which the Earth comes forth as self-closing and self-sheltering, without its being un-concealed as part of the world.<sup>55</sup> The first kind of concealment we encounter is when beings refuse themselves to us to the extent that all we can say of them is “that” they are. This refusal is at stake in our efforts to unconceal the Earth:

The stone presses downwards and manifests its heaviness. But while this heaviness weighs down on us, at the same time, it denies us any penetration into it. If we attempt such penetration by smashing the rock, then it shows us its pieces but never anything inward, anything that has been opened up. The stone is instantly withdrawn again into the same dull weight and mass of its fragments.<sup>56</sup>

The Earth only shows itself in the failure of our efforts to unconceal it. In this effort, we try to disclose the Earth as part of the world, but in our failure to succeed, the undisclosedness and unexplainedness of the Earth comes forth, namely, as that about which we can only say “that” it is. This *that-is* can be seen as a further specification of the second characteristic of the Earth as open—measureless—expanse of which we can only say *that it is*.

A second kind of concealment of the Earth comes forth when beings are obstructed, i.e., when beings show themselves as something else, the self-closing at stake in a being which shows itself as if it is something else, for instance, a tree

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of the Earth, and focus on the *physis* only, while the concealing-unconcealing provides good indications for how to understand the Earth in a concrete way, as I show below.

<sup>53</sup> See Vincent Blok, “Establishing the Truth: Heidegger’s Reflections on Gestalt,” *Heidegger Studies* 27 (2011): 101–18. Contrary to Hegel, who understood negativity or concealment as a contrary that keeps the movement of sublating going, Heidegger conceptualized this twofold between concealment and unconcealment as insurmountable (Martin Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie, Vom Ereignis*, Gesamtausgabe Band 65 [Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klosterman, 1989], pp. 264–65; *Contributions to Philosophy [from Enowning]*, trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly [Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999], pp. 186–87). For this reason, concealment in the case of Hegel concerns in the end *correlated* being, while for Heidegger, concealment concerns un-correlated being.

<sup>54</sup> Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, p. 193 (p. 275).

<sup>55</sup> In this respect, we can criticize Folz who tried to connect the self-withdrawal of the Earth with the materiality of equipment—the stone, for instance—which disappears in the usefulness of the axe (Folz, *Inhabiting the Earth*, p. 136). Taken in its usefulness, the Earth is already part of the world we already have understood, not the self-closedness of the Earth (cf. Blok, “Being-in-the-World as Being-in-Nature”).

<sup>56</sup> Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, pp. 24–25 (p. 33).

trunk which appears as (*as-if*) a grumpy old man in a dark wood. While the world opens a horizon of meaning in which things show themselves within boundaries and limits *as* they are, the Earth comes forth *indirectly* only when such boundaries and limits of things cannot be provided and the *that-is* of the Earth as open—measureless—expanse is the only thing we can say about it, or when this appearance of boundaries and limits in which a being appears as itself turns out to be an *as-if*, when a being shows itself as something else. Both types of concealment of the Earth only come forth in the context of the world we already have understood. In this respect, we can say that the Earth as un-correlated being is *ontologically* prior to the world, while it is *epistemologically* later than our experience of the world. We can understand now why, according to Heidegger, Earth and world are essentially different and at the same time not separated from each other.

World is grounded on Earth, and Earth rises up through world. But the relation between world and Earth never atrophies into the empty unity of opposites unconcerned with one another. In its resting upon Earth the world strives to surmount it. As the self-opening it will tolerate nothing closed. As the sheltering and concealing, however, Earth tends always to draw the world into itself and to keep it there.<sup>57</sup>

