The Places of God in an Age of Re-Embodiments

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What is Culture?

By

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For the River Wey – the stretch from Guildford to Godalming, England

For my mother Maria Rosa Pellicer-Vendrell
For my friend Tim J. Silverthorne

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INTRODUCTION

TRANSPOSITIONS OF GOD

> The only tribute to thought [...] is precisely to use it, to deform it, to make it groan and protest.
>
> – Michel Foucault[1]

Our contemporaneity involves a fundamental new mode of *religare* – the etymological root of "religion" – of binding the elements that conform to reality. Such imminent reordering should distance us from the theory of representation proper to the epistemological trajectory that has reached our days in the form of a pervasive ecocidal mode of being – it is penetrating and desacralizing all corners of Tellus, Mother Earth. The epistemological disposition – which has far more concrete overtones than a volatile ethos, sensibility or discourse – initially builds upon the Socratic exaltation of the intelligible in the beautiful, and carries on with the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century well into our days.

In the wake of Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophical annotations and those of his entourage, we may take the figure of a transcendent God as convenient shorthand for the motive that inspires and organizes the building blocks of the epistemological trajectory (cf. Vattimo 2002). For the sake of convenience we shall indeed more commonly refer to the trajectory at issue as "the disposition proper to philosophy and science as *epistēmē*". A hallmark in this disposition is the Enlightenment that heralds the so-called Modern Age in the late eighteenth century. "Aufklärung *is the conscious departure an individual undertakes with an eye towards releasing themselves from their self-incurred attitudinal immaturity"* (Kant 1784; own translation from the original German) reads Immanuel Kant's initial characterization of such a disposition (cf. also Foucault 1997). An initially European endeavour, the Enlightenment marks the intellectual negotiation of a universal order bereft of otherworldly values. It brings about an immanent turn which is brought to bear upon human reason. However, it is precisely human reason as the solemn fulcrum of

[1] Foucault 1980, 54.

immanence that renders the immanent turn in hand largely imperfect – *Aufklärung* remains an anthropocentric and ontological project through and through.

In this process of wholesale restructuring that we wish to co-stimulate, the relevance of *les Lumières* must be regarded as residing in the incipient immanent mobilization that it openly incites. The outright declaration of independence of human reason on the part of the *Aufklärer* is, first and foremost, an unabashed act of detachment from superstitions and dogmatism alike. It is in this respect that we may claim that the Enlightenment is an unfinished symphony. It encourages us to locate innerworldly ground for a new mode of *religare*, to bind the immanent elements together in a manner that induces in us a sense of respect for them, steers our way out of nihilism, and conduces us to a post-ecocidal age. Yet the tremendous force of the immanent turn, this book contends, is yet to be released.

Karl Marx considered German materialism, largely led by Ludwig Feuerbach, disjointed and tied to (Western) metaphysics for the most part. In due response, he wrote the "Eleven Theses on Feuerbach", where, largely prefiguring social constructivism, Marx characterizes the essence of the human being in organic connection with his social relations. These relations emanate, in turn, from the mode of production and render materialist philosophy inextricable from revolutionary *praxis*. In an analogous manner, the present book intends to liberate the full impetus implicit in the immanent turn that ensued from the timid theocide committed by the *Aufklärer* at the entrance into the Modern Age and carried on by authors in the post-Kantian tradition. The findings that follow from the present work largely find that the figure of God may have been slain but its place has not been eradicated. Going beyond the epistemological outlook "does not consist in passing from one concept to another, but in overturning and displacing a conceptual order, as well as the nonconceptual order with which the conceptual order is articulated" (Derrida 1984 [1971], 329). Against this backdrop, the modern immanent turn lends to an alternative reading. Perhaps it consists less in an unfinished project to be perfected by walking further in the same direction, as Jürgen Habermas eagerly holds, as a mere culmination of the disposition proper to philosophy and science as *epistēmē*. An immanent turn that remains statically immanent is but a metaphysical farce. The liberation from the objectification of an eternal being or God automatically entails the engagement or constraint of the immanent plane to a certain degree.

The truly immanent revolution uproots the principle of causality and the ontological frame where it is embedded to the advantage of a correlation in degrees and a theoretical approach that is osmogenetic. A composite

word of ωσμοζ "impulse," γενναω "to engender" and the suffix -σιζ denoting "action," "formation," "operation," "generalization," osmogenesis signifies the perpetual, impulsive, action or activity of engendering; the perennial rebirth of the engagement. The osmogenetic outlook reminds us that there is no such thing as an immovable, static plane of immanence. The only plausible immanent turn is one that engages-constrains the plane at issue to a certain degree. The currency or condition of possibility common to osmogenetic theory is correspondingly the transposition. Faithful to the etymological meaning of "transposition," this cognitive condition of possibility places each theoretical dimension *over*, *across* the remaining ones in such a manner that they become related to one another. It also consigns those positions associated with the ecocidal mode of being beyond its realm by transforming them into post-ecocidal categories. The engaged-constrained-immanent turn is, no doubt, still to be attempted. The present book is meant as a contribution in this direction.

