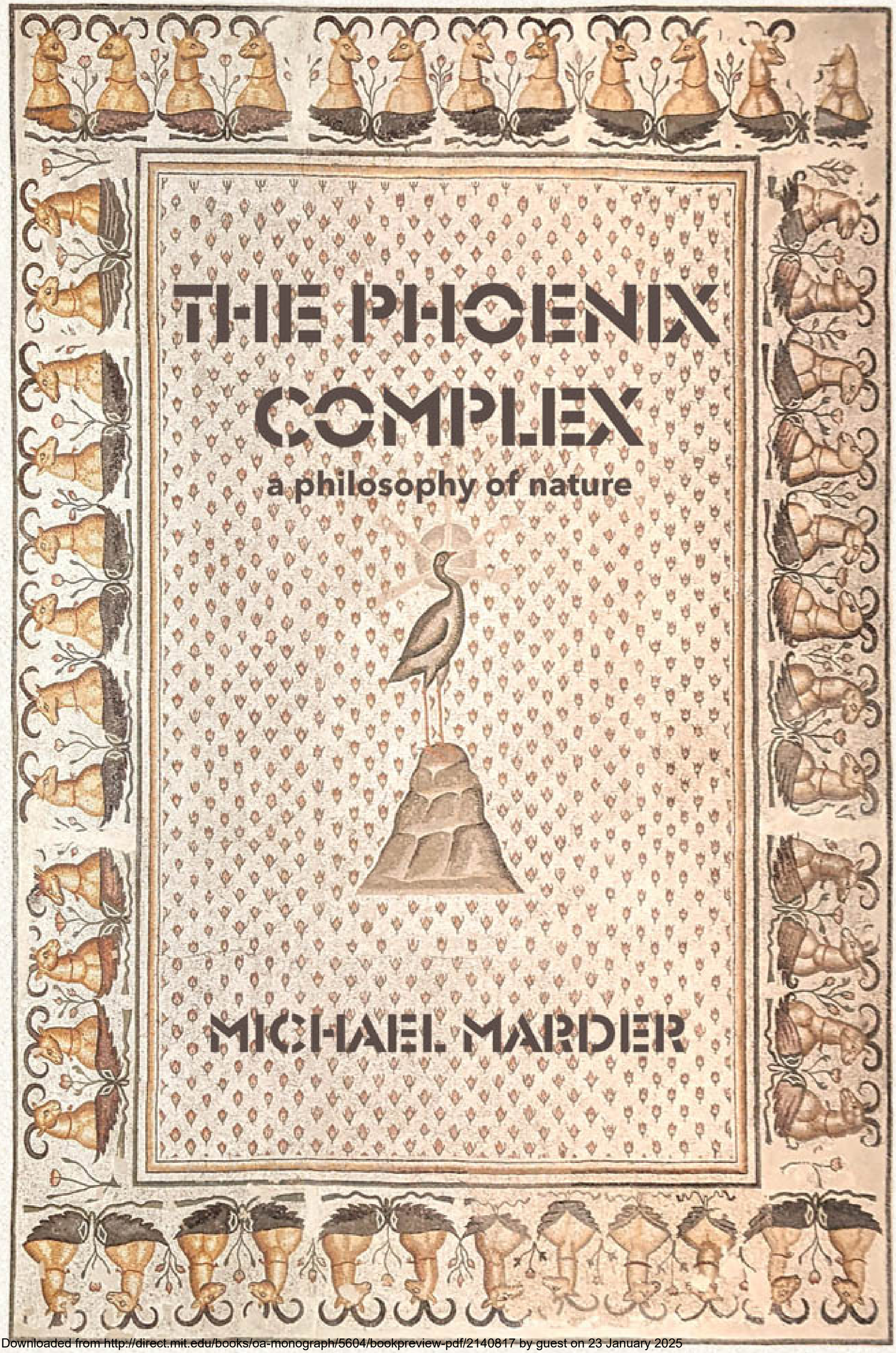
# THE PHOENIX COMPLEX

a philosophy of nature

MICHAEL MARDER



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## A Philosophy of Nature

### MICHAEL MARDER

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*For Luis, part of our "infinite conversation"*

I am that great phoenix [*bennu*] which is in Heliopolis [*Annu*], the supervisor of what exists.

*Who is he?* He is Osiris. As for what exists, that means his injury. *Otherwise said*: That means his corpse. *Otherwise said*: It means eternity and everlasting. As for eternity, it means daytime; as for everlasting, it means night.
—*The Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead* (Spell 17)

[There is] a fable which says that among the first medicines was one from the ashes and nest of the phoenix, just as though the story were fact and not myth. It is to joke with mankind to point out remedies that return only after a thousand years.
—Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* (29.viii)

You have seen everything that has ever been; you testify to the passing and turning of the ages.
—Claudian, "The Phoenix" (27.104–105)

Every combustion process is a sacrifice of individuality. When the sun represents the ideal principle in relation to the earth, the earth, as it were, sacrifices itself to the sun, as it does in the volcanic process, although, like a phoenix, it again revives from the ashes by the power of its indwelling individuality and binds itself in a relation to the sun anew.
—F. W. J. Schelling, *System of Philosophy in General and the Philosophy of Nature in Particular*

One need only remember how the regimes of the one and nature gave way to the disparate which dislocated them, beginning with their respective establishments, to understand that their destitutions were always a phoenix's tale. From the ashes of the Greek hegemony, the Latin hegemony emerges, and from the ashes of the latter, modern self-consciousness emerges. There is a thetic relapse without which no new regime could be put into place (yet which does not take up the destituted positions in any synthesis).
—Reiner Schürmann, *Broken Hegemonies*

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# Preface

## IS A PHILOSOPHY OF NATURE STILL TENABLE?

*Essence, truth, nature*—these concepts have been highly suspect, to the point of being tabooed, in Continental philosophy circles since the second half of the twentieth century. *Nature* is, by far, the most prominent of the three, particularly because its semantic and conceptual drift affects essence and truth alike. So, essence may be understood as the inner nature of things, while truth can be defined as the accordance of a statement with their outer nature, or, in a word, with reality.[1] A lot rides, then, on the undercutting of nature, whether in its inner or outer aspects: when it erodes, its companion terms promptly follow suit. Rejecting this concept for a slew of reasons (including its atavistic connotations, hierarchical presuppositions, and blindness to cultural and social constructions), we proudly declare our membership in the vanguard of criticism and our liberation from the symbolic yoke of the past we would much rather forget. Nonessentialism and post-truth are the badges of honor that go along with this membership.

The thesis that nature does not exist has found adherents of every stripe. The nineteenth-century distinction between *Naturwissenschaften* and *Geisteswissenschaften* (natural and human sciences), which had served as the cornerstone of the modern university system, has imploded, rendering both terms in the contrast meaningless. Roughly at the same time that the spirit (*Geist*) at the pinnacle of the humanities has lost its credibility, the nature (*Natur*) at the base of the hard sciences has been divested of its significance.[2] At the hands of natural scientists, nature dissolves into organic and inorganic chemical and molecular components, quantum mechanics and wave oscillations, condensed matter and thermodynamic processes. In the context of such dissolution, a unified notion of nature sounds like a specious abstraction.

Along with nature, life too becomes an outdated concept after it has been reduced to protein structures or energy and signal transduction, enzyme catalysts and metabolic pathways, genes and their expressions. Having fallen victim to these and countless other reductions, the life of life sciences turns out to be all but dead. Furthermore, the connection between life and nature should not be viewed as that between an organic part and the whole made up of organic as well as inorganic components. At its Latin etymological root, *natura* derives from *nascere* (to be born), or, more precisely, from the verb's past participle, *nato*. Nature is natality, the movement of birthing, of a beginning of life that keeps rebeginning and that, perpetually in statu nascendi (in the nascent state, which does not at all exclude death and dying), gives rise to future life out of the remnants of the past: of rivers and mountains, plants and animals, stones and humans, bacteria and an oxygen-enriched atmosphere. It is a movement, the dance of coming to appearance—by hatching or germinating, emerging from the birth canal, or undergoing fission—of (1) that which comes to appearance as an effect; (2) that from which the appearing comes, including the Aristotelian formal and material causes; and (3) that wherein that which appears emerges. Coming to appearance, for its part, is not covered by either the classical or the modern types of causality. Rather than merely phenomenal, it indicates that the movement of birthing is phenomenaliz*ing* (in fact, self-phenomenalizing, which is not quite the same as autopoietic) and, as such, it both precedes and succeeds scientific explanations.

The objective devastation of nature, threatening, beyond any given species, the ostensibly inexhaustible stream of birthing indicated by the word itself, finds its corollaries in nature's subjective and epistemic destruction. Let us take just two recent paradigmatic examples.

Timothy Morton spots in nature a transcendental principle that needs to be done and over with for ecology and ecological thought to flourish: "The very idea of 'nature,' which so many hold dear, will have to wither away in an 'ecological' state of human society. Strange as it may sound, the idea of nature is getting in the way of properly ecological forms of culture, philosophy, politics, and art."[3] Why, though, constrain nature to an idea, and one detained in scarce quotes at that? Are birth and birthing that nourish its sense equally amenable to idealization? A similarly unjustified epistemic mutilation of nature is evident in Lorraine Daston's recent book *Against Nature*. While admitting that "like all truly interesting words, 'nature' is a *mille-feuille* of meanings,"[4] Daston narrows its semantic range down to order, if not the (transcendental, once again) assurance of order; for her, "specific natures guarantee an order of things."[5] The load-bearing point in the argument converts nature into a static category, ignoring the dynamic strands of birthing. But, should one insist on this formulation of the problem, nature is both an order and an ordering, which implies a persistent *re-* and *dis*ordering of things. As such, it can guarantee nothing but change, turmoil, and disruption.

