



The Earth Means the World to Me: Earth- and World-Interest in Times of Climate Change

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Abstract

This contribution considers the world-historical significance of climate change. Climate change unmasks the stability of the living and acting in the world of human and nonhuman existence and confronts it with its living and acting on Earth, shifts the attention from World to Earth, and raises the question about the place of human and nonhuman existence on Earth. To answer this question, this chapter moves beyond humanist and post-humanist positions and argues for earth and world interest in times of climate change. First, an ontological concept of World is rehabilitated, which enables to distinguish between the Holocene World and the Anthropocene World. As climate change also confronts with Earth as exterior milieu beyond the interior milieu of the Anthropocene World, the chapter subsequently criticizes the self-interest of philosophers of the twentieth century and argues for world interest in times of climate change. It is argued that world interest should not lead to world production, whether it is found in a productive act by the Earth or by humanity, as world production is accompanied by Earth alienation. A gestalt-based understanding of the givenness of Earth as noncausal ontic-ontological ground of the givenness of World is developed. The conceptualization of World and Earth in this chapter helps to differentiate between the

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often ambiguous uses of these concepts in environmental philosophy and contributes to contemporary debates in philosophy of climate change.

Keywords

Earth · World · World production · Anthropocene · Climate change

“If only we knew, boss, what the stones and rain and flowers say. Maybe they call – call us – and we don’t hear them. When will people’s ears open, boss? When shall we have our eyes open to see? When shall we open our arms to embrace everything – stones, rain, flowers, and men? What d’you think about that, boss? And what do your books have to say about it?”
(Nikos Kazantzakis, *Zorba the Greek*)

Introduction

The experience of climate change and the role humanity plays in global warming are unparalleled. Emerging with the industrial revolution and accelerating after the Second World War, the face of the Earth transformed under the influence of humanity. In many books and reports, climate change is framed as the urgent global problem of the current age and threat of the survival of humanity on planet Earth. It calls for climate action, ranging from humanist efforts to reduce emissions and sustain Earth’s life-support systems to ecomodernist efforts to engineer and manage the humanized planet. It is questionable, however, whether it is possible to do justice to the “world-historical” significance of climate change if it is conceived from the perspective of *human* history and calls for *human* action. Rather, climate change should be perceived from a *sidereal* perspective, i.e., in terms of the history of planet Earth. In Earth history, humans emerged and evolved over hundreds of thousands of years and relatively recently transformed into a geo-force that forms a geological layer of anthropogenic sediments like man-made plastics, metals, and radioactive elements that explain the current change of climate. Seen from this perspective, it becomes increasingly clear that “for most of the last 100,000 years, a crazily jumping climate has been the rule, not the exception” (Alley, 2000: 120). The “world-historical” significance of climate change consists in the fact that it confronts humanity with the inherent instability of the climate and volatility of the Earth system (Clark, 2011). These insights should not be taken as an argument that the change of climate which humanity experiences today is not due to human impacts and that any climate action is in vain. Before engaging in climate action, however, a new round of reflection on the “world-historical” significance of climate change as disruption of human’s relationship with the Earth is needed. What is the place of human existence on Earth?

“World-historical” is put in quotation marks because climate change shifts the attention from World to Earth. In the phenomenological tradition, it is argued that humans always already live and act in a meaningful world in which they are

intentionally involved and know how to deal with other human and nonhuman beings in the world. According to Edmund Husserl, for instance, the meaningful world in which humans are at home constitutes a background condition for their consideration of objects in the foreground. This meaningful world is not limited to the cultural world or the world of human practice, but extends to the ecosystems of planet Earth or the *oikos* in which organisms live in conjunction with the natural environment. World is the *ground* of the objects in the foreground in the sense that “to live is always to live-in-certainty-of-the-world” (Husserl, 2012: 155).

While this basic belief in the givenness of World is never thematized according to Husserl, as the self-evidence of the givenness of World is part of its stability, it can be argued that it is precisely this certainty of World that is disrupted in times of climate change. The experience of climate change makes increasingly clear that World is no longer a relatively stable background of human existence in the world that they always already presuppose and count on in their everyday life and of the contingency and finitude of the current fit of their being in the world. In other words, the world-historical significance of climate change consists in the fact that global warming unmasks the stability of the living and acting in the world of human existence and confronts them with the instability of their living on Earth. To the extent that human existence is always already intentionally involved in such a meaningful World as interior milieu – the world in which the environment appears as resource for human consumption, in which they are included as consumers of these resources – the world-historical significance of climate change can be framed as confrontation with the Earth as *exterior* milieu that remains heterogeneous to any stability of human’s living and acting in the world. It is in this sense that it can be argued that climate change shifts the attention from World to Earth and raises the question about the place of human existence on Earth in this chapter.