This work postulates close to twenty transpositions of the disposition proper to philosophy and science as *epistēmē*. It identifies another twenty positions related to the latter. In the following I broach some of the transpositions and positions set out in each chapter. Numbers relate to the chapter where the elements in hand are developed:

1 From ontology and epistemology into the politicization and systematization of philosophy – the acknowledgement of knowledge's temporal character.
2 From conditions of possibility of knowledge into conditions of intransitivity of knowledge – the analytics of transposition as an instantiation of philosophy of the future.
3 Culture as an asymmetric expanse of nature and foremost reconfigurative operator.
4 Embodiment as the transposition of idealism/materialism and a true element of the immanent spatiality.
5 From modern universalism and postmodern contextualism into situated structuralism – the birth of *culti*.
6 From dualism into simultaneous correlation of low, middle and high culture; from causality into dynamic correlation in degrees of disembodiment, disembeddedness and decontextualization.
7 From living organism/inert matter, theism/atheism, anthropocentrism/ ecocentrism into the irreducibility of *loci standi* and *instrumenta movendi* linked by a *différance* effect.
8 From immanence into engaged-constrained immanence or from subject/object into the activity of manufacturers of culture and fossilizations.
9 From extrinsic value and unequal exchange as *cultus* of Leviathan into intrinsic value or *culti* of Tellus.

10 From philosophy and science as *epistēmē* into *religare* as *Kultur*.
11 From climate change into hyperbolic immanence as the Age of Re-Embodiments.
12 From what is *Aufklärung* into what is *Kultur*?

The present book follows from an attempt to address the following research questions:

1 How shall our ecologically destructive contemporaneity be characterized?
2 How much hope are we to place upon the institutional project for sustainable development?
3 Does the overcoming of ecologically destructive tendencies, mainly with a Western and Westernized origin, entail the location of novel conditions of possibility for knowledge?
4 In short, how are we to cognitively – and politically – exit the ecocidal, dystopian present?

CHAPTER ONE

DYSTOPIAN CONTEMPORARY POSITIONS: SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AS A MANIFEST INSTANCE OF THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL DISPOSITION

> [A]s long as we replace old values with new ones that only amount to new combinations between reactive forces and the will to nothingness, nothing has changed.
>
> – Gilles Deleuze[1]

> The fact that at present people all talk of things which they CANNOT have any experience, is true more especially and fortunately as concerns the philosopher and philosophical matters: [...] thinking itself is regarded by them as something slow and hesitating, almost as a trouble, and often enough as 'worthy of the SWEAT of the noble' – but not at all as something easy [...], closely related to dancing and exuberance!
>
> – Friedrich Nietzsche[2]

Synopsis

This initial chapter deals with one of the research questions that the present book addresses: the extent to which the official project of sustainable development – mainly as set out in *Our Common Future* (WCED 1987) – can steer the global polity out of the ecocidal mode of being where it is immersed. It is argued that, cognitively, the project at issue is conterminous with the epistemological tradition largely inaugurated by Socrates. It is upon these grounds that the project of sustainable development is readily dismissed as a putative post-ecocidal candidate.

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[1] Deleuze 2001 [1965], 81.
[2] Nietzsche 2003, § 213.

Seven points of continuity between the project of sustainable development and philosophy and science as *epistēmē* are identified. First, sustainable development is seen to fully endorse the anthropological slumber into which the Modern Age – the zenith of the epistemological trajectory – plunges. Similarly, sustainable development is found to project the analytic of finitude common to this Age to the environment as the latter turns into an issue of public concern. Second, the rational management with which *Our Common Future* is imbued is pinpointed as an intrinsic element of the logocentric sciences into which philosophy as *epistēmē* evolves. Third and relatedly, ecological statements that inform the report under scrutiny are identified as problematic logocentric claims to truth, operative and legitimized under the ecocidal mode of being. Points four and five relate to a leading feature of philosophy and science as *epistēmē* – namely, the pervasiveness of binary pairs. Sustainable development replicates the Cartesian culture/nature divide by which the *res cogitans* – "thinking matter" – stands over against the *res extensa* – "extended matter". Likewise, the rubric of sustainable development is conceived as conforming to an unproblematized reversal of productivity – as an extension and complementary pole of the latter, that is. Sixth, the propensity of sustainable development to take for granted a docile nature, assumed to be utterly controllable by Promethean Man, is interpreted as an expression of restricted economy, a leading trait of the epistemological disposition. Seventh, sustainable development, in its promise to render productivity clean, is severely charged with the perpetuation of the teleology of progress also ingrained in the epistemological trajectory.

Descent Into Our Contemporaneity

Recollections of a Past Utopia

Once upon a time there was a little girl, her cousins and friends from all nationalities who yet spoke a common language. They knew well how to proceed with a number of matters. They had come to master a range of crafts in the intricacies of a cove by the name of Cala Crancs. Notably, they had developed all their own techniques on how to turn fine-speck sand into a number of items of public display. Their varied production included robust and quite exuberant castles, bakeries exhibiting the most appetizing – or so they believed – shapes of croissants, and impervious barriers against the corrosive salt water when the sea was choppy. Water was another of the domains where these children had found a secure ally. The little girl and her relatives and friends had come to develop a

remarkable command of wave-surfing with their physical bodies. Their prolific imagination about how to establish an adequate relationship with the waves made up for boards or any kind of additional accessories. Remarkably our characters were able to hold their breath for as long as the wave kept its momentum. On every ride they would succeed in keeping their bodies stretched out and supple at one and the same time to let them reach the shore on a wave.