Whereas nature promises an ostensibly limitless outpouring of births, our philosophical, scientific, and technological outlooks are spellbound by death. I have already mentioned how, decrying life for being a metaphysical delusion, as atavistic as nature itself, biological sciences study life phenomena in terms of their substantive biochemical or biophysical substratum, rendering them as good as dead.[6] Analytic philosophy, aspiring to a scientific standing, inflicts the same fate on the life of the mind, laid out on the Procrustean bed of formal or symbolic logic. Nonanalytic philosophy, heavily influenced by Martin Heidegger and existentialism, is enthralled with death. Technology implements prevalent scientific and philosophical perspectives on a planetary scale, seeding death everywhere. Nature is accessible to our understanding as an a priori lifeless "sum total or aggregate of natural things."[7] The default condition of our thinking, if not of our being, is a *necroepistemology*[8] that sees the world through the prism of death cleansed of life, the death, which nonetheless passes for life itself, plus the cutting-edge research on how to delay aging and to satisfy the ever-growing demand for immortality (for the ultrarich). Even the apocalyptic sentiments of the "endism" pervading our zeitgeist belong within this scheme.

The original articulation of nature as birthing not only feminizes the *figure* or the *figuration* of nature but also zeroes in on a phase of life conventionally identified as its beginning. The beginning that is birth is highly peculiar: it coincides with the moment of coming to appearance, of emerging into the light, while leaving in the shadows life's covert development, incubation, or gestation that have been unfolding prior to that moment. The end of a life in death is a counterpart to its beginning at birth, but, unlike the coming to appearance at or in the beginning, death is not a disappearance: the dead body, the corpse, remains. Moreover, these remains themselves undergo further changes, decomposing and becoming compost for the nourishment of new life. The past participle form of *nascere* (to be born) that yields *natura* (nature) starts making sense, in the first place, not in the light in which those born make their appearance, but in the darkness from whence they emerge and whither they recede. The overall birthing that is nature does not exclude either dying or the dead, without whom the future-oriented trajectory of birth would not have been possible.

Although, at the subterranean level of being, death is not opposed to birth, the two moments have been treated as the extremes of a life, its end and beginning points. At the same time, death looms as the other of life itself; it is the sole notion I know of that participates in two binary relations at once (death/birth; death/life). If death is the contrary of a beginning of life *and* of life as a whole, is that because life is always at its beginning (which is also an unsurpassable middle), born or reborn from itself as much as from its other? While saluting Hannah Arendt for the important work she undertook with respect to natality, we have no choice but to admit that this concept is still poorly understood. Through an appreciation of its relation to life and to death, we might get a little closer to deciphering some of the meanings of nature.

The thinking of nature did not, of course, commence with *natura*, which privileged a coming to appearance in birth. In ancient Greece, it started with the pre-Socratic conception of *phusis* that, undeniably more vegetal than animal, meant "not only that out of which things grew or of which, in the last analysis, they are constituted. . . . *Phusis* included the law or process of growth exemplified in all things."[9] *Phusis* is a noun obtained from the verb *phuein* (to grow, to appear). It is the same verb that gives rise to the Greek for plant, *phuton*—a word with many other meanings, including "child," "descendant," or "creature." Taken together, the growing, that out of which, and that toward which things grow amount to *phusis*. The ground of growth is not substantively different from the growing: it is made up of the traces of past growth, decayed into the soil they fertilize. Nor is *phusis* an ever-expanding polymorphous extension, but a swelling and contracting ellipsis. Growing, coming to appearance, living—these are all rooted in death, which is why all life is an afterlife, all growth is an aftergrowth. Self-grounded, *phusis* is radically ungrounded, abyssal. Its thinking cannot be outmoded, because what it holds in store (and what it thereby invariably withholds in its variegated modes of coming to appearance) is always yet to come.[10]

If, rooted in the past, *phusis* belongs to the future, then it is an enigma. The pre-Socratic, whose thinking will energize us throughout this book, Heraclitus, observed in Fragment 123 that "nature loves to hide [*phusis kruptesthai philei*]." To translate otherwise: the growing coming-to-appearance has a predilection to self-encryption, to concealment and nonappearance. Reformulated this way, the unity of opposites, a theme winding through virtually all Heraclitan fragments, comes into a spotlight. Insofar as there is an order of things said to be natural, it is hidden; its successful elucidation conflates it with the appearing-growing entities and, therefore, misses the mark. In a similar vein, the Delphic maxim "Know thyself" (*gnōthi seautón*) does not culminate in secure knowledge of the objective kind; were it to have done so, it would have missed the very self to be known.

The paradox of Heraclitan nature may be attributable to a plethora of causes, for example, to the hunch that the ground for growth and appearing does not grow but decays and withdraws from the world of appearances and visible forms, or to the fact that the *coming* to appearance is nowhere to be found in the sphere of what appears. That said, what attracts me in these three Greek words is not the hiding but the loving. It is impossible not to love this love. The love (*philia*) of nature puts it on a par with philosophy: just as nature is the love of hiding, so philosophy is a love of wisdom. (Tongue in cheek, we might call nature *philocryptia* by analogy with *philosophia*.) So, what else can we glean from the nexus of philosophy and nature formed by *philia*?

Compare the darlings of philosophy and nature, the respective objects of their love, namely wisdom and concealment. At first glance, it seems that they are worlds apart: wisdom discloses reality as it is, the essence and truth of being; concealment denies us such a disclosure. A closer second look, however, will reveal a cardinal difference between knowledge (the absolute knowledge, even) and wisdom. The former is pure eidetic light shed on every corner of existence; the latter is a highly elusive thing, slipping from everyone's grasp, as Plato's dialogues amply demonstrate. It follows that nature and philosophy share, besides love itself, the love for the fugacious, for what is difficult to track down and impossible to catch, for an object that is axiomatically absent, because it is yet to come.[11]

Friedrich Schelling, who, resonating with the deep impulses and vibrations of ancient thought, was exceptionally attuned to nature as an activity, was entirely correct in his assertion that "to philosophize about nature means *to create* nature."[12] We should free this pithy statement of any and all idealist undertones. This is not a manifesto of the social construction of nature avant la lettre. In keeping with Schelling's logic and our own initial foray into the subject matter, nature is not created at will by the philosopher philosophizing about it. The philosopher who *creates* nature does not manipulate it as an object of theoretical understanding and practical construction, but joins, always belatedly, its own active force and a tradition of others who in the past endeavored to interpret this force, channeling the love of wisdom toward *phusis* that loves to hide.

The question posed in the title of this preface (Is a philosophy of nature still tenable?) is, thus, misplaced. In our hurried, half-baked judgment, philosophy of nature is a thing of the past, part of a naive approach unaware of the intricate comingling of nature and culture, nature and artifice, nature and technique. We do not take either the time or the care necessary to distinguish a philosophy of nature, capable once again or for the first time of relating to nature *as such*, from natural philosophy (*philosophia naturalis*), which uncritically carried out the activity of natural sciences before they became independent disciplines with well-defined domains of knowledge and their corresponding methodologies. In light of this *in*distinction, it would be better for philosophers to refrain from meddling with the scientific study of nature, lest they smuggle archaic metaphysical prejudices into the rigorous knowledge production and verification procedures of the natural sciences.[13]

If, on the contrary, there is anything we can learn from the *phusis* of the pre-Socratics (hence from nature before its formalization in Aristotle's philosophy), it is that no one can justifiably lay claim to and conceptually corral it. Nature is indomitable, despite our technologically substantiated illusions of total mastery and control over it, despite all the routines of cultivation, domestication, and manipulation; it has never been kept at bay, firmly maintained in any theoretical or practical grasp. Nor, by the way, has philosophy been tamed enough to be transformed into intellectual property, regardless of the drive toward systematization, subjection to logical rules and procedures, methodological regularization, and so forth. Here, Schelling's assertion about nature (that to philosophize about it is to create it) finds a more general supplement in Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's suggestion that "the object of philosophy is to create concepts that are always new. . . . Concepts are not waiting for us ready-made, like heavenly bodies. There is no heaven for concepts. They must be invented, fabricated, or rather created."[14] Nature and philosophy participate in a synergy of creation, instigated by the wild, untamed, and untamable, love at the heart of both.

A philosophy of nature is yet to come, yet to be invented, to be created or cocreated in the twinned birth of nature (including of birth as nature and of nature as birth) and philosophy. Creation does not happen ex nihilo; it requires the use of materials already at hand. We must, therefore, contend with the following in the multilayered creative effort ahead: factors that, at our present environmental, political, and economic conjuncture, condition the creative endeavor; the selection process for the sorts of materials to be deployed and inheritances to be received; and a malleable form that could grow from the selected materials.

All three points have to do, in fact, with limits to creation, limits that are historical, material, and formal. The *historical* limits are the most pressing: the assertion that philosophy of nature is yet to come, to be invented, needs to be contextualized within the actual exhaustion of ecosystems; the accelerating loss of biodiversity; the elemental mutations of water, air, and soil under a massive influence of industrial by-products released into the environment. Nature as the power of perpetual rebirth, and philosophy as the promise of a future-oriented conceptual self-recreation; nature *and* philosophy as expressions of a boundless love of concealment or of wisdom; philosophy *of* nature as a unique synergic crossing of two loves—all must be vigilantly held against the background of "finite finitude" (of nonrenewability) that is being unfurled right before our eyes, ears, noses, and minds in the twenty-first century.

The *material* limits for our creative exercise cannot stop at the history of Western metaphysics. Given how profoundly ingrained, if barely recognized in their original form, certain mythological figures and narratives governing our representations of and involvements with nature are, it would be unpardonable to exclude them from a nascent philosophy of nature. Considering the cross-cultural universality of the theme, it would be similarly inexcusable to keep to the Western tradition alone, not least because the philosophical West is a flimsy and artificial construction, propped up by support beams from North African and Arabic-speaking worlds among many other formally non-Western places. Bearing in mind the elusiveness of nature and its ontological (rather than ontic) reach, it would also be unjustifiable to restrict the scope of this work to the staple themes of natural philosophy, while keeping topics in ethics, politics, or aesthetics out of the discussion.