The world is released from the Earth and consists in the tendency to unconceal the Earth completely by providing boundaries and limits while the Earth is the origin of the world to which every world returns, and consists in the tendency to conceal the world completely by taking it back in measurelessness and limitlessness. This strife between both tendencies shows, first, that Earth and world cannot be separated: “World is ‘Earthly’ (of the Earth). Earth is worldly.”<sup>58</sup> The strife between both tendencies shows, second, that the strife will never result in the complete prevalence of the world (unconcealment) or the Earth (concealment); it makes clear that the world is not a “fixed stage with a permanently raised curtain on which the play of beings enact itself”<sup>59</sup> or the other way around. Rather, the unconcealment of the world *happens* as the permanent strife between un-concealing (world) and concealing (Earth), i.e., concerns a simultaneous unconcealing-concealing.<sup>60</sup> This strife between world and Earth makes clear that the Earth cannot just simply be characterized as materiality related to the strife, as is suggested by Haar, but very concretely as that which comes forth as self-closing and open—measureless—expanse in the *that-is* and *as-if* we experience in the world. As *that-is*, the Earth is “the continuing origin” of the world, and as *as-if*, the Earth “metes out” to world “the rigorous severity of error.”<sup>61</sup> The tendency of the Earth toward concealment

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 26 (p. 35). In this respect, we can criticize Folz who argued that the Earth has to be saved from modern technology (Folz, *Inhabiting the Earth*, pp. 137–38). In fact, the natural world is already technologically mediated (Blok, “Being-in-the-World as Being-in-Nature”) and the Earth does not have to be saved from the world, because it can only come forth as self-closed thanks to the world.

<sup>58</sup> Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, p. 193 (p. 275).

<sup>59</sup> Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 30–31 (p. 41).

<sup>60</sup> Blok, “Establishing the Truth,” p. 105.

<sup>61</sup> Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 31 (pp. 41–42).

is fundamentally different from the world as tendency toward unconcealment (first characteristic of the Earth). Furthermore, the Earth as open—measureless—expanse or boundary condition is even the heart of the world (second characteristic of the Earth). At the same time, however, the Earth is connected with the world in the sense that the Earth shows itself indirectly in the twofold way of concealing which is at stake in the *that-is* and in the *as-if* of beings in the world.<sup>62</sup> This *that-is* and *as-if* is the third characteristic of Heidegger's concept of Earth.<sup>63</sup>

With this third characteristic of the Earth, however, a critical issue emerges. Although Heidegger does not understand Earth as part of the world as I have shown, but as un-correlated being, he at the same time characterizes the Earth here not out of the Earth itself, but out of the way he has access to it, namely, as the *that-is* and *as-if* of beings in the world, which we can indirectly experience in our being-in-the-world. This strategy to characterize the Earth is strange in light of Heidegger's criticism of the metaphysical tradition.

According to Heidegger, the metaphysical tradition understood the being of beings out of the way they had access to this being, namely as *idea*.<sup>64</sup>

And since this content or essence of the thing becomes accessible through seeing, it is called an "idea." So the word *idea* is not a determination of *what* is meant. Instead, the term is derived from *how* the meant is *apprehended*. This determination grew out of the fact that, for the Greeks, looking and seeing—*theoria, intuitus, intuition*—was the primary form of apprehension.<sup>65</sup>

Contrary to what he calls the "theoretical attitude" of the metaphysical tradition, Heidegger's transformation of phenomenology consisted in the question of Being as such. But regarding his third characteristic of the Earth, we can argue that, just as the metaphysical tradition characterized the being of beings out of the way they had access to it, Heidegger's characterization of the Earth is derived from *how* the Earth is *apprehended* as well, namely, as the *that-is* and *as-if* which we can experience indirectly in our being-in-the-world. One can already question the legitimacy of such a derivation of the third characteristic of the Earth, if we remember that world concerns correlated being, while the Earth on the contrary concerns *un*-correlated being.

This tendency to derive the third characteristic of the Earth from how it is apprehended is not a slip of the pen in *The Origin of the Work of Art*, but is confirmed in Heidegger's reflection on a fourth characteristic of the Earth as well. According to Heidegger, the double movement of concealing-unconcealing as the essence

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 31 (p. 41).