Water being a tacit accomplice, expeditions out to sea were activities they would also undertake regularly. By combining breast and backstroke with crawl, this group of children knew how to swim with and against the mild Mediterranean currents to reach out to a majestic rock offshore. Once standing on that rock, they would keep their bodies submerged up to the hips and enjoy gazing at the fauna, often with the aid of diving goggles. They happily befriended those exotic creatures which were similar to the animals populating the rocks neighbouring the cove. Collective incursions onto the rocks surrounding their cove – that singular and safe place of their childhood – were also frequent. The children were keen to visit the crabs, the mussels, the winkles, the starfishes and the sea urchins regularly – they were one with their sea-friends.

In her mid-teens that little girl, now on her course to womanhood, lost interest in her sand-converting skills. She replaced her direct contact with sand with windsurfing. With the aid of a board and a sail, our main character preserved her keenness for both swimming in the Mediterranean sea and playing with the waves. Yet to her utter surprise and disappointment, the knowledge and skills she had been accumulating from a tender age became largely redundant. This was not because the skills were useless – she remained fond of swimming and had moreover grown increasingly aware of the healing properties of her swimming out to sea. However, some skills of hers had turned *impracticable* almost overnight. In the course of five years, two blocks of apartments had been built on the rocks where she and her cousins and friends used to visit their sea peers. What is more, at this stage of her life this woman had to develop new techniques and precautions to approach the sea – the sewage of the new inhabitants didn't always render the swimming salubrious.

Aware of and preoccupied with her steadily constrained ability to swim out to sea and heal herself at will, this character in her mid-twenties and in love with the sea eagerly visited an exhibition at the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA). The exhibition in hand was a turning point in the life of this woman wedded to the Mediterranean waters – it was to determine her next moves. The MACBA exhibition was about the promise of sustainable development in a middle-class suburb in

a Nordic country. As a curious student, this woman was very impressed with this display that dealt with key issues of her contemporaneity – howto regain a post-industrial alliance with the sand, the waters, the rocks, the crabs, the mussels, the winkles, the starfishes and the sea urchins – the sea-friends of one's childhood. As a result, she came to cherish the conviction and hope that this somewhat mysterious rubric – "sustainable development" – would tell her how to recover her cherished cove and make it practicable to swim and heal herself at will in Mediterranean waters.

An Apt Avenue to Politicize our Times

Let us note that the narrative above mentions a series of growing constraints in the life of our main character. As the little girl leaves her childhood behind to enter womanhood, the development of new housing on the coastline results in the proliferation of sewage out into the sea. The number of people and cars travelling in and out of the new buildings rises sharply. Yet what must be noted is that the case of our main character isn't an isolated one. It is like a billion others. It speaks, in the form of an embodied metonymy, of our contemporaneity. It exhibits the contingent fashion in which the elements that conform to reality are arranged. The case of our main character points to a specific mode of *religare*, to a concrete way of binding strongly together the components of reality (cf. Capra 1988, 145–6; Ferré 1988). This girl-woman in love with the sea bespeaks two confronted religions – what results from assembling elements or from the act of *religare*. The initial setting to which she is exposed kindly invites her to interact with neighbouring characters – the fine-speck sand, the sea, the rocks, the crabs, the mussels, the winkles, the starfishes and the sea urchins. The disposition of the elements that develops in her puberty, by contrast, interposes a number of instruments – sewage, cars, new buildings – on the girl-woman's way to relate to her bedfellows.

We can take the two different engagements with the two distinct dispositions of the building blocks of reality on the part of our main character as much informing as intervening in the process of knowledge production in and for our times. "In a sense […] we have to conform to a 'logic' which is inscribed only in the course of events" (Vattimo [1988] 1991, 177). Against this backdrop, we can assert that today all philosophers, as initial testimonies of the conditional and conditioning truth prevalent in the space where they speak, have undergone a particular shift in the way they customarily interact with the components of reality. Our ability to

labour, repose, heal and be at leisure in our native or subsequently adopted places has been constrained to a certain degree (*La Vanguardia* 10/01/2012).

For the sake of convenience, we may refer to these constraints on different fronts as ramifications, splittings, manifestations of an ecocidal mode of being – as a mode, that is, which deliberately interferes with our ability to work, rest, heal and be playful with and in our autochthonous sites or those subsequently adopted following migratory processes. This feature stands out so prominently in the philosopher's test of our age that in seeking the possibility of knowledge for our times, it creeps in surreptitiously but unwaveringly. It infiltrates the process of knowledge production.