The project's *formal* limits are not those of a purely abstract discourse on nature. Broader than that, they admit as legitimate mythic, non-Western, and premodern figures, together with figuration as such, which depends on imagistic, imaginal, and imaginative thinking. What, at any rate, would be a form appropriate to a fugacious intersection of two wild loves, of philosophy and of nature? How could this dynamic form be expressed in a lively (interdisciplinary, cross-cultural, and at times colloquial) fashion? In what sense might it spring up hylomorphically, from the materials themselves? These are the guiding questions of the formal aspects of the work at hand that inherently deformalize it, returning over and over again to its historical and material conditions.

In the interplay of the historical, material, and formal limits, *The Phoenix Complex* comes into being. The figuration of nature proposed in the book is the phoenix, which gives birth to itself from the threshold of death. This book relies on materials that include ancient Egyptian, Greek, and Roman mythology, philosophy, and literature; Hinduism; Confucianism and neo-Confucianism; early Christian theology; nineteenth-century *Naturphilosophie*; Russian cosmism; and contemporary Jewish thought. The topics covered herein are the quest for immortality, periodic renewals of political power, the ethics of alterity, the cycle of reincarnations and liberation from its machine-like rhythm, hopes for (human and nonhuman) resurrection, the nourishing potential of death and of what strikes one as disgusting, the stretching out and the condensation of time, and the possibilities of transcendence within immanence. The list goes on, but, without exception, these and related themes are set against the historical horizon of what I have referred to as finite finitude—an apparently unprecedented disruption of the routines of rebirth; the loss of the fecundating, fertile or fertilizing capacities of death; the incompatibility of eternity realized (say, in nondecomposable materials or nuclear residues) with the regeneration of plant, microbial, fungal, human, linguistic, cultural, political existences; the reproduction of life *as* death.

The structure of *The Phoenix Complex* exemplifies (or, better yet, performs) the subject matter of the book. In the chapters that revisit texts and ideas from the Western canon (chapters 2–5 and, to some extent, chapter 8) you will find pairings of two thinkers from historical periods that are often separated by thousands of years: Plato and Levinas, Aristotle and Hegel, Plotinus and Schelling, and Hildegard and Spinoza. It is, therefore, a book as much on philosophies of nature as it is on the history of philosophy, which is more or less visibly anchored in thinking nature. Curiously enough, the ideas of ancient philosophers (above all, on issues related to reproduction and substitution, life and death, the same and the other that are fundamental to the phoenix complex) make a comeback and are reborn in the guise of modern systems of thought. Their comeback gives a lie to the default account of modernity as a radical break with the past and, more importantly, corroborates the hypothesis that not only the content of ideas but also their originating impulse is reactivated time and again. Reiner Schürmann's astute observation on the destitution and reinstitution of hegemonic modes of thinking finds its confirmation in this tendency, which Schürmann himself expressed in terms of "a phoenix's tale."[15]

*

The tragic rift of our times is the persistence of the ideological and, for the most part, unconscious conception of nature as a phoenix, which has either become or is in the process of becoming practically inoperable, incompatible with today's realities. For millennia now, humanity has been interpreting the cyclical regeneration of nature as a sign of its infinite capacity for rebirth from the ashes of destruction. (Correlatively, the idea of phoenix-nature itself has been returning—across centuries, geographical and cultural divides—in the otherwise heterogeneous currents of philosophy of nature.) Hoping that this would continue indefinitely, we keep literally burning the world down, while awaiting its phoenix-like resurgence. The same is true, on a smaller scale, of our attitudes toward our own bodies that are supposed to bounce back and regenerate after having suffered horrific accidents, starvation, torture, and mutilation, or, less obviously, after having been subjected to the slow but steady influence of cancerogenic food additives, radioactive isotopes, or air and water pollution.

Both singly and in groups, as consumers and corporations, states and energy companies, we continue to think and to act as if nature were safe and sound in the face of the irreparable devastation of biodiversity and the planet's fragile ecosystems: as if it (and we, ourselves) were a miraculously resilient phoenix. No wonder that *resilience* is one of the ideological keywords of the day! Nevertheless, what is being and has been annihilated for some time now can no longer regerminate. It cannot be rejuvenated from the ashes, receiving a new lease on life from death. The ashes of our age are not fecund; they are the sterile signs of the death of death, not to be confused with immortality. These ashes, or these signs, include soil degradation and depletion, spent nuclear and nonbiodegradable materials, desertification and the expansion of hypoxic areas in the oceans, the catastrophic melting of Arctic and Antarctic ice, the suffocating smog filling the atmosphere. Any future philosophy of nature must bear the realization of environmental finitude as a birthmark on the body of its thought.

In what follows, we delve into the rift between the already-surpassed limits to regeneration, on the one hand, and the economic and political, theological and secular ideologies that still make us believe in infinite regenerability, on the other. We will seek a philosophy of nature in the continuities and contradictions between traditions that, in disparate epochs and geographical regions, shape the phoenix complex and, with and through it, our tragic predicament in the twenty-first century.[16]

# 1 THE PHOENIX COMPLEX

The phoenix complex: we are all suffering from it, individually and collectively. It is in us, having become entrenched in minds and bodies over millennia, all the while we are trapped in it, our practices and infrastructures servicing its many units and component parts. Even more so, the fate of the livable world well beyond the human sphere is hanging in the balance on account of this cross-cultural and transhistorical, in equal measure psychological and political, religious and philosophical, complex. If it remains undiagnosed, it is because the phoenix complex comprises a mélange of practices, narratives, discourses, beliefs, and hopes that has not yet been formally called by its proper name. And, assuming that scholars duly recognize and classify it, this predicament will likely not be acknowledged as a problem at all, but as a blessing in the form of the infinitely self-regenerative capacity inherent in finite existence.

In the concluding pages of *Pyropolitics in the World Ablaze*, I brought up the phoenix complex with reference to "the politics of ashes." I described it as follows: "In the twenty-first century, the myth of the phoenix continues to bewitch us. We still think of ashes as fertilizers, nourishing new growth. After destructive flames have done their work, the sun's creative blaze will give a sign of resurrection to the plants it will call forth from the residues of past burning. Between the two fires, life and hope will resume. Vegetation will spring from the earth and strive skywards afresh."[1]

The invocation of the phoenix complex in *Pyropolitics* was a playful riff on Gaston Bachelard's elaboration of the Prometheus complex and the

Empedocles complex in *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*.[2] Bachelard sees the complexes he identifies as two sides of the same flaming coin. (Gold, by the way, has a privileged relation to the cosmic flame, to which Heraclitus analogizes it in Fragment 90.[3]) The active Prometheus complex is an expression of "the will to intellectuality," replete with "all those tendencies which impel us *to know* as much as our fathers, more than our fathers, as much as our teachers, more than our teachers."[4] The Empedocles complex is its passive counterpart, the condition, in which the "fascinated individual hears *the call of the funeral pyre*."[5] The phoenix complex is, conversely, on the hither side of knowing and fascination, while embracing both of these poles. Instead of choosing between the imperative "to seize fire" (Prometheus) or "to give oneself to fire" (Empedocles), the phoenix seizes fire by giving herself to it, surrendering her past self in order to gain a foothold, or a winghold, in the future.

Why does the self-sacrificial logic of the phoenix triumph, even and especially in an age that prides itself on its secularity? This question will shadow every hypothesis and every conclusion to come. One possibility is that humanity has not yet learned how to deal with and, above all, how to think otherwise about the finite transcendence of finitude that yields an image of infinity. Fecundity, regeneration, procreation, the beginning of life after an end of other lives: every facet of vitality, with its ruptured continuities tracing the outlines of survival, is sieved through the mesh of sacrifice and self-sacrifice. A religious framework exchanges finite existence for life everlasting; hence the leap of the pre-Socratic philosopher, Empedocles, into the active crater of Mount Etna in an attempt to become godlike. A secular outlook, for its part, trades finite existence for another finite existence, meant to extend life past the predecessor's expiration date. In both instances, fire is the preferred medium of these transactions.

The idea that humanity must burn the earth in order to renew it is as old as humanity itself. Slash-and-burn agriculture or shifting cultivation (known as *jhum* in India; *milpa*, *conuco*, or *roza* in Latin America; *shamba* or *chitemene* in Africa; *rai* in Sweden, etc.[6]) has been practiced since the Neolithic period as a way to fertilize the soil with the ashes of vegetal matter that has gone up in flames. Plants, fungi, microbes, insects, and other animal species are set ablaze in order to give room to the future, to stimulate the growth to come. On this view with thousands of ramifications, the world and life itself are constituted in and by fire, including, among other things, the practices of burning, or "fire-fallow cultivation," and whatever is cultivated on burnt grounds. The more and more frequent forest fires ravaging a warming planet with drier climates and monoculture tree plantations extend the phenomenon of slash-and-burn agriculture beyond what is humanly intended. No one believes that the green phoenix[7] rising from the ashes of flaming biomass would be eternal. But everyone thinks and acts as though the series of resurrections it heralds would never come to an end. Nothing could be further from the truth. Land degradation soon depletes the soil of nutrients necessary for plant growth.[8] It is not only that the present is sacrificed for the sake of the future; the longer-term future is placed on the altar of the shorter-term one.

The phoenix complex is predicated on hope—the hope that death will not have the final word, that life and its slow-burning fires will resume in the ashes of past existence, that the earth and plants will stay fecund. But it is a hope that drives on a spiral of hopelessness (it is not by chance that, at the bottom of Pandora's box, there was hope, among the other evils the box contained). With every twist, it becomes less and less objectively justifiable, and yet its strength is undiminished. The road to hell is paved with good intentions, and the road to environmental destruction is paved with hope, which is shaped like a phoenix. In various languages, there is a saying, "Hope dies last."[9] We should hear the truth of this expression in a literal key: hope will have buried all of us along with a liveable planet before it, itself, dies out. It would have been better (more honest, more constructive) to adopt a stance of absolute hopelessness, not of a paralyzing variety but of a translucent kind that works as an antidote against the surfeit of self-deception. Such hopelessness could finally prompt us to care for the world, irrecoverable in any future iteration of expected growth. It could prompt us to care, if our hands and minds were not tied by the millennial bonds of the phoenix complex. And if someone dares write a utopian treatise for the twenty-first century, then an appropriate title for it would be (*contra* Bloch) *The Nonprinciple of Hopelessness*.