Before engaging in answering this question, the following reservation must be considered. Many philosophers of climate change tend to rely more and more on scientific findings in their reflections. Clive Hamilton, for example, wrote a great book on the world-making capacity of humanity in times of climate change, but his conceptualization of a *defiant Earth* is scientific, i.e., based on findings of the Earth system science. He argues, for instance, that the Earth system is a new *object* (Hamilton, 2017: 11; 21) and that Earth system science *discloses* World in times of climate change (Hamilton, 2017: 63). However, as sciences are primarily interested in *ontic* facts and their regularities while philosophical concepts like “World” and “Earth” concern the *ontological* level of the meaning of these facts that change due to climate change, it is questionable whether the sciences actually provide access to the living and acting in the world of human existence in times of climate change. As sciences are primarily interested in *ontic* facts and their regularities in the World of science while “Earth” remains exterior to any interior milieu or World, it is furthermore questionable whether the sciences actually provide access to the living on Earth of human existence in times of climate change. It is highly questionable in this regard whether “surviving the Anthropocene [...] depends on science” (Hamilton, 2017: 57). For this reason, this chapter engages in a *phenomenology* of

the living and acting on Earth of human existence in times of climate change. (The further elaboration of the phenomenological method is beyond the scope of this chapter. For this, see Blok (2020).)

In section “[The Emergence of World in Times of Climate Change](#),” first, the ontological concept of World is rehabilitated. With this, it becomes possible to distinguish between the Holocene World and the Anthropocene World. As climate change also provides an experience of Earth as exterior milieu beyond the interior milieu of the Anthropocene World, the chapter subsequently criticizes the self-interest of philosophers of the twentieth century and argues for world interest in times of climate change. It is argued that world interest should not lead to world production, whether it is found in a productive act by Earth or by humanity, as world production is accompanied by Earth alienation (section “[From World-Interest to Earth-Interest in Times of Climate Change](#)”). A gestalt-based understanding of the givenness of Earth as noncausal ontic-ontological ground of World is subsequently developed (section “[The Givenness of Earth and World](#)”). The conceptualization of World and Earth in this chapter enables to differentiate between the often ambiguous uses of these concepts in environmental philosophy and contributes to contemporary debates in philosophy of climate change, as will become clear in the section “[Conclusion: The Advantage of a Philosophical Concept of Earth and World in Times of Climate Change](#).”

The Emergence of World in Times of Climate Change

Although climate change shifts the attention from the living and acting in the world of human and nonhuman existence to their living on Earth, it does not imply the *end of the world*, as philosophers like Timothy Morton argue (Morton, 2013). Climate change indeed leads to the end of the natural world of modernity in the industrialized society, i.e., the end of pristine nature which is not affected by humanity. But this does not mean that only a flat ontology of earthly objects remain and no different level or World remains, as philosophers like Latour (2016) argue. (It is precisely the reduction of World to an object in front of a subject in the humanist tradition, as well as the reduction of humanity to an immanent position which is enmeshed in the natural environment in the post-humanist tradition, which involves the end of the World (Blok, 2021).) It is precisely the experience of climate change that enables to experience World. A first round of reflection on the “globality” of *global* warming can make this clear.

The experience of global warming does not primarily consist in the experience of new physical objects, like raindrops, storms, and tsunamis. What is at stake is a shift in the *meaning* of raindrops and storms as indicators of *global* warming. In times of global warming, a global phenomenon is experienced that humans were not aware of in previous times when they only experienced objects: the climate in which they self-evidently live and on which their human existence depends. This climate concerns the *whole* of being in the sense that in the age of global warming, there is no position possible outside of it; whereas in earlier ages it was possible to externalize waste to

the environment, humans nowadays realize that every externalization is in the end internalized in the Earth system and impacts Earth's life-support systems (Blok, 2017). In other words, the experience of global warming is the experience of the *whole* of being, i.e., of the World in which the one who experiences this whole is included. (This inclusion of human experience in the experience of World is important to keep in mind as this inclusion indicates that the World is at stake and not only a worldview that particular humans might have. While worldviews presuppose a position in front of the world that remains external to it, World constitutes an interior milieu in which human and nonhuman existence is included. If Latour, for example, discuss the globality of the globe – “global is largely, like the globe itself, an invention of science” (Latour, 2004: 451) – he misses this includedness of human existence in this globality and takes an outsider and productionist perspective which is characteristic of all worldviews.) This means that contrary to philosophers of the twentieth century like Heidegger, who argued that the current age is characterized by the oblivion of being, it can be argued that climate change provides the opportunity to have a metaphysical experience of being (Zwier & Blok, 2017), i.e., of “World” in times of climate change.