This anterior cognitive condition – *i.e.*, an ecocidal mode of being – carries with it an implication that energetically intervenes in the narrative. It mediates the constitution of knowledge by forcing on it an irreducibly normative dimension. Attesting to one of the foremost outstanding dimensions of these present times – their systematic ability to debase and replace local knowledge and techniques, medicinal remedies and labour-related and recreational resorts – we take due precautions against giving free rein to an unmitigated relativism. In the present conditions of existence there are palpable ecocidal elements. Our main character cherishes the direct interaction with her surrounding friends – the sand, the sea, the rocks, the crabs, the mussels, the winkles, the starfishes and the sea urchins. Hence the imperative necessity to consider as normative those initiatives which safely secure the keeping of ecocidal elements at bay. The body of knowledge we are to construe should facilitate sharp analysis but should simultaneously subject this analytical process to the demands of our times, placating the ecocidal mode of being. "The philosopher of the future is both artist and doctor – in one word, legislator" (Deleuze 2001b, 66); she must be both interpreter and evaluator.

This militantly political departure will at least partially inoculate us against two perverse leanings pervasive among professional philosophers. One is abstract thinking and the other the incessant repetition of the terms that one is taking issue with. There is indeed a tendentious propensity to address philosophical issues, such as the nature of truth, knowledge, action, reality and morality, in a vacuum, removed from the context which is to define them in the first place. I associate this insidious practice with the history of Western philosophy and science as *epistēmē,* and its dogged search for ontological predicates on the eternal nature of being. This tradition has encouraged the circulation of moral and political advocacy (cf. Leiter 2006a, 88; Nietzsche 1989a). However, our eagerness to regain

the conditions to undertake labour, leisure and healing activities rather leads us to engage in systematic philosophizing out of which certain aspects of reality gain illumination, so that we can draw ethical and political conclusions. "The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking which isolates itself from practice is a purely scholastic question" (Marx 1976a, Thesis 2). It must without fail be a political perspective that dictates what we are to do with knowledge. Claims to truth are apt to the extent that they cast light on the set of problematics that besets our times and takes us well beyond them. Philosophy must relinquish its immortal aspirations in order to be apt to love knowledge and knowing – however untimely it may be for the status quo. We are to hold a *theoria*, understood in its etymological meaning of speculation, as provisional knowing that momentarily sheds light upon a state of affairs "which attributes a temporal core to truth instead of [approaching] truth as something invariable to the moment of history" (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002 [1969], xi; cf. also Curry 2010c; Salleh 2010).

The philosophical practice of engaging in a sterile critique of the positions one is in obstinate disagreement with is no less frequent. By way of contrast, the politically-oriented philosopher is constrained to uphold, not the notion – any universal notion – of truth, but a timely and operative truth that should – in our case – walk us out of the ecocidal mode of being. This truth, with a political agenda writ large, doesn't step in virgin and naked. Rather, it shrewdly arms itself with a constellation of effective devices in the form of new categories of knowledge that, wisely operated together, should help us alter the negative sign of reality. Now, this unstoppable urge for self-articulation overrides the scattering of energies on the fervent disapproval of those philosophical outlooks that one loathes with considerable animus.

Finally, we are interested in the way that the constituents of reality combine together. The metaphor of *religare*, true to its etymological meaning as "to bind strongly", "to put together", "to assemble" disperses disembodied and disembedded approaches such as Hegel's spirit of the times, Michel Foucault's (1997) fascination with the ethos, milieu of the Enlightenment, Foucault's own exaltation of discourse as well as Patrick Curry's (2010d) steady focus on a non-modern sensibility. Our literal metaphysics of religion pays attention to the disposition of the elements of reality, a disposition which is always embodied, embedded and contextualized. The uncompromising politics of take issue with the various ways in which this contextualized disposition is arranged.

Against this backdrop, we shall refer to the history of Western metaphysics as the disposition proper to philosophy and science as

epistēmē, or as the epistemological layout or, for that matter, disposition. This disposition must be conceived as the cradle of Western materialism, which culminates the civilizational tendency in the history of humankind in the development of steadily more complex artefacts.

Four Research Questions for a Post-Ecocidal Age

It should be noted that what was a lived utopia in my teens,[3] turned into a growing dystopia by my early twenties, and has manifested itself as a search for understanding and hope since my mid-twenties. Against this background, the present book is an attempt to address the following queries:

1 Is further development constraining this pervasive, indisputable, so profoundly palpable, ecocidal contemporaneity we are forced to adapt to as our ability to swim at will, as an instance of labouring, reposing and conducting healing and recreational activities[4] in our autochthonous or subsequently adopted places?
2 How much hope are we to place in the institutional project for sustainable development in relation to the regaining of our old ability to swim at will, and therefore labour, repose and conduct healing and recreational activities in our native or subsequently adopted places?
3 Does the regaining of our old ability to swim at will in our original places altogether entail the location of novel conditions of possibility for a kind of knowledge capable of grappling with the ramifications, splittings, manifestations of an ecocidal mode of being? "An inquiry whose aim is to rediscover on what basis knowledge and theory bec[o]me[s] possible" (Foucault 1980 [1970], xxi) again. Or what is equal to saying, what transformations are needed in the "critical theory" project if "nature" is to be wholly incorporated into its conceptual and political framework?
4 In short, how are we to cognitively – and politically – exit the ecocidal, dystopian present?