But what, exactly, is the phoenix complex? That no univocal definition of the term is possible is indicated by the word *complex*, which *per definitionem* eludes definitions. A mix of affects, ideas, images, and associations, it retains an *effective identity*, bolstering the claim to a widespread, generalizable (if not universalizable), and rapidly self-propagating, reproducible, stable *and* highly mobile mode of thinking and associated practices.

Before Bachelard, Sigmund Freud introduced the Oedipus complex in his 1899 *The Interpretation of Dreams* and further developed it in, among other books, *Totem and Taboo*. Psychoanalytically explained, a complex is a network of cathexes, of the bound quanta of libidinal energy that form a recognizable pattern of dreaming, feeling, thinking, and relating to oneself, to others, and to the world. As Freud puts it, emphasizing the affective component, "In the case of a psychical complex which has come under the influence of the censorship imposed by resistance, the *affects* are the constituent which is least influenced and which alone can give us a pointer as to how we should fill in the missing thoughts."[10] And, still prior to Freud, Baruch Spinoza gave us hints as to the formation of a complex in the fifth part of his *Ethics*, where he postulated that "the greater the number of other images with which an image is associated, the more often it springs to life [*quo imago aliqua pluribus aliis iuncta est, eo saepius viget*]" (V.xiii).[11] The image of the phoenix boasts a wealth of such associations, which is why it not only frequently springs to life but also outlines the contours of that which we think of in connection with life and, by elision, with death.

Arrested, repressed, or pent-up affects form the grid of a complex in a manner similar to the conceptual grid of the schemata in Kant's philosophy. No longer identifiable in their incipient form, myths that used to express, obliquely, these repressed libidinal forces (the myths of Oedipus, of Electra, of Prometheus, or of the phoenix) dissolve into the fabric of culture and the psyche. As myths shed their narrative identity, their power and effectiveness do not diminish; on the contrary, their hold on us, as well as on countless generations before and after us, grows stronger.[12] The reproducibility of any complex, its resurfacing with each new generation, lends it the characteristics of a psychocultural phoenix. So much so that we might say that the phoenix complex is the complex of the complex, the apparatus (*dispositif*) by means of which every complex works, sets itself to work, or, even prior to that, is prepared for being put to work across temporal and spatial divides.

In contrast to the other protagonists of fire complexes, the phoenix is not a human, but a mythic bird. Its speciation and sexuation (which is—let us admit it already—highly unstable and multifarious, weaving together divine elements, animal and plant species, as well as male, female, and asexual specimens, while being inscribed in the phallic frame of masculine desire[13]) are the likely reasons for its relative obscurity, at least in Bachelard's oeuvre, compared to Prometheus and Empedocles. Whereas Prometheus stole fire from the gods and, with this theft, gave rise to technique, the phoenix, in an act of autocombustion, paves the way to life's regeneration. Thus, we are faced with technology, on the one hand, and nature, on the other. But fire is kindled in each of these "hands" or wings that are hard to keep apart, since life is not without its techniques (its mechanics and machinations), and technology is not without its reproductive capacities.

A figuration of nonhuman nature, the phoenix is a singular universal. The earliest cultural documents, where the creature is mentioned, starting with the Egyptian story of the bird *bennu* who is an incarnation of Atum, the ancient god of Heliopolis,[14] announce that the phoenix is so rare as to be one of a kind. Sixth-century Spanish theologian Isidore of Seville relates that "in the entire world, the phoenix is singular and unique [*sit in toto orbe singularis et unica*]." "The Arabs," he continues, "call someone singular a phoenix [*singularem 'phoenicem' vocant*]" (*Etymol.* 12.7.22). That is how singularity universalizes itself: it translates the proper name of a species into a common name, the word for singularity as such.

The phoenix is a species of one, as the Neoplatonist Porphyry argues in his commentary on Aristotle's *Categories*: "The bird species phoenix is not said to belong to several things differing in number, if indeed only one phoenix ever comes to be. If it is said of several things, they differ by succession [*diadochē*], not in number."[15] Isidore probably draws on third-century North African author Lactantius, who similarly highlights the uniqueness of the bird, inscribing her in the feminine: "*unica phoenix*" (*De ave phoenice*

31). Ambrose, the fourth-century Bishop of Milan, likewise considers the phoenix to be "one sole bird [*avem unicam*] not allowed to perish" (*Exaemeron* 5.23.79).

It is, furthermore, the singularity of the phoenix that permits her, him, or it to stand in the place of the universal, representing the whole of nature. The universalization of the singular proceeds along three paths.

The *first path* depends on the erasure of boundaries between different classes or types of beings in conventional systems of classification. Although the phoenix is a bird, the origins of its name are rather murky. Lactantius indicates that the territory of ancient Phoenicia (present-day Lebanon) shares its name with the phoenix and that, moreover, date palm (*Phoenix dactylifera*) is so called because the phoenix must die in a nest built on that tree.[16] "The aged bird," he writes, "directs her swift flight to Assyria, upon which Venus herself bestowed the name Phoenicia [*Phoenices nomen cui dedit ipsa Venus*]" and "chooses a palm tree with the top towering high in the air, a tree which is so named thanks to the bird [*sublimem vertice palmam, quae gratum Phoenix ex ave nomen habet*]" (*De ave phoenice* 65–70). Two centuries prior to Lactantius, Roman philosopher Pliny the Elder, on the contrary, deduces the name of the bird from the tree: "The bird phoenix, who receives his name from a palm tree, dies together with it and is reborn of itself [*phoenice ave, quae putatur ex huius palmae argumento nomen accepisse, intermori ac renasci ex se ipsa*]" (*Historia naturalis* 13.ix.42). What is striking in Pliny's description is that the tree must die together (*intermorior*) with the bird who bears its name; more effectively than this very name, it is a shared death (intermortality, as we may baptize it in Latinized English) that succeeds in blurring the boundaries between the representatives of vegetal and animal kingdoms. In Fragment 3 of his *De natura*, third-century Pope Dionysius of Alexandria goes so far as to claim, in the spirit of catachrestic conceptual translation we have already detected in Isidore of Seville, that the appellation *phoenix* is a fitting one for all "long-lived creatures, be they animals or plants [*ta de makrobiōtata zōa te kai phyta*]" (Eusebius, *Praep. Evang.* 14.25.4).

From this brief sampling of classical sources, it becomes apparent that, despite its singularity, the phoenix participates in heterogeneous regions of existence: plant and animal worlds, the sun and other astronomic entities such as the comets, the land of the creature's birth or death, dry high ground (*Benben*) and the watery abyss (*Nu*),[17] and the divine realm, from the Egyptian god Atum to Jesus of Nazareth, which explains the intense interest of early Christians in this symbol of resurrection. The indeterminacy of classical mentions of the phoenix is not a token of their failure to delineate its sense better, more clearly;[18] such indeterminacy is faithful to the central and overarching role prepared for the phoenix in the imagination of nature. The name also has a contribution to make here: whether common or proper, it is already a juncture of the singular and the universal, of a unique being so named or so designated and all other beings bearing the same appellation. As it names someone or something utterly singular, one of a kind, *phoenix* initially muddles the difference between proper and common names and goes on to level distinctions between types of beings, while preserving its own singularity. Out of this essential, irreducible confusion, it spreads out to all of nature and beyond—to supranatural being, the divine.

The *second path* to the universalization of the singular intersects with the first and activates the operations of synecdoche. In rhetoric, *synecdoche* is a figure of speech, through which a part represents the whole and, vice versa, the whole is condensed into one of its parts. Via a synecdoche, the phoenix does not gradually encroach on domains outside its own, but, as an exception to the general order of things, momentarily, in the bright flash of self-incineration, stands in for all organic being and even the inorganic elements. With some classical authors convinced that the phoenix is an actually existing creature, others persuaded that it is a figment of human imagination, and others still affirming its rarity and *probable* existence, the phoenix hovers between reality and fiction, something that grants it the privilege of a representative part, achieved, precisely, by its subtraction from the whole it represents. Throughout, the exceptionality of the phoenix enables synecdochic exchanges.

In a work by fourth-century Latin poet Claudian, the phoenix is a singular witness to the whole history of being: "You have seen everything that has ever been; you testify to the passing and turning of the ages [*vidisti quodcumque fuit; te saecula teste cuncta revolvuntur*]" (*Carmina minora* 27.104–105). In his *De carnis resurrectione*, second-century Christian author Tertullian develops a complex synecdochic economy, where the whole is gathered in a part and a part manifests the whole with regard to the phoenix: “If the whole world faintly figures resurrection [*Si parum universitas resurrectionem figurat*] and if, moreover, there is no other such sign as this . . . , then take a most complete and unassailable symbol of our hope . . . I refer to the bird, which is peculiar to the East and famous for its singularity [*de singularitate famosum*], marvelous for its posthumous life, renewed from voluntary death” (13.1–6). While all of creation is a poorly perceived sign of resurrection, the phoenix is a glaring sign, a spectacular part that, jutting out from the rest, represents the whole.[19]

In the synecdoche of the phoenix and nature, the world or the universe, which Tertullian designates with the Latin *universitas*, is, like the mythic bird, one of a kind. And, also like the phoenix, it is periodically reborn from the ashes that remain after its incineration. The difference between the organic and the inorganic domains is flattened by fire: the fire of life itself, shooting off myriads of sparks that are the living, who engender similar new sparks; the cosmic fire of the sun and of other celestial bodies that enlivens and brings everything to appearance; and the inner fire of the earth, taking care of the gestation of metals in their ores and of the volcanic formation of mountain ranges. Heraclitan fire is everything that exists as well as the medium of exchange of the singular for the universal and of the universal for the singular: of death for a new life. The faint and inherently ambivalent figuration of the world—the world as a figure at once for itself and for something other than itself, namely for itself *othered*, refreshed, reborn—comes into visibility in the synecdochic light cast by the flames that consume the aged body of the phoenix.