How can World be characterized in times of climate change? The era of climate change can be characterized as the Anthropocene. To be clear, the Anthropocene is not conceived here as an ontic phenomenon, i.e., as a geological epoch that started at a particular moment in time (for instance, the Trinity test on 16 July 1945) and can be established by a community of geologists. If the question is what exactly changed in the era of the Anthropocene, in contrast to the previous era of the Holocene, these changes are not primarily found at the ontic level of new objects that emerge in times of climate change, but at the ontological level of the transition of the understanding of World as a whole in times of climate change (Zwier & Blok, 2017); climate change disrupts the way in which reality as a whole appears – i.e., the stability of the World as background condition for the living and acting in the world of human and nonhuman existence – and the way human being is responsive to this new reality in this new epoch.

The occurrence of instability in times of climate change does not mean that the transition from the Holocene to the Anthropocene concerns a shift from World as stable background (i.e., Holocene) to World as instable background (i.e., Anthropocene). Earth history shows that Earth always has been volatile (Davies, 2011), and therefore, this volatility is itself not characteristic of the Anthropocene World. The globalized Anthropocene World appears qualitatively different, namely, no longer characterized by *local* categories like urban versus rural, nature versus culture, or West versus East. The Anthropocene World appears as *global* interior milieu in which humanity and the natural environment become intertwined; the natural environment can no longer be conceived without the human cultivation, preservation, and development, while Earth's population by humans makes it impossible to conceptualize humanity without the natural and technological environment on which it depends (Blok, 2017). The natural environment becomes humanized and humanity becomes naturalized in the interior milieu of the Anthropocene World. The advantage of the concept of World beyond the objects

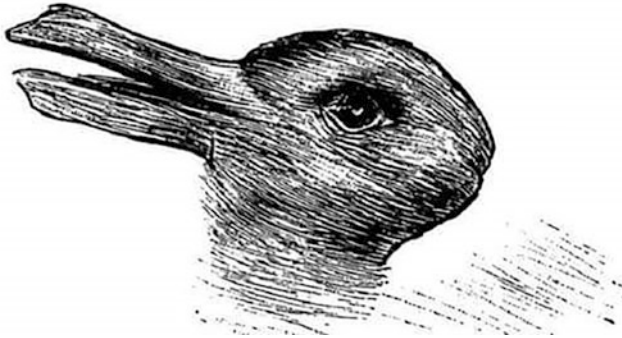


Fig. 1 Gestalt switch of a duck/hare

humans encounter *in* the world is that it can help to explain the difference between the Anthropocene World and the Holocene World (Blok, 2021).

How are these two Worlds related to each other if they do not concern objects humans encounter in the world but are related to the meaning of these objects? Storms, rain, and floods appear, for instance, as indications of a *local* climate like a country climate or a maritime climate in the Holocene and as indications of *global* warming in the Anthropocene. The fact that the same storms and floods appear as indicators of a local climate in the Holocene and of a global climate in the Anthropocene shows that World concerns a metaphysical whole which is itself not to be found at the level of objects in the world, but appears *amidst* of these objects, and cannot be reduced to these objects.

To illustrate this difference at the level of World, the example of a duck's head that can also appear as a hare can help (Fig. 1).

The appearance of the head as duck or hare is not due to the depicted object, duck or hare, or its parts, the mouth, ears, and eyes, as it is the same object that appears as duck or as hare. The difference can also not be explained based on the figure or *form* of the duck and the hare, because it is the *same* figure which appears at the same time differently as duck or as hare. Rather, the figure is ambiguous and concerns the meaning of the head which appears amidst the descriptive object as duck or as hare. This is called a gestalt switch, in which the same object, thanks to the gestalt, appears again as a hare and then again as a duck, without the possibility that these two meanings can be reduced to each other.

In a similar way, the relation between the Holocene World and the Anthropocene World can be conceived as a gestalt switch, in which the same objects (storms, raindrops, floods) appear again as Holocene World and then again as Anthropocene World. Just like in the case of the duck and the hare, the Anthropocene World cannot be derived from these objects or their parts but appears amidst of these physical objects as metaphysical whole. And yet, this whole of the Holocene World is not a metaphysical figure or form of the objects that appear in this world, because it is one and the same figure which appears at the same time differently and can switch to the Anthropocene World, without the possibility that these two Worlds can be reduced to each other.

If the concept of the gestalt switch is stretched here to understand the relation between the Holocene World and the Anthropocene World, a psychological interpretation of the gestalt has to be rejected. The gestalt switch of World is not a question of *perception* or *worldview*, because then the perceiver supposes to have a position external to this World and is this World object of his or her perception. In case of a gestalt switch of World, however, not only a switch of the perception of the World is at stake. On the one hand, the perceiver grew up in the World *outside* of him or her. On the other hand, he or she *embodies* that World outside of him or herself, for instance, in the humanization of the natural environment and the naturalization of humanity in the Anthropocene World.

It is therefore better to conceive the gestalt switch as a transformation of the appearance of World and, at once, the way humanity responds to this World. The question of World as metaphysical whole, gestalt, and the relation between these Worlds, the transformation of World, is the task of philosophy. And insofar as the World is threatened by climate change, the reflection on World in times of climate change is the task of environmental philosophy.