[3] Which can only be so defined in face of our dystopian present.
[4] As Tim Jackson has aptly noted in a personal communication, these abilities should be extended, among other terrains, to nutrition, shelter, exploration, relationship, reproduction, identity. Jackson also suggested happiness, but as Chapter Nine will clarify, this putative site follows, in my view, from the arrangement of other factors – it is its contingent by-product.

Sustainable Development in Ecocidal Times: An Anachronistic Instance of Science as *Epistēmē*

Common Denominators of Sustainable Development

Sustainable development is a project already at work (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987). It may have some merit to proceed by addressing research question (4) by way of (2). We should therefore conduct an inquiry into whether the project under this rubric is the blueprint that will guide us out of the ecocidal, dystopian present so that we may regain our ability to swim at will – as a metonymy for labouring, reposing and conducting healing and recreational activities in our own or subsequently adopted places.

There are plural understandings of sustainable development (cf. Jackson 2006a). For reasons that will be clarified at the beginning of Chapter Two, the banner at issue has undergone a process that positions it now on a par with the term democracy. Democracy is a highly elastic signifier that serves disparate dispensations. It can be stretched out to one extreme by anarchist authors to refer to direct – as opposed to representative – politics. It is reclaimed with the same impetus by an opposite extreme made up of the likes of the American administration to justify warfare incursions into various countries. Similarly, currently the slogan of sustainable development and its associated form sustainability is different things to different groups of people. It is, on the one hand, eagerly upheld by ecocrats who regard the management of nature as the justification for the centralized forms of governance that have destabilized her in the first place. It is, on the other hand, also appropriated by rural activists in West Bengal who exhibit the most exemplary practices of Gandhian politics. The topic of the present book falls well beyond a discourse analysis of the various ends to which either the slogan "sustainable development" or "sustainability" are put to use; our concerns are the conditions of possibility of knowledge for a post-ecocidal age. We shall therefore identify the promise of sustainable development with the official or, at any rate, primordial definition and strategy. This choice is by no means arbitrary. The initial characterization of sustainable development plays a crucial role in the perpetuation and naturalization of the modern mode of being, as will be unravelled below.

The *locus classicus* of the primal characterization of *Our Common Future* is a report drawn up by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) under the aegis of the General Assembly of the United Nations (the report is also known as the Brundtland Report after

the Commission's chairperson). In this initial statement, "[s]ustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987, 43). Now, to introduce the related concept of "sustainability" we may go by way of a definition attributed to "sustainable consumption". Let us take the characterization of the British Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) as an example. The DTI understands "[s]ustainable consumption and production [a]s continuous economic and social progress that respects the limits of the Earth's ecosystems, and meets the needs and aspirations of everyone for a better quality of life, now and for future generations to come" (quoted in Jackson 2006b, 5). This is a precious definition in that it captures the common denominator of sustainable consumption specifically,[5] and the promise of sustainable development more generally. Let us next explore this set of concomitances systematically.

1. The Analytic of Finitude, Man and the Environment

As quoted above, "sustainable development" highlights environmental limits – "progress that respects the limits of the Earth's ecosystems". This appeal to limits is reminiscent of the analytic of finitude proper to the modern mode of being in the West, when "man [...] find[s] the constant reminder of his limitations in his needs" (Foucault 1980 [1970], 314). Once Western philosophy cleanses itself from religious and metaphysical cosmetics to enter the Modern Age, the finite status of the human condition is more perspicuously perceived. "Man's finitude is heralded – and imperiously so – in the positivity of knowledge" (ibid., 313). Man, finitude and this kind of knowledge – positivism – that is no longer concerned "with an edifice of theory structured upon deductions from absolute principles, but rather with viewing events as they occurred and discussing actual problems that had arisen" (Shaw 2005 [2003], 25) conform to the distinctive trinity of the Modern Age:

> if man's knowledge is finite, it is because he is trapped, without possibility of liberation, within the positive contents of language, labour, and life; and inversely, if labour, and language may be posited in their positivity, it is because knowledge has finite forms. (Foucault 1980 [1970], 314)

This emphasis on existential contours is part and parcel of the canonical definition of sustainable development, which highlights humanity's finitude

[5] For more definitions cf. Jackson 2006b, 5.

vis-à-vis the capacity of the environment to sustain its needs. "Sustainable development […] contains within it […] the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs" (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987, 43).