Another dimension of the phoenix–nature synecdoche is epistemological, rather than *stricto sensu* ontological. In his study *De natura animalium*, the second-century Roman author Claudius Aelianus praises the phoenix’s exceptional wisdom, astute mathematical skill and geographical knowledge. “The phoenix,” writes Aelianus, “knows how to count five hundred years without the aid of arithmetic, since it is the disciple of all-wise nature [*mathētai phuseōs tēs sophōtatēs ontes*], so that it has no need of fingers or anything else to aid it in the understanding of numbers” (6.58). The bird also knows where Egypt is situated and uses this knowledge to transport its predecessor's remains for burial in Heliopolis. While, as Aelianus emphasizes, humans (priests and scientists alike) bicker about the appropriate methods for counting years and while prized human wisdom deals with such things as "the affairs of the market, armaments, and other schemes of human mutual undoing [*ta agoraia kai ta enoplia kai tas allas tōn antrhōpōn eis allēlous te kai kat allēlōn epiboulas epoumen sopha*]" (6.58), the phoenix is imbued with the knowledge of nature as the embodiment of nature's own self-knowledge. The closest "disciple" of nature, the phoenix is a part of the whole, concentrating in itself the self-relation of that whole.

The epistemological facets of the phoenix–nature synecdoche contribute to the dismantling of the distinction between reality and fiction. There is no need to be "astonished" with the inclusion of the phoenix in serious naturalistic and historiographic works by the likes of Pliny the Elder, Tacitus, or Gaius Julius Solinus.[20] As a part of the whole it expresses, the phoenix both exists and doesn't exist in actuality, a symbolic supplement of the totality, which does not come into being as the totality that it is before this event of supplementation. If the phoenix's presence among crocodiles and eagles and oysters is unusual, it is not so due to the creature's purely invented, fantastic character but due to the phoenix's special status vis-à-vis nature, compared to other creatures. It is a part that stands apart from the rest and, thanks to this apartness, is able to reflect the whole.

The *third path* to universalizing the singular traverses the terrain of reproducibility, repeatability, and replaceability. Lactantius conveys many of the promises and ambiguities latent in the self-reproduction of the phoenix, in her replacement by herself as other to herself, female and male: "She is her own offspring, her father and her heir [*Ipsa sibi proles, suus est pater et suus haeres*]. . . . The same indeed, but not the same; the very one, yet not the one [*Ipsa quidem, sed non eadem, quia et ipsa, nec ipsa est*]" (*De ave phoenice* 165–170). With these words, Lactantius echoes Tertullian, who notes that, reborn, the phoenix is "once more where just now there was none; once more himself, but just now out of existence; another, yet the same [*iterum phoenix ubi nemo iam, iterum ipse qui non iam, alius idem*]" (*De carnis resurrectione* 13.8–9).

The confluence of sameness and otherness in a flaming reincarnation is the crux of the phoenix complex as far as its environmental and philosophical dimensions are concerned. The body and the life of the phoenix are, despite their uniqueness and inimitability, replaceable—by no one but the phoenix her-, him-, or itself. If there is neither time nor a good reason to mourn the loss of a weary life ebbing away from the aging bird, that is because self-replacement in the other, who is and is not the old self, is assured. The gap between different iterations of the same existence ("once more where just now there was none") is a minor interval illuminated, scorched, and immediately hidden, swept under the rug of being by the powers of fire. Generations upon generations of living (and dying) creatures are understood on the basis of this same otherness: the next generation is both next and not next; this one is and is not the preceding one. "Once more" existence recomposes itself, replacing itself by itself as other. That is what comes next, if it indeed comes.

Given the identification of the phoenix with the whole of existence (in particular, with the whole of nature), its recovery from the clutches of death no longer belongs squarely to the realm of the fantastic; this event comes to describe, instead, our millennia-old relation to and representation of nature's reproduction or self-reproduction. In the best of scenarios, when its loss is not altogether ignored, biological life is mournable only when it is not replaced, or, rather, not replaceable, by itself as other to itself. The psychological weight of mass extinction balances on (or falls with) the irreplaceability of the lost species. Yet, even here, mourned irreplaceability is diluted and reintegrated into the logic of the phoenix complex via suggestions to create genetic databanks (in the case of plants, seed archives), the DNA archives of endangered species that can be resurrected from the stored blueprint of their basic makeup at will. The classification of biofuels—for instance, ethanol, distilled from sugar cane, or biodiesel, derived from soybean oil—as renewable sources of energy alongside solar, hydro, and other elemental energy alternatives is the phoenix complex at its purest, seeing that the reproducibility (*renewability*) of the burnt elevates this mode of energy production to an ideal environmental practice.[21]

From Plato to twentieth-century French Jewish author Emmanuel Levinas, philosophers, too, have trodden the third path toward the universalization of the singular so frequently that it has, by now, become a metaphysical highway of sorts.[22] According to the philosophical recipe whether directly or indirectly inspired by the tale of the phoenix, the unique can be replaced by itself as other to itself by means of either or both biological and cultural reproductions. Seeking the infinity that dwells in finitude, as the word *infinite* already intimates, philosophers tease out that in a living being which temporally, conceptually, physically, or psychically exceeds this very being, the excess granting it the quality of aliveness in the first place. From the speech of Diotima, which Socrates reports in Plato's *Symposium* (208a-b), to Levinas's notion of fecundity and ethical substitution, the "mechanics" of overcoming finitude and mortality have been, for all intents and purposes, unchanged. In keeping with the phoenix's spectacular resurrection and the cunning of reason it encapsulates, everything finite keeps itself by letting go of itself, by losing its identity and recovering what has been lost in a new version of the same existence, "another, yet the same."

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At this point, I am obliged to interrupt the relatively smooth expository flow of the phoenix complex so as to consider an issue that, apparently secondary, needs to be addressed from very early on, because it will be the touchstone of subsequent discussions. The issue is that of sexual difference.[23] Lactantius is one of a handful of classical authors who writes about the phoenix in the feminine. Earlier still, first-century CE Roman geographer Pomponius Mela observes that the phoenix is "always unique," *semper unica* (the adjective in the feminine), and that she "is not conceived by copulation nor born through parturition [*non enim coitu concipitur partuve generatur*]" (*De chorographia* 3.72). This qualification plainly presages the immaculate conception of Jesus, but it also raises the question: Why should the bird be male or female if it does not reproduce by sexual means? How does the gendered adjective in the Latin assertion of the phoenix's absolute uniqueness both contradict and intensify that very assertion?

The thread of sexual difference is tied in a knot with those of mortality and individuation. The asexual reproduction of organisms by cell division renders them virtually immortal and less individuated than those that employ sexual reproduction; the awareness of an impending death bestows on us the most intense, painful individuality and, drawing attention to the body and its finitude, puts us face-to-face with the reality of sexual difference; individuality as a dialectical achievement requires a negation of a simple identity, the negation that mimics the nullifying effects of death and confronts us with another sex (or with other sexes). In the story of the phoenix, the three threads in this conceptual knot are both present and absent, affirmed and denied, acknowledged and repudiated: the phoenix is both mortal and immortal, unique to the point of being a *she* and (asexually) reproducible, the same and the other. The technical psychoanalytic word for the simultaneous acknowledgment and repudiation of something is *disavowal*.

By dint of disavowal, then, the phoenix complex is put to work, at the same time affirming and denying death, sexual difference, and individuality. It does so on the largest scale imaginable, since the phoenix is a synecdoche for nature. In our deeply ingrained attitudes toward the worlds of plants, animals, and bacteria, and to the milieus of the earth, the atmosphere, and the oceans, we disavow the finitude, individual uniqueness, and sexual differences of actors in the ecological drama. Lulled by the cadences of natural cycles, long since fatefully disrupted, extended, or contracted, thanks to the artefacts and by-products of human industry—the cycles that include those of birth and death—we deem existence invariably reproducible either in itself or in the other. Everything happens as though death did not have the final word at the levels of the genes, the ecosystems, and the elements that are also supposed to "regenerate." It is this *as though*, a fiction we keep telling ourselves without the least awareness of reproducing *it* at the expense of the world, that provides the essential ingredient for the disavowal that sets the phoenix complex to work.

Since Greek antiquity, philosophers have singled out two types of reproduction: in oneself and in the other. Hegel only gave these types and their interrelation the crispest expression in his *Philosophy of Nature*. The phoenix, for his part, reproduces himself in himself as in the other and in the other as in himself, not mediating but compressing the extremes of sameness and otherness, as well as life and death, into each another. Refracted through the Hegelian prism, such reproduction is colored in distinctly vegetal hues.

According to Hegel, in the world of plants, "The process of formation and of reproduction of the *singular* individual in this way coincides with the process of the genus and is a perennial production of new individuals."[24] The individual and the genus are immediately one, as they are when it comes to the phoenix. The life of plants is their constant rebirth, their survival of themselves as others and of others as themselves. Following from this is an equally constant reinvention of nature, of *phusis* or *natura* as the overall movement of burgeoning-birthing. A perennial renaturing of nature, perhaps. Magnified and reprojected onto biological existence in general, vegetal "perennial production" yields a model for the resurrection of the biosphere from the ashes, to which it has been reduced.[25] The phoenix is always green.