<sup>63</sup> With this, I do not want to imply that the *that-is* of the Earth can be understood out of the metaphysical opposition between the *what-is* (*essentia*) and the *that-is* (*existentia*). For Heidegger's criticism of this metaphysical distinction, see Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, pp. 190–92 (270–72).

<sup>64</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, pp. 214, 409 (pp. 226, 473).

<sup>65</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Logik: Die Frage nach der Wahrheit*, Gesamtausgabe Band 21 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klosterman, 1995), p. 56; Martin Heidegger, *Logic: The Question of Yruth*, trans. Thomas Sheehan (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), p. 47.

of truth has to be established in a work of art, i.e., in a gestalt in which the strife between Earth and world is established.<sup>66</sup>

The essential nature of Earth, of the unmasterable and self-closing bearer, reveals itself, however, only in its rising up into a world, in the opposition between world and Earth. This strife is fixed in place within the work's gestalt and becomes manifest through this gestalt.<sup>67</sup>

Here again, we see that Heidegger acknowledges the Earth as un-correlated being (ontological level), which only comes forth via a work of art (epistemological level). This would not be a problem, if Heidegger's further characterization of the Earth as un-correlated being was not *prescribed* by the way he has access to it, namely via a work of art; in and through the work of art, the Earth appears as "self-closing bearer" according to Heidegger, as "site of its steady stand in which the gestalt must be fixed in place."<sup>68</sup>

On the one hand, we can agree with Haar that the Earth as bearing ground is the fourth characteristic of Heidegger's concept of the Earth. This bearing ground is the "native ground" of a historical people according to Heidegger. We can even conceive this fourth characteristic as a further specification of the *that-is* of the open—measureless—expanse we encountered as the third characteristic of the Earth. The experience *that* something *is* concerns the experience of the singularity of the time and place in which that being stands; *it is*, here and now. From this perspective, we can understand why the bearing ground is also called a native ground or *Heimat*. The *that-is* of the Earth constitutes the spatio-temporal singularity of the Earth, which makes the Earth a *native* ground for the destiny of a people. This bearing—native—ground is the fourth characteristic of Heidegger's concept of the Earth.

On the other hand, we can criticize this fourth characteristic of the Earth as bearing—native—ground because it is not derived from the Earth as un-correlated being itself, but from the projection of a world by a work of art. This becomes clear in the following quote: "For this reason, everything with which man is endowed must, in the projection, be fetched forth from out of the closed ground and explicitly set upon this ground. In this way, the ground is first founded as a ground that bears."<sup>69</sup> So, although the Earth concerns un-correlated being, the fourth characteristic of the Earth as bearing—native—ground is derived from the projection of a world by a work of art, which grounds the Earth as such a ground that bears. What is more, to the extent that the work of art is dependent on the human artist who has to establish the strife between Earth and world in a gestalt, the Earth as bearing ground needs humanity. But if the Earth "needs" humanity in order to come forth as bearing—native—ground, this fourth characteristic of the Earth does not concern the Earth as un-correlated being, but as correlated being.

<sup>66</sup> See Blok, "Establishing the Truth," for a further elaboration of Heidegger's concept of gestalt.

<sup>67</sup> Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 43 (modified) (p. 57).

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42 (p. 57).

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47 (p. 63).



To conclude, although Heidegger acknowledges the Earth as un-correlated being (ontological level), he derives his understanding of the Earth from the way he has access to it (epistemological level). In this respect, I conclude that the Earth itself remains unthought in Heidegger's work.