The primacy of finitude follows from the tendency of modern philosophy to regard the being of man as its object of study. One must note that such marked anthropocentrism, first apparent in Kant, is self-referential and moulded by factors internal to philosophy. It reasons that the objective factors that restrict knowledge – space, time and the framework of the categories that Kant proposes – are also the conditions for the possibility of knowledge. "Despite its finitude – and also because of it – human reason takes over the role of God as legislator for both nature and morality" (Yovel 1989, 7). No wonder that finitude, man and the environment conform to a triad. We should indeed note the arbitrariness of the chosen objective factors, which fail to highlight the political agenda of Kant's time. Rather, Kant's philosophy aims at an immortal truth, holding together independently of one's actuality. Be this as it may, human finitude's self-foundation in the Modern Age stands both for the founding and for the fundamental and the positive. In the ecocidal mode of being, the environment turns into the exalted foil for human finitude. The environment becomes part of man's extended finitude and thus part of man's own foundation. Scientific bodies such as the World Commission on Environment and Development (1987) and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2001, 2007) develop an analytic of finitude of Man in relation to the limited carrying capacity of his environment. In so proceeding, these scientific bodies and the institutional endeavour on sustainable development become situated in the core of the modern mode of being. The empirical work of these two scientific bodies situates Man's needs in the bilateral flows of the physical and cultural bodies, on the one hand, and the environment's "maximum sustainable yield" (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987, 45), on the other. By way of sustainable development, which poses the queries "which of nature's 'services' are indispensable for further development, and to what extent? […] Which 'services' of nature are dispensable or can be replaced by, for example, new materials or genetic engineering?" (Sachs 1996, 244), the analytic of finitude is drawn on new contours. Man's awareness of his finitude is exacerbated in relation to his environmental limitations.

Whilst in the early Modern Age, empirical biological knowledge of the human body marks the threshold of finitude, with the advent of the ecocidal mode of being – or, at any rate, heightened and officially voiced

awareness thereof, it is the environment and its carrying capacities that circumscribe the boundaries of human life. To put it inversely, it is humanity's acute urgency to have "access to resources" (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987, 43) that extends, via the institutional project of sustainable development, the modern condition onto the environment. "[F]initude is always designated on the basis of man as a concrete being and on the basis of the empirical forms that can be assigned to his existence" (Foucault 1980 [1970], 318, 313; cf. also Latour 1993). What must be retained at this initial stage is that sustainable development, in enacting the analytic of finitude to secure humanity's existence, remains anchored in the modern mode of being. This realization modifies, in turn, the course of our investigation. Research questions (2) and (4) in tandem will now read: will the modern mode of being steer us out of the ecocidal mode of being?

There is a topic closely related to the analytic of finitude which is highly pertinent to address research question (3), that is, relevant to our groping through the conditions of possibility of that kind of knowledge that shall assist us in our process of regaining our sites of labour, repose, healing and leisure. The Modern Age presents finitude as a caustic fabric against traits of the history of Western philosophy: "Modern thought [...] will contest even its own metaphysical impulses, and show that reflections upon life, labour, and language, in so far as they have value as analytic of finitude, express the end of metaphysics" (Foucault 1980 [1970], 317). Finitude presents Western metaphysics as "a veil of illusion" (ibid.), a form of estrangement – "an alienated form of thought" (ibid.) – and, therefore, as a passing "cultural episode" (ibid.). Yet for all its anti-metaphysical claims, finitude *per se* is no guarantee of full eradication of Western metaphysical traits. The structure of finitude may be still disposed in dependency on part of the network that defines the Western metaphysical tradition. "All metaphysics, including its opponent, positivism, speaks the language of Plato" (Heidegger 2000f [1978], 444).

This being so, the concern for finitude that traverses the politics of sustainable development further contextualizes this institutional endeavour in a context even broader than that demarcated by the Modern Age. The quest for sustainable development shows some initial signs that it is a spin-off from the history of Western philosophy in the ecocidal mode of being. Western philosophy may be characterized as an episode in the history of European culture inaugurated by Socrates but largely prefigured by Parmenides (Feyerabend 1987, 121; Plotnitsky 1994, 231; Panikkar 2009, 284), that "goes back to the Greeks, and goes sideways into all sorts of non-philosophical disciplines which have, at one time or another,

proposed themselves as substitutes for epistemology, and thus philosophy" (Rorty 1980, 390). This is a philosophical and scientific trajectory that grounds cognitive processes upon *epistēmē,* namely, upon the production of "certain theoretical knowledge of abstract universals" (Curry 2004f, 104) commonly understood as *logos, ratio,* reason. "Kant is no less certain than Heraclitus that th[e] ordering of perceptions, this *kosmos*, is governed by a *logos* which transcends the merely local differences of history and power" (Allen 1993, 28). This is a tradition ruled by the supreme law of aesthetic Socratism: "'To be beautiful everything must be intelligible'" (Nietzsche 1967a, 84).

In the wake of Nietzsche and denoting distinct emphases on its different aspects, this philosophical and scientific tradition has been variously referred to as the history of Western metaphysics, metaphysics of presence, ontotheology, logocentrism and the epistemological tradition (Schrift 1990; 1995, 14; Derrida 1997, 12 *et passim*; Heidegger 2000f [1993], 446; Rorty 1980). To facilitate research question (3) and feature the fact that it is possible to engage in non-epistemological philosophical and scientific *praxis*, it is equally legitimate to refer to this tradition as philosophy and science as *epistēmē* or, as noted above in line with our exposition of the facts in the light of *religare*, as the epistemological layout or disposition. In the following, it will be shown how the rubric "sustainable development" replicates six traits proper to Western metaphysics, namely: rationalism; logocentrism; binary logic; unproblematized reversal; restricted economy; and teleology of progress.