Not by accident, the phoenix is reinstated in her vegetal incarnation. The synecdoche plant–nature, upon which I have commented elsewhere,[26] mirrors the synecdoche phoenix–nature. And there is more: the temporary erasure of individuality and sexual difference allows for the elimination of the third thread that invariably accompanies them, namely mortality. But the dismissal of sexual difference is bound to fail. Has this difference not initially arisen in the kingdom of plants that have both sexual and asexual methods of reproduction at their disposal? Doesn't the indeterminacy of vegetal sexuation, also evident in the figure of the phoenix, apply not only to the question *Which sex is it?* but also, and above all, to the question *Does it have a sex at all?*

The indeterminacy of sexual difference in plants and the phoenix alike points toward a similar equivocation with respect to their individuation and finitude. In sexual reproduction, some of the main protagonists are seeds or the seed, straddling the divide between plant and animal classes of being. (See the first path toward the universalization of the singular.) Soon after noting that the phoenix is utterly unique, Ambrose goes on to say that it "reproduces itself from its own seed [*resurgentem eam sui semine*]" (*Exaemeron* 5.23.79). The Latin *sēmen* can mean plant seeds as much as semen. In other versions of the myth, the rebirth of the phoenix is made possible by the fire of the sun that symbolizes the male side of the sexual relation. Twelfth-century Byzantine poet Johannes Tzetzes writes that the phoenix "builds its nest of delightful smell on trees / And when it dies, is born again as a worm from that tree / And then is nourished by the heat of the sun [*thalpomenos hēliō*] and turns into a phoenix once again" (*Chiliad* 5.390–393).[27] Being born again from the tree that has served as its last habitat, the phoenix is also nourished in the manner of plants by solar energy that substitutes the flames, in which the bird is reborn in keeping with the widely known storyline. With its belonging to the plant or animal kingdom rendered more indeterminate than ever before, the individuation of the phoenix is also unfixed.

The ambiguity that envelops the phoenix's finitude complements the indeterminacy of its sexuation and individuation. While some depict the rebirth of the new phoenix from the ashes of the old, other authors, such as Tzetzes (but also Pliny the Elder and first-century CE Roman historian Tacitus), stress her resurrection through the spontaneous generation of a single worm or of maggots from her dead flesh. (The relative oblivion, to which the latter narratives have been subjected, is yet another symptom of the operations of the phoenix complex.) Be this as it may, a place of dwelling, a tomb, and a womb for renewed existence converge on the nest, which the ageing bird builds for herself at the end of her long life. Second-century CE Greek poet Dionysius Periegetes, notes that the phoenix "makes itself a pyre for death or a nest for life [*puran tina tēs teleutēs hē kalian suntithēsi tēs zōēs*]" (*De aucupio* 1.32). Sixth-century Gallo-Roman historian Gregory of Tours writes that the phoenix "builds for itself its nest or grave [*construit sibi seu nidum sive sepulchrum*]" (*De curso stellarum ratio* 12).

Confusion about the receptacle for life or for death further escalates when Tacitus treats it as an actual womb, from which the young phoenix will emerge. In this rendition of the myth, the phoenix "builds a nest in his own land and then pours forth his genital force into the nest, from which the fetus arises [*suis in terris struere nidum eique vim genitalem adfundere, ex qua fetum oriri*]" (*Annals* 6.28). The vital fluid (*vis genitalis*, i.e., the semen) reveals that the phoenix is male, but, more interestingly, Tacitus is evoking a situation, in which the seed of an animal impregnates a feminized vegetal structure that is the nest. With the addition of the sun, which Tzetzes endows with a fiery and phallic function, or of the lightning that strikes the old phoenix with its "life-giving dart" in Claudian (*Carmina minora* 27.57–60), impersonal environmental forces and objects participate in the bird's reproduction on the suspended edge of life and death.

The crux of the matter is that disparate accounts of the phoenix's sexuation, life, death, and individual attributes do not (only) contingently clash with one another owing to the heterogeneous traditions and historical strata they belong to, from the Egyptian *bennu* and the earliest extant Coptic text on the phoenix to classical and late antiquities. Rather, the inconsistency of these accounts is an effect of the equivocal triple knot, tied in the figure of the mythic bird, who is both mortal and immortal; individuated to the point of absolute uniqueness and utterly generic; male, female, and sexless. By means of the synecdoche, in which the phoenix relates to all existence as a part that condenses the whole, the equivocations (three in one and one in three) reflect on *us*—on our relation to the outside world and to ourselves. Our hitherto undiagnosed phoenix complex does not permit us to be at a safe distance from the plants, the earth, and the atmosphere consumed by the flames. In them and as them, we, too, are burning, alongside the past and the future that are not ours. We, too, are the phoenix.

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Already in Heraclitus, fire is the element of transformation. *Puros tropai*, the turns or turnings of fire, mentioned in Fragment 31, are the revolutions of becoming, through which every element is eventually sifted. Fire's turns or turnings, in their turn, should make sense in the light of Fragment 30, which speaks of "fire everlasting, kindling in measures and going out in measures [*pur aeizōon, aptomenon metra kai aposbennumenon metra*]."[28] The phoenix is, on this view, a spark of cosmic fire, which, on an exceptional basis, makes fire's turnings in general phenomenally accessible and which, in the spectacular display of its rebirth, hypostatizes the passage from going out in measures to kindling in measures.[29] The measured extinguishing and reigniting of her life testify to the ever-living (*aeizōon*) nature of the fire she seizes by delivering herself to it: the fire of vitality, infinite across its finite instantiations, infinitely self-regenerating past the term of each living being and its milieu. And, because the microcosm and the macrocosm are the mirror images of one another, the periodic lighting up and dimming down of the world's ensouled body would be transposed onto our own bodies and lives, their fires not to be snuffed out once and for all.

The transformation of the phoenix in fire, or with the help of the fire released by the sun or by lightning, is the passage from a threadbare life through death to a fresh life. His death is, far from the end, a strange detour from life to life, a bright flash, after which the body of the bird is reconstituted not in the yonder of heaven, but here below. It is for this reason that the early Christians, of the likes of Tertullian, saw in the phoenix the answer to the problem of resurrection *in the flesh*.

Claudian expresses the notion of a fiery death as a break and a continuation in the chain of lives with beautiful discursive economy: "The adjoining twinned lives are separated in the exact middle by a burning fire [*geminae confinia vitae exiguo medius discrimine separat ignis*]" (*Carmina minora* 27.70–71). In a breathtaking fashion, he articulates life and death as the varying modalities and intensities of the same fiery life (just as day and night are articulated in the same unity of *one day*, a twenty-four-hour cycle). A brief flaming interval is wedged between the past and the future existences of the phoenix, distinguished from one another by virtue of this wedge. The effacement of death happens, tellingly, before the instant of resurrection, in the very moment of death, construed in terms of an elemental figuration of life in and as fire. Death is rid of its sting to the extent that it is deprived not of its finality but of its being-death: fire, which discriminates between lives, is itself a living, moving, growing, decaying, propagating animal or plant, Heraclitan *pur aeizōon*. The break between two lives is not a break; it is a sublime continuation of life in a different, cosmic or elemental, register, where *puros tropai*, the turnings of fire, turn death inside out into life.

Here is how Lactantius narrates the turnings of fire in the phoenix's death-birth: "Meanwhile her body, by birth-giving death destroyed [*interea corpus genitali morte peremptum*], grows warm, and its heat itself births a flame, and from the ethereal light from afar it conceives fire" (*De ave phoenice* 95–98). A "birth-giving death" is another way of saying the "phoenix complex." This gnostic-sounding formulation implies both forgetting death and reveling in it, living under the illusion of one's immortality and running or flying toward death as toward a gateway to the future. Transfixed by the phoenix, we forget death, because it is nowhere to be found and because it happens all around us, to others, whether human or not. At the same time, and equally mesmerized by the phoenix, we revel in death. When it is contemplated at all, assuaging the fear it awakens in us, it takes the shape of another life, suffused with "ethereal light" and "heat," *calor*, or of a birth into another life, perhaps a better one: refreshed, reinvigorated, more independent inasmuch as self-given.

The blurring of boundaries between distinct kinds of beings and the apparatus of synecdoche that, each in its own way, universalizes the singularity of the phoenix signal that the phoenix's life and death (or nondeath) are life and death *as such*. When contemporary science focuses on genes instead of their carriers, it is still wandering in phoenix's tracks or following her flight paths. Triumph over death at the level of individual bodies translates into an analogous triumph at the level of ecosystems. Although nuclear flames block the rebirth of whatever they touch, there are plenty of ideologically laden attempts nowadays to present Chernobyl as a magnificent phoenix reborn from the nuclear ashes. Isn't plant and animal life making its comeback in the "exclusion zone" abandoned by humans in the aftermath of the disaster? There is, however, very little awareness of the fact that decomposition rates in the most contaminated areas of Chernobyl are exceptionally low, given the near absence of microorganisms and soil invertebrates who carry out this process.[30] With the accumulation of vegetal matter on the forest floor, devastating fires become widespread, leading to new smaller-scale fallouts due to the resuspension of nuclear particles in the air.[31] The death of death, which the phoenix complex celebrates, is manifest in nuclear disasters and environmental devastation. That is why its philosophical investigation is irreducible to a mental exercise, bearing instead on some of the most urgent practical problems and impasses of our times.

Nevertheless, mixing the rejection and the affirmation of rotting, the phoenix complex already contains the resources necessary for working through it, the resources that await those determined to overcome cultural amnesia, itself symptomatic of heavy repression. The dominant variant of the myth involves, no doubt, a fiery death and a nearly immediate resurrection.

This variant itself is not uniform; it accommodates a plethora of reports, ranging from the phoenix entrusting herself to a blaze she did not spark to the phoenix generating fire from his own body or from his body's interactions with wood.