From World Interest to Earth Interest in Times of Climate Change

To what extent can it be argued that climate change involves a shift in the attention from World to Earth, as is argued in the introduction, if climate change primarily introduces a new Anthropocene World? The experience of climate change does not only indicate the emergence of a new Anthropocene World, as climate change at the same time disrupts this global interior milieu of naturalized humanity and humanized nature. The heterogeneity of Earth as exterior milieu is indicated by the volatility and capricious nature of the Earth and the processes that erupt and interrupt the stability of the living and acting in the world of human existence and makes human life fundamentally insecure. While philosophers like Levinas had to rely on abstract notions like elementary nature (*Il y a*) to indicate the asymmetry between human existence and the natural environment on which it depends (Levinas, 1969), it can be argued that climate change provides a concrete metaphysical experience of Earth as exterior milieu beyond the interior milieu of World, an experience of human and nonhuman living on Earth beyond their living and acting in the world. This embeddedness of human and nonhuman living and acting in the world in their living on Earth becomes undeniable in the Anthropocene. The shift of the attention from World to Earth does not imply the end of the World, but articulates the experience that the Anthropocene World as global interior milieu remains embedded in and is susceptible to the interruptions of Earth as exterior milieu.

The shift of the attention from World to World's embeddedness in Earth disrupts every preconception of human living and acting in the World. An example of such a preconception is the idea that living and acting in the World can be characterized by being-toward-death. Being-toward-death means that the foresight of human existence of their own individual death in the future informs his or her living and acting in the World in the present, ranging from the flight from death to its resolute anticipation in the face of his or her being-toward-death (Heidegger, 1993). But if

humans reflect on their own future death, they are not concerned with the World they live in, but “self”-interested in their concern for the singularity of their own or Self. While philosophers of the twentieth century, ranging from Sartre to Levinas and Heidegger to Agamben, were self-evidently “self”-interested in this regard, it is the question whether the self-interest of philosophy should not be replaced by world interest in times of climate change (Blok, 2020). It is not only the case that leaving this World means the end of *a* human living and acting *in* the World. It is also the case that the death of World as life-support system leads to the degradation of the conditions of human and nonhuman living and acting in the World and their possible extinction, i.e., to the end of their living in the *World*. It is precisely the foresight of the death of World as life-support system, which is experienced when humanity crosses the “planetary boundaries of planet Earth” (Rockstrom et al., 2009), that informs human living and acting in the World in the present. It is no longer self-interest but world interest that informs the living and acting in the World of human existence in times of climate change.

The shift from self-interest to world interest can be understood as a shift from the self-production of humanity, for instance, the anticipatory resoluteness of authentic Dasein (Heidegger, 1993), to world production. Such a world production is already called for by traditional philosophers like Marx (1978: 163–164) and Arendt (1958: 52–53) and can also be found in the work of contemporary philosophers of climate change. Clive Hamilton, for instance, argues: “Once humans separated from other creatures and began deliberately to use their world-making powers to modify their environments they assumed responsibility for natural systems and other animals. But now, in the Anthropocene, the fate of the Earth has become entwined with the fate of humans and our responsibility is of a new kind, risen to another level. Before our own welfare, our virtues, and our duties to one another, our inescapable responsibility for the Earth defines us as moral beings” (Hamilton, 2017: 52). Seen from this perspective, humans produce their World as a relatively stable and permanent interior milieu in their “unending fight against the processes of growth and decay through which nature forever invades the human artifice, threatening the durability of the world and its fitness for human use” (Arendt, 1958: 100). Climate change increases even the urgency to produce World as relatively stable interior milieu in humanities struggle against the “power” of the Earth that becomes undeniable in the Anthropocene (Hamilton, 2017). Contemporary efforts for the permanence and durability of the World are not only found in world production but also in various climate actions, ranging from humanist efforts to reduce emissions and sustain Earth’s life-support systems to ecomodernist efforts to engineer and manage the humanized planet.

It is questionable, however, whether world production serves world interest, rather than self-interest, if world production produces an interior milieu that primarily serves the survival of *human* living and acting in this world. As long as world interest leads to world production and World concerns the interior milieu in which humans are intentionally involved, the world interest of human existence is oriented on the *human* history of their living and acting in the World and insufficient to provide access to their living on Earth as exterior milieu. Every production of World

concerns the production of an interior milieu in which humans are intentionally involved, and this production produces human living and acting in the World in their struggle against Earth as exterior milieu. Indications of this struggle can be found in efforts to interiorize this exterior milieu as part of the World; phenomena like the meaning of raindrops, storms, and floods in times of climate change are assessed as insignificant by climate deniers, or as significant and adopted in the climate models of the IPCC, or become subject to technological developments to manage and control the planet. In this regard, world production is focused on the management and control of the stability of the Anthropocene World as interior milieu, i.e., of the World as “spaceship” (Buckminster Fuller, 2008). In this conceptualization of the Anthropocene World as spaceship, the exterior milieu on which each and every World depends remains forgotten. In this regard, it can be argued that world production is accompanied by Earth alienation.