2. Rationalism

Modern philosophy starts with the acceptance of the collapse of metaphysics, and the search for philosophical grounding for human action out of its own actuality. The leading exponent of modern thought, Immanuel Kant, accepted the loss of metaphysical anchoring. Yet, as we saw in the previous section, Kant came short of deriving a critical rationality out of his contemporaneity. Instead, the Prussian thinker submitted philosophy to an idealist turn. This is is equal to saying that Kant faced up to the metaphysical loss by culminating the Cartesian *cogito* and propounding universal – decontextualized and decontextualizing – human subjectivity as the new guardian over superstition, custom and despotism (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1991 [1986]; Habermas 1991 [1986]; Rorty 1980).

The meaning of truth in classical and modern philosophies differs insofar as the latter is brought to bear upon distinct ontological *a prioris*. It

is a natural phenomenon with a principle of its own that marks the tone for truth in classical philosophy. By contrast, the Cartesian *cogito* and its culmination in Kantian ground operate as the new platform for apt knowledge in the Modern Age. Kant's critical reason, to be sure, supplants the place reserved for nature in classical philosophy by the subject's subjectivity. In this novel setting, human "understanding does not derive its laws from, but prescribes them to, nature" (Kant quoted in Allen 1993, 37).

With Kant, the Archimedean point of philosophy and science as *epistēmē* turns anti-naturalistic and comes indeed to reside upon reason, "a foreign power that has to impose its laws upon nature from without" (Yovel 1989, 7). This U-turn is referred to as Kant's Copernican Revolution, namely, the movement by which the *logos* that sanctions the epistemological disposition is relocated in subjective idealism. Kant's scholarly endeavour is the victorious anthropomorphization of *logos*. "The human mind itself, when exercising its rationally structured spontaneity, prescribes the basic laws of morality and religion to itself, just as it legislates the universal and necessary lawlike patterns that nature itself obeys" (ibid.).

Subjective idealism is the context where *epistēmē* evolves (cf. Rorty 1980, ch 3; Allen 1993, ch 2; Latour 1993, ch 2). "[T]he truth of the Platonic ideas has become more and more identifiable with the objectivity of the statements of physics" (Vattimo 2002, 14). Rationalists philosophers, Descartes and Spinoza, marked the first moves in this direction (cf. Serrano 2011). Yet it is Kant who substantiates the divide between philosophy vs. science and *epistēmē* by rendering the former the primary, underlying discipline. "The eventual demarcation of philosophy from science was made possible by the notion that philosophy's core was 'theory of knowledge', a theory distinct from the sciences because it was their *foundation*" (Rorty 1980, 132). Heideggerian sources regard the transition from philosophy as *epistēmē* into science as *epistēmē* more as a logical conclusion of a trend long initiated than as a schism. "The development of philosophy into the independent sciences […] that, however, interdependently communicate among themselves ever more markedly, is the legitimate completion of philosophy" (Heidegger 2000f [1993], 434 *et passim*).[6] Heidegger, that is to say, regards empiricism as a mere prolongation of philosophy as *epistēmē*. "Epistemology was not necessarily a rationalist enterprise. Indeed, its last great defenders were

[6] Yet, as Heidegger (2000f [1993]: 433) notes, "we forget that already in the age of Greek philosophy a decisive characteristic of philosophy appears: the development of the sciences within the field that philosophy opened up."

and are empiricists" (Taylor 1987, 465).

Sustainable development attests to this anthropocentric rational vein: "at stake is not just the sustainable development of shared ecosystems and the commons, but of all nations whose development depends to a greater or lesser extent on their rational management," reads a passage in *Our Common Future* (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987, 261). Ecology, the discourse on the natural environment set in order by the enlightened mind, as we shall further see in the next subsection, is to inform the right management of "Earth's ecosystems" or "environmental resources," an entity which is seen as practically segregated from the human realm, were it not that it guarantees humanity's needs. "[S]ustainable development requires the promotion of values that encourage consumption standards that are within the bounds of the ecological possible and to which all can reasonably aspire" (ibid., 44). As it was anticipated above, sustainable development must be read as the legislator of modern features once ecocidal tendencies that follow from the realization of the latter become apparent with the naked eye.

3. Logocentric Claims to Truth and Ecology

As a vestige of Christian dualism preserved by way of the God that underwrites the Cartesian schism, Kantianism favours logocentric claims to truth anchored in transcendental human reason. This practice "is a product of viewing knowledge as an assemblage of representations" (Rorty 1980, 136). Kantian categories – substance, quantity, quality, relation, action, affection, place, time, position and state – are no more than ontological attributes, properties, qualities or characteristics that can be predicated of a thing. The need for "unconditional authorities [truth and *logos*] is so strong that, even in a critical age such as Kant's, it showed itself superior to the need for criticism and was, in a certain sense, able to subject the entire work of critical reason and put it to its own uses" (Nietzsche 1967c, § 412; cf. Rorty 1980, ch 3). In this light, biology must be interpreted as the human discourse on life or the logocentric representation thereof; ecology as the discourse on the natural household or the logocentric representation thereof; geology as the human discourse on the Earth or the logocentric representation thereof; sociology as the discourse on society or the logocentric representation thereof; and so on and so forth. All the sciences prolifically ferment in this logocentrically-mediated ethos unravelled by the human mind. "By taking the totality of beings and making it dependant upon the synthetic accomplishments of the subject, Kant downgrades the cosmos into the object domain of the