In its earliest (Alexandrian) rendition from the second century CE, *Physiologus* states that the phoenix "sets itself ablaze" or "kindles the fire by itself" (*kai auto to pur anaptei*) (7). Fourth-century Bishop of Salamis Epiphanius of Cyprus specifies in *Ancoratus* how, "with its wings, having beaten its own breast many times, bringing forth fire from its body [*pur hapo tou sōmatos autou propheromenos*], it sets afire the underlying wood" (84.4). Other authors, such as Claudian or Ambrose, postulate an external source of fire, be it the sun or lightning, while later texts depict the kindling of fire by an environmental force in combination with the rapid beating of the phoenix's wings.[32]

Perhaps the most interesting among these is the poetic version presented by sixth-century Christian grammarian Joannes de Gaza in his *Discriptio tabulae mundi*: "clapping its wings [*kinumenōn pterugōn*]," the phoenix who places itself opposite the sun, endeavors "to seize the blaze [*phlogos harpazein*]" of the sunray and to immolate itself of its own accord (2.215–218). A Promethean leitmotif runs through this account of rebellion, in which nature rises up against nature, unleashing a *contranatura* force within *natura*: the phoenix positioned over and against the sun, stealing the solar ray, not clinging to its waning biological vitality, and earning the right to be by renouncing its actual being.[33] But, whereas the theft of fire by Prometheus sets the scene for the technology of artifacts, producing and reproducing the prosthetic supports for a vulnerable and naked existence in this life, the capture of a sunray by the phoenix lifts the curtain on the technology of salvation, producing and reproducing life beyond death.[34] If the basic "Promethean structure" is being-for-death,[35] that is, of adjusting better to the harshness of life with the horizon of absolute finitude, the structure of the phoenix is being-for-deathlessness, or surpassing this horizon and de-absolutizing finitude.

Whatever the source of fire, in an act of self-immolation, the phoenix as synecdoche burns all of nature with the intention of reinvigorating life itself. According to the rules of the game dictated by the phoenix complex, by burning the world, we burn ourselves (unless it is the world that burns itself through us), albeit unintentionally so. A synecdoche is, after all, reversible. This act is what in theology is designated with the Hebrew word *'olah* or the Greek *holokaustos* (the whole burned), an offering, in which the sacrificial victim is entirely consumed by fire. The combustion of fossils is their rebirth, albeit without the singularity of the phoenix, seeing that they are extracted and incinerated en masse, as mass. The life–death relation is also inverted here: between the millions of years it takes to liquify, gasify, or petrify vegetal and animal remains and the eternity of *mass* extinction, there is only a flash of combustion, enlivening our technologies. The life, or the afterlife, of the fossil phoenix is but a punctuation mark between one death and another.[36]

Lurking in those phoenix narratives that emphasize the bird's immolation is the tacit desire to skirt decay. This desire is rooted in two affects, namely impatience and disgust, that are themselves correlated with time and matter. Jointly, they rebuff finitude. Claudian's phoenix realizes that he must prepare his own funeral pyre when his "bright eye grows dim [*decrescit lumen*] and the pupil becomes palsied by the frost of years" and when "his wings, wont to cleave the clouds of heaven, can scarce be raised from the earth" (*Carmina minora* 27.36–40). The decrease of the inner flame of the eye (*decrescit lumen*) calls for reanimation with external fire, the medium of the bird's rebirth. Between decline and renewed vigor, the impatience of the phoenix is double. On the one hand, he is unwilling to accept senescence and the gradual approach of death, which, while still impending, robs the body of its innate powers and capacities. On the other hand, he rejects the slowness of decomposition, impatient with what happens *after* death. Just as the bird's life in its late stages is fast forwarded to its final moment, so a transformation into a new version of its existence that follows is sped up.

The impatience of the phoenix is also ours within the complex that bears her name. With the global growth of an elderly population,[37] already at its highest level ever, geriatric care and cosmetic industries are flourishing in response to the demand to minimize and delay the onset of aging and its visible signs. A more radical demand that often goes under the name of transhumanism is to do away with aging altogether, to discover by scientific means the fountain of eternal youth, a perennial capacity for self-renewal, keeping close to the event of birth, circling back to it over and over again, and being reborn—perhaps, renatured even, reinitiated into the order of life. Stem cell therapy research, with its associated promises and risks, is tending in this direction. What our fantasies of life without senescence and decrepitude ignore is that, to skip aging, to elude death, one needs to die all the faster and more spectacularly, literally to burn oneself up. Some of the lethal side effects of experimental treatments, including stem cell therapy, are subtle reminders of this paradoxical logic.

Impatience with mortality and with the physical changes an aging being experiences goes hand in hand with the desire for unlimited energy. (Entropy is, after all, the energy equivalent of death and dying in a system.) Combustion has a central place in the energy paradigm that, breaking matter down, effects a fast release of heat and light, the fiery element of the phoenix. Energy extraction wrests potentiality from an actual body that contains it, while destroying this body, reducing it, precisely, to a mere discardable container. Similarly, the sublime mechanics of phoenix's reproduction draw the infinite from finite corporeality, abandoned as something superfluous at best and as an obstacle on the path to renewal at worst. Matter and its forms are treated as no more than shells, hiding the valuable kernel of potentiality or infinity. Fire, into which the phoenix, fossils or biodiesel, our entire planet, and we ourselves are thrown, institutes another regime of phenomenality: an unsustainable vision of the future that would repeat, indefinitely, the present.

In addition to impatience with finite time, permeating the phoenix complex is disgust with rotting, with the finitude and materiality of the flesh. At the most immediate, sensory level, the sight and smell of decomposition are obviated in the flaming resurrection of the phoenix. Virtually all classical authors, from Herodotus and Ovid to Clement of Rome, Lactantius, and Ambrose, bring up olfactory issues related to death. The phoenix builds its last nest with aromatic herbs and spices—myrrh and cinnamon, above all. Animal flesh burning with fragrant vegetal materials neutralizes the sensory evidence of death.

Fifth-century Christian poet Dracontius explains that the phoenix ignites the flames of its funeral pyre by beating against the aromatic wood of the nest with its wings: "*et verberat alas / ut flammas adsciscat avis (sic nascitur ignis) / ante alitem ambrosios iam consumpturus odore*" (*Romulea* 10.107–109). The bird gives birth not only to its future self but also to the medium of its rebirth, taking over the signature activity of nature itself. Fire is born from the phoenix (*sic nascitur ignis*) who is consumed by the flames so as to be reborn: the self-annihilating and self-generating circle of its action is closed without a glitch, without as little as a hint of decay, which is the whiff of death.

The fire raging in scented wood and aromatic herbs muffles the smell of decomposition, but that is not the only reason for choosing it as the element of resurrection. As the Hebrew term *ʿolah*, which I have already mentioned, indicates, flames allow a burnt offering to be lifted up in smoke, to be nearly disencumbered of the heaviness of matter and handed over to the heavens. In a Hegelian vein, we might say that fire is a material element which borders on ideality, opposing and negating, as it does, the materials it is burning in, and yet dependent on these very materials.[38] Wafting from aromatic herbs heated by the sun, fragrant smells move along a similar trajectory, foreshadowing (less violently, perhaps) the ascension of the body and of the spirit.[39] When matter is raised in and as smoke, it is almost dematerialized, and whatever is left of it is reduced to ash, which is next to nothing. The desiccated, minimal remnants of corporeal materiality dispense with the stage of decay and the revulsion that the sensory facets of decomposition tend to provoke.

In the self-generation of the phoenix who will be different from, but also the same as, her predecessor, we may spot a peculiar relation to the notion of identity and to the third path of universalizing the singular. Besides being a visceral reaction to the outcomes of decay, disgust is an affective response to the changing shape of the corpse, slowly tending toward amorphousness. There are two possible solutions to this inexorable alteration: fixing a material form in its present mold or, conversely, speeding up change. Somewhat counterintuitive, the second strategy is the one the phoenix embraces. The idea is to accelerate change so much that it will become barely perceptible, the new incarnation almost instantaneously supplanting the old. Although in the course of a gradual alteration changes are imperceptible as well, a comparison of freeze-frame shots taken at different stages of the process allows us to register them. The fiery metamorphosis of the phoenix, where everything and nothing is altered, does not afford the spectators this opportunity; in the version that has magnetized cultural imagination, little more than a bright flash, as blinding as it is revelatory, separates the old from the new.

If the phoenix is a synecdoche of nature, then the impatience and disgust it betrays are impatience with the slow pace of periodic decay-and-renewal cycles and disgust with the material transformations of the body and the outside world. The phoenix's corpse is the corpse of nature itself; its aging, conflagration, and ashes—the aging, conflagration, and ashes of nature. Furthermore, if the phoenix as the condensation of the whole of nature in a single animal-vegetal-elemental figure is both the same and not the same after its fiery revival, then there is no such thing as nature—only nature*s*, continually dying and being swiftly reborn.

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Supposing that, as I have already argued, the resources for overcoming the phoenix complex lie hidden in the complex itself, it is necessary to pay close attention to the alternative versions of the story that have been largely forgotten, or that, at least, do not immediately come to mind at the mention of this mythical character. The versions I am referring to welcome decay as a source of spontaneous generation or regeneration of life from the dead body of the phoenix. Here, the flesh itself, even when it is already rotting, is seen as a marvelous brooder of life.

In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the old phoenix arranges his aromatic nest, in which he lies down and puts an end to himself: "*se super inponit finitque in odoribus aevum*" (15.400). Then, "a small phoenix is reborn from the body of the father [*corpore de patrio parvum phoenica renasci*]" and, when he is strong enough, carries "his cradle, which is also his father's grave [*pius cunasque suas patriumque sepulcrum*]" to the city of Hyperion to be offered at the altar of the city's temple (15.402–407). The coincidence of one phoenix's grave and another's cradle is poignant in light of the reproductive potential of the dead: it is from the corpse of his predecessor that the small phoenix emanates. The city of Hyperion, to which the young phoenix takes his cradle-grave, is the city of the sun, the ancient Heliopolis (*helios huperion* [the sun up above], is a citation from Homer's *Odyssey* [12.346]) featured in the original exposition by Herodotus. The inference to be made is that the remains of the deceased bird along with the nest are burned on the altar of the sun god already after the offspring is strong enough to make an offering on behalf of the dead ancestor.