If climate change makes clear that human living and acting in the World remains embedded in their living on Earth, it becomes clear that world production is insufficient. On the one hand, world production concerns the symmetric relation of human living and acting in the World, i.e., a relation in which being is accessible for thinking and constitutes an interior milieu, while human living and acting on Earth indicates an asymmetric relation, i.e., a relation in which being is inaccessible for thinking and constitutes a milieu that remains exterior. On the other hand, world production is not capable to exclude this exterior milieu, as each and every stability of human living and acting in the World can be interrupted by the eruptions of planet Earth. Rather than world production, environmental philosophy should lead to Earth interest and raise the question about the place of human existence on Earth as origin of each and every living and acting in the World. A feralization of human living and acting in the World is needed to experience their living on Earth, i.e., to make the shift from world interest to earth interest.

The shift from world interest to earth interest does however not imply that human living and acting in the World has to be rejected in favor of their living on Earth. To the extent that human existence always already lives and acts in a meaningful World in which he or she is intentionally involved, *his* or *her* living on Earth is also dependent on his or her living and acting in the World. To be clear, World is embedded in Earth and not the other way around, but human living and acting in the World is dependent on their living on Earth and vice versa. In this respect, earth interest does not *replace* world interest, but is better understood as dual interest in World *and* Earth. At the same time, earth interest doesn't call for earth production, as human living on Earth is primarily *given* and doesn't have to be produced anymore.

The givenness of Earth is not only prerequisite for the emergence of human beings on Earth at an ontic level; the Earth emerged in Earth history long before humans emerged on the planet and can be seen as a necessary condition for their emergence. Moreover, if human existence always already lives and acts in a meaningful World in which humans are intentionally involved and know how to deal with other human and nonhuman beings in the World, the givenness of Earth is also prerequisite for their responsiveness to the World around them, that is, for their living and acting in the World at an ontological level. In Earth's history, Earth was long

before humans emerged on the planet, and in this respect, human living and acting in the World emerges, unfolds, and expands out of Earth in the era of humanity and threatens to go back into the Earth again at the end of this era in which human living and acting in the World is threatened by climate change (Blok, 2020: 265–274). In other words, human living and acting in the World comes to truth only on the ground of the Earth. It is this *givenness* of Earth as origin and future end of human living and acting in the World that disrupts the self-evidence of human living and acting in the World as symmetric relation and confronts with human living on Earth as asymmetric relation.

It is important to keep the experience of asymmetry with the Earth as exterior milieu in mind, as the experience of this asymmetry often leads to a new symmetry or continuity between human existence and the natural environment – *Das bist Du!* – for instance, in case of post-humanist philosophers like Haraway (2003) and Latour, who argues for a “principle of generalized symmetry” (1993: 103). It can be argued, on the contrary, that Earth disrupts the symmetric relation of human living and acting in the World and confronts him or her with a fundamental asymmetry of their living on Earth, which cannot be fixed by world production nor by the enmeshment of human existence in the natural environment.

The Givenness of Earth and World

The givenness of Earth is in nothing comparable with the givenness of World as the phenomenological tradition would have it (see “[Introduction](#)”). The givenness of World is not self-evident but emerges in Earth history as new background condition – e.g., Holocene and Anthropocene – that remains finite at the same time. In the givenness of World, newness and finitude come together and limit its relative permanence, durability, and stability. This shows that the givenness of World is not radically immanent and absolute, as philosophers like Nancy would argue (2007). It can be argued that the World in the current age is not transcended by the World of the *ideai* or God but that human living and acting in the World is *rescended* by Earth as origin of each and every emergence of World in Earth history. It is precisely this concept of the absolute facticity of World that culminates in the conceptualization of World as spaceship and testifies of Earth alienation. Contrary to the Earth alienation of world production, earth interest acknowledges the Earth as absolute fact and ground of World. Not World is an archaic, but Earth is the unpredictable event that emerged as *death star* in Earth history and remained more than four billion years without World before humans appeared on Earth, i.e., before it gave rise to human living and acting in the World. (At the same time, it is impossible to claim that the emergence of Earth is the absolute beginning, as there might be other death stars that gave rise or will give rise to human- and nonhuman living and acting in the World. The further exploration of the absolute beginning of Earth is beyond the scope of this chapter.)