### (3) THE NECESSITY OF EARTH-INTEREST IN CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHY

In subsection one, I took Meillassoux's call for realism as a call for a new interest in the Earth as un-correlated being, and consulted both Meillassoux's and Heidegger's concept of the Earth. After the rejection of Meillassoux's account of the Earth as anti-realist, I turned to Heidegger's conceptualization of the Earth in subsection two and criticized his concept of the Earth as well. To be clear, I did not criticize Heidegger here for being a correlationist, as Meillassoux did. On the contrary, it turned out that the Earth has to be understood as un-correlated being, as it is opposed to world as correlated being. With this, I first of all provide a new interpretation of Heidegger's concept of the Earth which solves various interpretation problems that are present in the literature, as I have shown. The advantage of my interpretation of the Earth as un-correlated being is that it helps to clearly define *Earth* and *world* as well as the relation between them, and that this concept of Earth can be associated with Meillassoux's concept of hyper-chaos.

More important for the purpose of this article is, however, my further reflection on Heidegger's characterization of the Earth. It became clear that at least three of his characteristics of Earth are problematic. The second characteristic of the Earth concerned the Earth as open—measureless—expanse. To the extent that Earth as open expanse is further characterized as measureless, as opposed to the measures and limits of the world, one can already question whether this measurelessness is in fact a characteristic of the Earth itself, or only a negative characteristic which is derived from the characteristics of the world.<sup>70</sup> If this is the case, the Earth remains unthought in Heidegger, and this calls for a *positive* characterization of the Earth. More problematic is Heidegger's third characteristic of the Earth. I have shown that Heidegger derives this third characteristic as *that-is* and *as-if* from the way he has access to it. Because Earth concerns un-correlated being, while world on the contrary concerns correlated being, it is highly questionable whether a characteristic of the Earth as un-correlated being can be derived from the way we have access to it, namely, as *that-is* and *as-if* of correlated being (world). If this is the case, the Earth remains unthought in Heidegger and this calls for an effort to reflect on *the things themselves*, i.e., a *positive* characterisation of the Earth *itself*.

Finally, the fourth characteristic of the Earth as bearing—native—ground is

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<sup>70</sup> We can argue that the negative characteristic of the Earth is due to Heidegger's concept of the essence of truth: "The essence of truth, i.e., unconcealment, is ruled throughout by a denial" (*ibid.*, p. 31 (p. 41)). At the same time, it is questionable whether such a negative conceptualization of the Earth is sufficient.

also problematic because it is derived from the projection of a work of art and therefore only concerns the Earth as correlated being. If this is the case, the Earth remains unthought in Heidegger and this calls for a *positive* concept of the Earth as *un-correlated being itself*.<sup>71</sup> Here I leave the question of whether Heidegger's later work on the Earth in the context of the *Geviert* can help to characterize the Earth as un-correlated being. Instead, I finish this article by a further reflection on an indication for the existence of the Earth as un-correlated being provided by Meillassoux, the emergence of the Earth at an ontic level.

According to Meillassoux, Heidegger cannot account for the emergence and evolution of the Earth 4.3 billion years before the appearance of humans on the Earth. The emergence of the Earth long ago cannot be reconstructed based on the givenness of being for thinking—as if it were comparable with the hidden backside of a tower that can be reconstructed based on the front we directly perceive—because the emergence of the Earth is not based on something given, but the origin of givenness, an absence of givenness “prior to givenness in its entirety.”<sup>72</sup> According to Meillassoux, correlationists such as Heidegger are not able to perceive the temporal emergence of planet Earth, i.e., “to conceive . . . a time in which the given as such passes from non-being into being.”<sup>73</sup> According to Meillassoux, Heidegger would argue that he asks for the transcendental conditions of the *experience* of the temporal emergence of the Earth, but Meillassoux argues that he asks for the temporal emergence of such transcendental conditions of the possibility: “. . . when we raise the question of the emergence of thinking bodies in time we are also raising the question of *the temporality of the conditions of instantiation, and hence of the taking place of the transcendental as such*.”<sup>74</sup> The emergence of planet Earth is not the emergence of the correlation of being and thinking, but the emergence of the Earth as capacity to articulate factual correlations between being and thinking, i.e., the era of humanity and terrestrial life which in the end will disappear again.<sup>75</sup> This Earth is itself not correlated with thinking, but the factual correlation emerges, unfolds, and expands out of this Earth and goes back into the Earth again, not the other way around. This means that the singularity of the emergence of planet Earth is temporally prior to the emergence of these transcendental conditions of the experience of the temporality, in which being and thinking are correlated. The singularity of this emergence not only concerns the ontic origin of planet Earth, but also its coming into being at an ontological level according to Meillassoux: “. . . the time at issue here is the time wherein *consciousness* as