nomological natural sciences" (Habermas 1996 [1992], 407), where nomology is the human treatise on – read: logocentric representation of – laws and their interpretation.[7] Kantian and neo-Kantian authors "present themselves as the inheritors of the Greek claim that to understand is to identify a 'logos,' or in Latin a 'ratio,' both terms leading to reason, to account" (Stengers 2009). Hence Nietzsche's (1967a, § 13) derogatory branding of Socrates as "the precursor of an altogether different culture, art and morality". Socrates readily identified knowledge with *epistēmē*, namely, as a logocentric quest for abstract universals, marking thereby the tone for the entirety of Western philosophy. Socrates "made of life something that must be judged, measured, restricted, and of thought, a measure, a limit, that is exercised in the name of higher values: the Divine, the True, the Beautiful, the Good" (Deleuze 2001 [1965], 70).

This rational vein is with no less impetus exalted in the scientific project of sustainable development. In *Our Common Future* the human power of representation remains another name for the production of knowledge. Ecology turns now into the domain of representation *par excellence*; the cognitive matrix from which predicates on nature emanate, are justified and pronounced as necessary. The "common and mutually supportive objectives" in the Brundtland Report must "take account of the interrelationships between people, resources, environment and development" (1987, IX).

4. Culture/Nature as an Instance of Epistemological Binary Logic

Another salient trait of philosophy and science as *epistēmē* is binary logic or "*the belief in antitheses of values*" (Nietzsche 2003, § 2). The Western philosophical tradition has been one of clear-cut blacks *or* whites. "Aristotle gave us our binary logic and much of our scientific worldview. He taught us to logic chop and always draw the line between opposites, between the thing and the not-thing, between A and not-A. The better you drew those lines, the more logical your mind and the more exact your science" (Kosko 1994, 68). One can find an abundance of these bipolar positions enacted in this tradition; "we define metaphysics by the distinction between two worlds" (Deleuze 2001 [1965], 69–70): nature/culture, idealism/materialism; good/bad; unity/plurality; *logos/mythos*, logic/rhetoric, intelligible/sensible, speech/writing, literal/figurative, presence/absence, intuition/signification, identity/difference, truth/error (Baynes et al. 1987, 119; Schrift 1995, 15; Johnson 2004, viii). It must be

[7] "Nomos" is the Greek for "use, custom, law".

noted that the two entities, far from standing on an equal footing, form an uneven structure with the first contrasted pole in a privileged position over the second. An "opposition of metaphysical concepts […] is never the face-to-face of two terms, but a hierarchy and an order of subordination" (Derrida 1984 [1971], 329). The second term is considered as the degraded, corrupted and undesirable version of the first. Out of the lengthy list, one binary pair may be readily associated with the rubric sustainable development, namely, nature/culture. However, in our context, the order of the opposition is reversed as both the culture and nature we are dealing with are cognates of the Cartesian *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, respectively.

On one reading, sustainable development is the all-out crusade that the West undertakes in face of an increasingly absent nature. This dire situation renders human finitude more acutely conspicuous against a backdrop that now must be taken into account, and for which an alleged whole new culture – sustainable development – is marshalled. In this light, we may corroborate our initial suspicion that the analytic of finitude proper to the Modern Age – which the institutional project of sustainable development proceeds to relate to environmental matters – is pervaded with vestiges of the tradition of philosophy and science as *epistēmē*. Far from defeating Western metaphysics, this analytic extends the traits common to this trajectory into the ecocidal mode of being. Sustainable development, in so far as it enlists the Cartesian dispensation that also characterizes the Modern Age, "require[s] an absolute distinction between the two terms [culture/nature] and the continual repression of the work of mediation" (Latour 1993, 140), and therefore also that of analysis. Yet the proliferation of all kinds of artefacts, from GMOs to IMF policies geared to structural adjustment and to geo-engineering, rather speaks of a highly populated space in between the extremes "culture" and "nature". A genetically modified seed, to take the example above, is neither fully "natural" nor fully "cultural". Rather, it lies somewhere in between the continuum that "culture" and "nature" draw should we be able to approach the bipolar oppositions from a non-hierarchical perspective (Nietzsche 2005 [2001], § 112). In other words, the space of analysis opens up, once the contrasted Cartesian *res cogitans* vs. *res extensa* undergo a profound recasting. This space is suffocated in the quest to sustain present and prospective human needs against a backdrop that secures the latter.

The marked anthropocentrism imbuing *Our Common Future*, announced above in the section "Logocentric Claims to Truth and Ecology", appears perennially in the history of philosophy and science as *epistēmē*. "[T]he name of man being the name of that being who, throughout the history of metaphysics or ontotheology – in other words,