It became clear that the givenness of Earth as exterior milieu is not so much indicated at the level of the emergence of volcanoes and plate tectonics, as these

phenomena can always be interiorized in the World. The volatility of Earth is not an ontic phenomenon but an ontological phenomenon; Earth is never exhausted by any particular World and is always richer and deeper than any actual fit of human living and acting in the World. It even could have been the case that Earth never let human living and acting in the World emerge. The givenness of Earth is primarily indicated by the experience of the contingency of the *givenness* of Earth in Earth history (Meillassoux, 2013) and the ontological experience of the *contingency* and *finitude* of the stability of human living and acting in the World in times of climate change. An indication of the finitude of this contingent fit of human living and acting in the World can be found in climate change that shows the being-toward-death of World. It is a very particular and fragile arrangement of World as anthropic principle that accommodates human and nonhuman living and acting in the World, which could have been absent and different and possibly ends in the future. This being-toward-death of World cannot be interiorized and remains external to any living and acting in the World.

With this, it becomes clear that a distinction has to be made between the givenness of Earth and World as background condition. The givenness of World concerns a particular stable background in which human living and acting in the World fits, like the Holocene and Anthropocene World. But what becomes undeniable in the Anthropocene World is that each and every stability of this given World as interior milieu is limited by the volatility and capricious nature of the givenness of Earth as exterior milieu. The givenness of Earth concerns the instable *origin* of any givenness of a stable background condition in which human living and acting in the World fits, i.e., the exterior milieu that limits each and every interior milieu of World. As such an origin, Earth is the ontic-ontological background of human living and acting in the World as background for the possibility to encounter objects in the foreground.

Although Earth is given as origin or ground of World, it is clear that World is not *produced* by Earth or the *cause* of World, as is sometimes argued, whether it is understood as cosmogenic power (Stengers, 2000) or generative of new Worlds (Kirby, 1997). Earth cannot be seen as *efficient cause* of World, nor is World the *formal* or *final cause* of Earth. If climate change makes one thing clear, it is that the Earth can no longer be seen as “Mother” who takes care of human living and acting in the World, as she turns out to be unconcerned, if not indifferent, toward her children. *Human* existence is characterized by world interest in times of climate change, not the Earth itself; Earth does not have an interest to produce World and doesn’t provide a model for World, and World is also not the goal or end of Earth. Even if human living and acting in the World draws on the materiality of the Earth and even if it is argued that Earth distributes itself into the materiality or embodiment of human living and acting in the World, it is not the case that Earth has any positive “interest” in such a distribution. It is also not the case that Earth has a negative interest and produces World *in order to* withdraw itself. This idea stems from a Christian motive that can be found both in classical philosophy – for instance, Heidegger’s embedding of the forgetfulness of being (*seinsvergessenheit*) in the abandonment of being (*seinsverlassenheit*) – and in contemporary philosophy of

climate change. Timothy Morton, for instance, argues that the Earth, like all entities, “are shy retiring octopuses that squirt out a dissembling ink as they withdraw into the ontological shadows” (Morton, 2013: 3–4). But it is not the case that Earth as exterior milieu withdraws itself from human existence, but, on the contrary, that *human* world production as interiorization of Earth withdraws itself from this exterior milieu, which is primarily *given*. If Earth distributes itself into the materiality or embodiment of human living and acting in the World, humans embody this Earth in their living and acting on Earth without involving any positive or negative interest from the side of the Earth.

The embodiment of Earth in human being on Earth does also not mean that Earth is the *material cause* of World. If World does not concern physical objects but the *meaning* of these objects for human living and acting in the World that emerges, unfolds, and expands out of Earth and goes back into the Earth again at the end of the era of human existence on Earth, the meaning of the World is not materially caused by Earth. Although World is not caused by Earth in any classical sense of the word, World is not an absolute fact but *grounded* on Earth. How can the relation between World and Earth be conceived if Earth is the noncausal ontic-ontological ground of World?

In order to conceptualize Earth as ground of World beyond the *causa materialis*, *causa formalis*, *causa efficiens*, and *causa finalis*, the gestalt switch has to be considered again. The picture below shows a gestalt switch of a vase that can also show itself as a profile of a face (Fig. 2).

In order to understand the gestalt switch from the vase to the profile of the face, gestalt psychologists like Koffka introduced the concepts figure and ground. Just like in the example of the duck and the hare, it is the same figure which again appears as vase and then again as profile of a face. The difference between the vase and the profile of the face is not explained by the figure, but by the background that frames the picture. If the figure is understood from the black part of the background, it appears as profile of a face, and if it is understood from the white part of the background, it appears as a vase. Thanks to the figure *and* the background, one and the same figure appears again as a vase and then again as a profile of a face.

The importance of the background next to the figure becomes clear if a similar picture is considered without a background (Fig. 3).

In this example, there is no background; so strictly speaking, the figure can only be understood from the perspective of the black part as vase. Thanks to the absence of the background, the picture only indicates the one-dimensional factuality of a vase and nothing else than that.