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<sup>71</sup> Philosophers such as Sartre and Derrida have pointed out already that Heidegger was not primarily interested in materiality, such as sexual difference, embodiment, and materiality (see Frank Schallow, *The Incarnality of Being. The Earth, Animals, and the Body in Heidegger's Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), p. 39).

<sup>72</sup> Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, p. 21.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25 (emphasis in the original).

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 21–22; Meillassoux, “Time without Becoming,” p. 3.

well as *conscious time* have *themselves emerged in time*, for the problem of the arche-fossil is not the empirical problem of the birth of living organisms, but the ontological problem of the coming into being of givenness as such.<sup>76</sup>

For Heidegger, however, the problem is not that he cannot account for the emergence of planet Earth. He acknowledges the independent existence of beings without any correlation with human thought. For Heidegger, the main concern of philosophy is not the acknowledgment of the emergence of planet Earth before human consciousness: “(1) Beings are in themselves the kinds of beings they are, and in the way they are, even if, for example, Dasein does not exist. (2) Being ‘is’ not, but being is there [*es gibt*], insofar as Dasein exists.”<sup>77</sup> This quote clearly shows that Heidegger is an onto-centrist; he is not interested in the emergence of planet Earth at an ontic level, but only in the emergence of being at an ontological level.<sup>78</sup>

On the one hand, it can be argued that Meillassoux cannot blame Heidegger for not being able to account for the emergence of planet Earth 4.5 billion years ago because, according to Heidegger, philosophy should concentrate on being, not beings. On the other hand, it could be argued that Meillassoux’s argument about ancestry can help us criticize Heidegger’s onto-centrism in his analysis of the Earth as (un-correlated) being.

In the context of the findings in subsection two, I argue that the emergence of planet Earth cannot be derived from the world as its *that-is* or *as-if*. The reason is that the emergence of the Earth is not based on something given (world), but concerns the *origin* of the givenness of a world in which being and thinking are correlated; the emergence of planet Earth is a prerequisite for the emergence of human being on the Earth and in this respect the origin of givenness of a world in which being and thinking are correlated. What do we mean by the Earth as this *ontic* origin of the world at an ontological level? This origin of givenness does not concern the world as condition for our *experience* of the temporal emergence of the Earth (epistemological level), but on the contrary, it concerns the temporal emergence of the Earth itself; the world as correlation between being and thinking emerges, unfolds, and expands out of the Earth in the era of humanity, and goes back into the Earth again. But contrary to Heidegger’s *ontological* understanding of the Earth as open—measureless—expanse for the emergence and disappearance of a world, Meillassoux makes us sensitive to the idea of the Earth as open expanse at an *ontic* level; the singularity of the emergence of planet Earth is *temporally prior* to the emergence of a world in which being and thinking are correlated in the era

<sup>76</sup> Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, p. 21 (emphasis in the original); Blok, “Realism without Speculation.”

<sup>77</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Logik*, Gesamtausgabe Band 26 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klosterman, 2007), p. 194; Martin Heidegger, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, trans. Michael Heim (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), p. 153.

<sup>78</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, Gesamtausgabe Band 40 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klosterman, 1983), p. 21; Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 20.

of humanity. The singularity of this emergence not only concerns the *ontic* origin of planet Earth, but also its coming into being at an ontological level according to Meillassoux.<sup>79</sup> Due to Heidegger's onto-centrism, i.e., his ontological focus on the strife between Earth and world—he overlooks this ontic level of the emergence of the Earth as un-correlated being.