If the transformation from the Holocene World to the Anthropocene World is understood as a gestalt switch, then this transformation is also only possible, thanks to the combination of figure and ground. Just like it is the same figure that appears again as a vase and then again as a profile of a face, so it is the same figure of the World that appears again as Holocene World and then as Anthropocene World in Earth history. And just as it is the background of the figure that makes the gestalt switch from the vase to the profile of the face possible, it can be said that it is thanks to the Earth as background that the World shows itself again as Holocene World and

Fig. 2 Gestalt switch of a vase/profile of a face

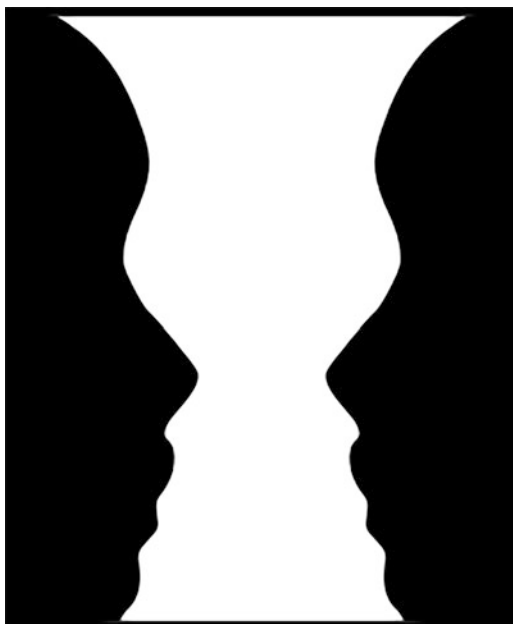
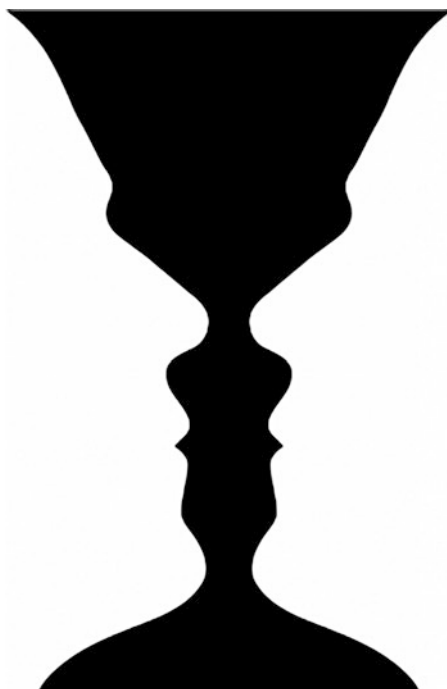


Fig. 3 One-dimensional facticity of a vase



then again as Anthropocene World, without the Earth being the cause of World. It can be proposed therefore to conceive Earth as such a background of the plurality of World in Earth history.

Conclusion: The Advantage of a Philosophical Concept of Earth and World in Times of Climate Change

The conceptualization of World as figure and Earth as ground can help to clearly differentiate between the often ambiguous use of these concepts and their amalgamation to a hybrid natural-cultural environment in the social sciences and cultural theory. Earth can be defined as exterior milieu that is the ontic-ontological ground of World as interior milieu of human living and acting in the World. This conceptuality of Earth as ground of World can contribute significantly to contemporary debates in environmental philosophy.

First, the ontology of World enables to question the flat ontology in contemporary philosophy and to conceptualize the Anthropocene World in contrast with the Holocene World (section “[The Emergence of World in Times of Climate Change](#)”). World is like the element in which fish lives. This element is most proximate as the fish lives in it and constitutes its living and acting in the World. This immediate element remains at the same time distant and unnoticed, as the element permeates everything and is incomparable with anything else (Aristotle, 1957). On the one hand, the conceptualization of World beyond the objects humans encounter *in* the world enables to explain the difference between the Anthropocene World and the Holocene World (section “[The Emergence of World in Times of Climate Change](#)”). On the other hand, the difference between the Holocene World and the Anthropocene World enables to articulate this element which normally remains unnoticed in the human focus on *beings* in the world.

Second, the ontology of Earth as ontic-ontological ground of World enables to conceptualize the difference between human living and acting in the World as symmetric relation and human living and acting on Earth as asymmetric relation and to question the hidden anthropocentrism in contemporary philosophies of climate change. Latour, for instance, thinks the Earth only in relation to human existence – “Things are everywhere mixed with people; they always have been” (Latour, 2003: 37) – and reduces it therefore to the interior milieu of World in which human existence is intentionally involved (Latour, 2016, 2017). The same type of anthropocentric orientation can be found in the work of contemporary philosophers of climate change who highlight the role of humanity in world production (Hamilton, 2017). As long as world interest is not embedded in earth interest, an alienation of Earth is at stake in world production (section “From World-Interest to Earth-Interest in Times of Climate Change”). Third, contrary to the anthropocentrism of world interest, this earth interest can be framed in terms of the feralization of the human, i.e., the acknowledgment of the embeddedness of human living and acting in the World in their living and acting on Earth. The concept of Earth as ontic-ontological ground of World accepts the facticity of the World in which humans

live and at the same time the facticity of the Earth in which any World remains embedded. This embeddedness of World in Earth questions the conceptualization of World as spaceship in environmental philosophy, as the Earth remains forgotten in such a conceptualization. Earth turned out to be the noncausal ground of World, which makes the transition of the Holocene World to the Anthropocene World possible (section “[The Givenness of Earth and World](#)”).