### CONCLUSION

What is more, while Meillassoux points to the Earth as ontic-ontological condition of the possibility of the emergence of a world in which being and thinking are correlated—the emergence of planet Earth as capacity to articulate a world in the era of humanity—we can point to an ontic condition of the end of the world. What matters to us nowadays, namely, is the future of planet Earth due to global warming, increased world population, etc. From the *Living Planet Report 2012*, for instance, it becomes clear that humanity is using fifty percent more resources than the Earth can provide, and that we need two or more planets to support our modern way of living in the future. More, in particular, it is acknowledged that biodiversity is still declining and that 2.7 million people around the world have to cope with water scarcity.<sup>80</sup> According to several scholars, we have crossed the “planetary boundaries of planet Earth,”<sup>81</sup> and experience the urgency to secure the sustainability of Earth's life-support system.<sup>82</sup> What matters to us nowadays is therefore the sustainability of the Earth as life-support system for our living on Earth.<sup>83</sup>

To be clear, what matters to us here is global warming as an ontic phenomenon that threatens the survival of humanity on Earth, and as a consequence, threatens to be the end of the world.<sup>84</sup> Ontic phenomena such as the emergence of planet Earth, the emergence of humanity on planet Earth, and the possible disappearance of humanity

<sup>79</sup> Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, p. 21.

<sup>80</sup> World Wildlife Federation, *Living Planet Report 2012* (Gland: World Wildlife Federation, 2012).

<sup>81</sup> J. Rockstrom, W. Steffen, K. Noone, A. Persson, F. S. Chapin, E. Lambin, T. M. Lenton, M. Scheffer, C. Folke, H. Schellnuber, B. Nykvist, C. A. de Wit, T. Hughes, S. van der Leeuw, H. Rodhe, S. Sörlin, P. K. Snyder, R. Costanza, U. Svedin, M. Falkenmark, L. Karlberg, R. W. Corell, V. J. Fabry, J. Hansen, B. Walker, D. Liverman, K. Richardson, P. Crutzen, and J. Foley, “Planetary Boundaries: Exploring the Safe Operating Space for Humanity,” *Ecology and Society* 14, no. 2 (2009): 32.

<sup>82</sup> Jeremy Baskin, “Paradigm Dressed as Epoch: The Ideology of the Anthropocene,” *Environmental Values* 24 (2015): 9–29.

<sup>83</sup> W. Steffen, P. J. Crutzen, and J. R. McNeill, “The Anthropocene: Are Humans Now Overwhelming the Great Forces of Nature?” *Ambio* 36, no. 8 (2007): 614–21.

<sup>84</sup> Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects. Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2013). It is clear that according to Heidegger, the end of the world is not possible because the strife between Earth and world are interconnected and interdependent. The further discussion about the possibility of the end of the world according to Heidegger and Morton is beyond the scope of this article.

due to global warming can make us sensitive, first, to the idea that ontic events may have an ontological effect, namely, the end of the world in which being and thinking are correlated. Second, since the disappearance of humanity as a consequence of global warming puts an end to the world, and with this, puts an end to the strife between Earth (un-correlated being) and world (correlated being), I argue that the truth of being originates from un-correlated being at an ontic-ontological level, i.e., planet Earth as capacity to constitute the strife of Earth and world.<sup>85</sup> Third, this capacity of the Earth as un-correlated being can make us sensitive to the idea that Heidegger's concept of the Earth as inclination toward concealment and self-withdrawal (first characteristic of Heidegger's concept of Earth as un-correlated being) originates from the Earth at an ontic level, out of which the strife between Earth and world at an ontological level emerges, unfolds, and fades away. It is this concept of the Earth as ontic-ontological origin which can lead to a positive concept of the Earth as un-correlated being itself. The further development of such a positive concept of the Earth not only requires that environmental philosophers drop the correlationist approach of the Earth as the zone they live in, but that they fundamentally reconsider their concept of "environment" and the role of "ethics" regarding the Earth as un-correlated being.