What consequences does the concept of Earth and World have for the call for climate action in times of climate change? Because humanity is using significant more natural resources than Earth can provide and currently need two or more planets to support the modern way of living in the future, it is called for a new phase in the Anthropocene in which human stewardship of the Earth ensures the sustainability of Earth’s life-support systems for human life on Earth. In this regard, the Anthropocene does not only *describe* the time of climate change, but the unease with globalization and climate change also calls for a new era in human history in which human existence should take responsibility for Earth’s sustainability. The philosophical reflections on the world-historical significance of climate change in this chapter show that climate action should not primarily consist in actions at an ontic level, ranging from adaptation strategies to mitigation strategies to save the climate. Does climate change then call for climate actions at the ontological level, namely, the world production of a post-Anthropocene World in which human living and acting in the World is characterized by the responsibility for the live support systems of planet Earth (Hamilton, 2017)? It became clear that world production is insufficient and results in Earth alienation, as long as it is not embedded in earth interest.

A further argument for earth interest emerges if the current Anthropocene World is considered. The Anthropocene World can be characterized by the end of history. The end of history means that the globalization of the humanization of the ecosystems of planet Earth and the naturalization of humanity has reached its completion and nothing *new*, no *post-* can emerge. The end of history is indicated in the efforts to move away from self-interest toward world interest, which turned out to remain embedded in self-interest (section “[From World-Interest to Earth-Interest in Times of Climate Change](#)”). It is also indicated in the logic of world *production*. How can it be claimed to move beyond the Anthropocene World of *management* and *controlling* the world as spaceship (Blok, 2017), as long as this *post-*Anthropocene World has to be *produced*. Does the conceptuality associated with world *production* not belong to the same productionist logic that is normally associated with management and control? If this is the case, each and every effort to *produce* the post-Anthropocene World belongs in the end to the Anthropocene World it tries to leave behind. The reason why currently there is no sign of a post-Anthropocene World might be found in the productionist logic of world production, which makes it impossible to engage in the transition to this post-Anthropocene World.

Seen from the perspective on Earth as ground of World in the previous section, however, it can be argued that earth interest, rather than world interest, disrupts the end of history of the Anthropocene World. Reflecting on the discussion of the necessity of World as figure *and* Earth as ground of the gestalt switch of World, it

can be argued that what is needed is earth interest. Why? If the figure (World) is conceived without the ground (Earth), only the one-dimensional factuality of the envioning world remains and no gestalt switch from the Anthropocene World to the post-Anthropocene World is possible. On the contrary, without earth interest, any effort to produce the post-Anthropocene World falls back in the Anthropocene World it tries to overcome. In this respect, it can be said that world production without earth interest is characterized by *conformism* to World and *alienation* of Earth. And as long as world production is characterized by Earth alienation, a gestalt switch from the Anthropocene World to the post-Anthropocene World is impossible. Without earth interest, world production enjoys its hedonist conformity to the World and, with this, intensifies the changeless and everlasting end of history.

For this reason, it can be argued that climate action not only should move beyond the ontic level of adaptation and mitigation strategies but should also move beyond world production and embed the world interest of human existence in their earth interest. The interest in Earth as ontic-ontological background of the Anthropocene World opens the *possibility* of a future gestalt switch to a post-Anthropocene World. The possibility of a post-Anthropocene World emerges if the contingency of the givenness of Earth as ground of human living and acting in the World is considered. It is the givenness of Earth as ground of World that shows that the Anthropocene World is in fact finite and a new beginning, i.e., a gestalt switch to another World is always principally possible, maybe even emerged already, even if no sign of it appeared yet in times of climate change. It is the givenness of Earth as ground of World that disrupts the end of history and makes another beginning of World possible.

Although this new beginning of a new World is not produced by the Earth or by humanity, this “production” of a post-Anthropocene World is at the same time not without human involvement. World only *is* in human living and acting in the World, i.e., the post-Anthropocene World only *is* in the actual responsiveness of human existence to this new World. The further reflection on the role and contribution of human and nonhuman living and acting in the World to the transformation from the Anthropocene World to the post-Anthropocene World, and the appropriateness of the productionist logic to characterize the contribution of human existence to the dynamics between Earth and World, is beyond the scope of this chapter and up to future research.

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