I argue that Meillassoux's call for realism can make us sensitive to such a positive concept of planet Earth as ontic-ontological origin of Heidegger's concept of the strife between Earth and world. Heidegger's onto-centrism prevents him from thinking the era of humanity on Earth as a consequence of an ontic-ontological event like the emergence of planet Earth and the emergence of humanity on Earth, just as his onto-centrism prevents him from thinking the end of humanity as a consequence of an ontic-ontological event like global warming.<sup>86</sup> In the current age, in which we have a massive experience of global warming, a further reflection on the ontological effects of ontic phenomena can no longer be avoided.

Although Meillassoux's speculative realism may help us to open this path for contemporary environmental philosophy, as it explicitly considers a world without humanity,<sup>87</sup> this does not mean that his mathematization of the Earth is

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<sup>85</sup> The emergence and future disappearance of planet Earth can be conceived as *phusis* in a radical new way. This *phusis* of the Earth is incomparable with the emergence of a plant or tree (*phusis* at an ontic level) and with the emergence of a world in its strife with the Earth (*phusis* at an ontological level) because it is the ontic-ontological precondition of the *phusis* of a tree or a world.

<sup>86</sup> Meillassoux explicitly argues that correlationists like Heidegger cannot think the emergence of planet Earth: "For a transcendental philosopher, for what I call 'correlationism,' this makes no sense — it is an absurd question to ask, 'What would the world be if there were no humans?' 'What would the world be like if we did not exist?' — This is an absurd question, *the* absurd question, I think, for every Kantian or post-Kantian philosophy" (Quentin Meillassoux, "Speculative Realism," *Collapse* 3 [2007]: 328–29; cited in R. S. Gall, "Knowing, Counting, Being: Meillassoux, Heidegger, and the Possibility of Science," *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 28, no. 3 [2014]: 341).

<sup>87</sup> Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, p. 136.

appropriate to further explore and reflect on this phenomenon of the Earth. Neither is Heidegger, because his onto-centrism prevents him from further reflection on this possibility of the Earth as ontic-ontological origin of the strife between Earth and world.<sup>88</sup> This Earth does not necessarily have to be negatively characterized as self-closed or self-withdrawing (first characteristic of Heidegger's concept of Earth.<sup>89</sup> Rather, this Earth is the boundary condition of our inhabitation of the Earth (world), which "stirs and strives" for itself, and even "assails us and enthrals us as landscape,"<sup>90</sup> without, however, being concerned about our human inhabitation on the Earth (world). This Earth is not embedded in concealing-unconcealing, but is its ontic-ontological origin, the elementary which at the same time remains exterior to this strife.<sup>91</sup> To the extent that the Earth remained unthought in Heidegger, and can at the same time be seen as the life support system of (human) life which is threatened by global warming, the challenge of contemporary environmental philosophy is to further reflect on this Earth as that which really matters to us, to think the Earth *after* Heidegger.

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<sup>88</sup> In a letter to Elisabeth Blochmann from 1931, Heidegger writes: "I often ask myself -this has for a long time been a fundamental question for me—what nature would be without Man. Must it not resonate through him (*hindurschwingen*) in order to attain its ownmost potency?" (cited in Meillassoux, "Time without Becoming," p. 5). But he does not further develop this possibility anywhere.

<sup>89</sup> Cf. Schallow, *The Incarnality of Being*, pp. 91–92; Johnson, "A Critique of the Husserlian and Heideggerian Concept of Earth," p. 234.

<sup>90</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 100 (p. 95).

<sup>91</sup> "The sky, the Earth, the sea, the wind—suffice to themselves" (Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 132).