Ovid does not elucidate how the rebirth of the phoenix happens, though it definitely does not entail a flaming transformation, which is postponed until the time when the offspring is already mature. Ambrose gives a more detailed account: "When the phoenix realizes that he is coming to the end of his life, he builds himself a casket of incense, myrrh, and other aromatic plants, into which he enters and dies when his time comes [*impleto vitae suae tempore*]. From the moisture proceeding from his flesh, a worm emerges [*De cuius humore carnis vermis exsurgit*]. In the course of time [*Ac processu statuti temporis*], he puts on 'the oarage of his wings' until the bird is restored to his primitive form and appearance" (*Exaemeron* 5.23.79).

I will bring three details of Ambrose's description into sharper relief. First, the passage of time is welcomed, reiterated twice: in relation to the moment of death when "his life's time is completed" (*impleto vitae suae tempore*), and in relation to the metamorphosis of the worm into the phoenix "in due time," or "in the course of time," (*ac processu statuti temporis*). Second, rather than fire, it is the "moisture of his flesh," (*humore carnis*) that generates the worm; instead of the phallic fiery element, it is a watery substance that permits the phoenix to be reborn. There is, consequently, neither impatience nor disgust in Ambrose's account. Third, the generativity of the corpse is in line with what, well into in the Medieval period, was known as *generatio aequivoca* (spontaneous generation). The emergence of maggots or flies from rotting meat is a paradigmatic example of the phenomenon,[40] identified at least since the times of Aristotle and scientifically disproven by Italian naturalist and physician Francesco Redi as late as 1668.[41] By means of *generatio aequivoca*, the reproductive potential of the dead comes to the fore. The miraculous origination of life from a corpse obeys the logic of the phoenix in a different way, no longer allergic to the process of decomposition.

Pomponius Mela sexualizes the putrefaction fluid of the dead phoenix, implicitly equating it with the seminal liquid, with which the bird will inseminate himself in his afterlife. “The phoenix,” he writes, “broods on a funeral pile heaped up with different scented plants and decomposes. Next, after congealing from the moisture of its putrefying limbs, the bird conceives herself and is born from herself [*dein putrescentium membrorum tabe concrescens ipsa se concipit atque ex se rursus renascitur*]” (*De chorographia* 3.72–73). A dead body becomes the source and the incubator of new life. By virtue of the phoenix’s inscription in the feminine, as well as the mention of brooding, and the bird’s postmortem self-insemination and self-conception, sexualization accomplished from the side of death acquires a richly hermaphroditic feel.

Mela’s take is rather surprising when examined against Aristotle’s theory of spontaneous generation. For the Greek philosopher, sexual difference accounts for the production of an offspring of the same kind (*homogenē*), whereas resorting to spontaneous generation means that the “offspring are not identical with their parents.” Aristotle continues in *De generatione animalium*, “Such are the creatures which come into being not as a result of the copulation of living animals, but out of putrescent soil and out of residues” (715a). In principle, as a result of reliance on spontaneous generation, the progeny of the phoenix might not be identical to the predecessor, since this mode of procreation is much more indeterminate and open-ended than sexual reproduction (maggots and flies are born of rotting horse meat, whereas only horses are born of living horses). Nevertheless, Mela mixes the two methods—the sexual and the spontaneous—by sexualizing the phoenix’s putrefaction fluid, which plays a lead role in her self-conception. With this, cross-generational identity, threatened by spontaneous reproduction, is secured, albeit at the price of the indeterminate future of fecund remains.[42]

The liquid origins of the phoenix are also conspicuous in a reference by fifth-century CE Egyptian grammarian, Horapollo. In Horapollo’s encyclopedic work *Hieroglyphica*, the entry for “How Great Cyclical Renovation Happens,” states, “When the phoenix is about to die, he casts himself vehemently upon the ground, and is wounded by the blow, and from the ichor, which flows from the wound, another phoenix is produced [*ex sanie vero (vulneris) defluente, alius gignitur*]” (2.lvii). The self-inflicted wound is a variation on the theme of self-sacrifice, without, however, any recourse to fire. The offspring then arises from the wounded, yet still living, body of the father, with whom he is a contemporary for a short while. The two travel to Heliopolis, where the older phoenix dies at sunrise, which is itself the birth of a new day.[43] The "great cyclical renovation" transpires when the end meets a new beginning, the one flowing into the other. Curiously, in Horapollo's implicit understanding, reproductive capacity (and, perhaps, sexuality *in toto*, though, as described, the process does not involve mating) is a self-inflicted wound, enabling the renewal of the genus at the expense of individual specimens, who fulfill their "end" in this act.

Pliny the Elder points to the bones and marrow of the phoenix's corpse as the place, whence life resprouts: "From its bones and marrow is born initially a little worm, before becoming a chick [*Ex ossibus deinde et medullis eius nasci primo ceu vermiculum, inde fieri pullum*]" (*Historia naturalis* 10.ii.4). Decomposition must be already advanced for the bones and their marrow to be laid bare and to give rise to a small worm. Further, the emergence of the young phoenix is quasi-vegetal: she is born from a hard kernel (like that of a fruit) that, in life, is wrapped in soft fleshy tissues. Seldom is the skeletal system seen as essential to anything but the support of a living body or as the remnant of a dead one verging on the inorganic. For Pliny, however, it is the innermost chamber of corporeality, holding the seeds of rejuvenated life.

The subterranean, chthonic, and "humid"[44] current of the phoenix narrative is the repressed underside of the bird's glorious resurrection. This other phoenix does not eschew the slowness of time's passage nor does it exhibit disgust toward a material transformation. As Dutch scholar of world religions Roel van den Broek reminds us, several classical authors were abreast of the existence of the two traditions (of fiery self-renewal and of emanation from a decaying body) and even tried to integrate mutually exclusive scripts in their texts.[45] Notable in this regard are Lactantius, Epiphanius of Cyprus, and the unknown author of the third-century Christian treatise *Didascalia apostolorum*. More than a mere historical curiosity or a contingent finding of intellectual archaeology interested in the myth of the phoenix, the duality in question bespeaks a complex approach to finitude, with the blindingly bright upside and the shadowy underside of its overcoming.

There are sundry cultural, religious, ideological, and phenomenological reasons for the prevalence of the narrative upside over the underside, reasons that explain the notoriety of flaming regeneration and the near oblivion, to which a slow transformation in the course of decomposition has been subject. Obviously, I am extending here my earlier argument on the equivocations of the triple knot (sexuation, individuation, and death) tied in the story of the phoenix. This addendum is important in its own right: it taps into the repressed resources that may be of some use for immanently overcoming an ecologically and intellectually pernicious set of beliefs and practices, that is to say, for working through the phoenix complex. The apocalyptic mood, which is prevalent in contemporary ecological thought on the obverse side of the complex, shows, precisely, the inability or the unwillingness to work through it, acting out its negation instead.

Whereas both traditions concern themselves with the fact and the mechanics of regeneration—of the phoenix and, hence, of nature or natures—they outline divergent means for reaching the same end. The wager of a fiery rebirth is on the ideality of self-substitution; in a slow emergence from a decaying or wounded body, the emphasis is on material metamorphoses. The ideal that the first strategy envisions is realized thanks to the contraction of time and the elimination, or sublimation, of matter in fire. The materiality of the second strategy requires tarrying with (and within) the flow of time, attending to decomposition, to the fluxes and miraculous upshots of decay that, in a variety of forms, circle back to life after the threshold of death has been crossed. Synthetic and, to some extent, syncretistic accounts, marrying strands from the two traditions, are, therefore, tantamount to efforts to reconcile the ideal and the material aspects of survival, reproduction, and rejuvenation.

In the third century CE, such synthetic accounts abounded. In *Didascalia apostolorum*, for instance, the farewell act of a dying phoenix is to "pray facing the Orient and to set itself aflame and to burn up and to become ash [*et succenditur a se ipso et comburitur et fit cinis*]; from the ashes, a worm emerges [*de cinere autem fit vermis*], and this worm grows, transforming into another perfect phoenix" (5.7.14.10–13). Upon depicting how the dead body of the phoenix catches fire due to a combination of the heat spewed from its decomposition and "ethereal light from afar," Lactantius writes that it dissolves into ashes. He continues: "These ashes gather into a pile, as though concentrated by moisture into a mass, and have the effect similar to that of a seed [*quos velut in massam cineres umore coactos conflat; et effectum seminis instar habet*]. Hence, an animal is said to arise, first without limbs, and it is said to be the milky color of a worm. It grows." (*De ave phoenice* 99–103).

This is not a poetic collage, a ragbag of two traditions, vying for the right to represent the death of the phoenix, but their careful harmonization, balancing the ideality and the materiality of regeneration and, indeed, self-regeneration. Take the body ablaze, an iconic image of matter inflamed by the power of spirit. In the context of the phoenix's incineration, Lactantius separates the powers of fire—light and heat—apportioning them to an ethereal and distant source of luminosity, on the one hand, and the very near fount of warmth emanating from the corpse, on the other. Fire itself is divided between the ideal and the material worlds, between a disembodied gleam and a heat-producing body that is a decomposing corpse. The division is a necessary precondition for a union of another kind, one where self-combustion is indistinguishable from kindling by the other. The body is no longer a passive substratum receiving the fire of spirit; it participates in the act of ignition.

Lactantius and other authors working at the uneven seams that suture the two traditions have their finger on the pulse of *the spirit of matter* and *the matter of spirit*, which will, a mere century and a half later, fascinate Augustine and instigate his own thinking. Sustainable regeneration is possible nowhere but at this double crossing, which goes far beyond the bid to sew together heterogeneous literary or theological traditions.

Aside from fire, the phoenix is nourished in its rebirth by water, the moisture that lets cinders coagulate into a mass. In effect, mass is a cipher for matter, the materiality of the remains that, losing their recognizable form, are depersonalized, rendered anonymous. Theirs is not matter devoid of spirit: in the anonymity of a mass, a power of generativity "similar to that of a seed" resides. Chaos and the makings of a novel order merge into a single hylomorphic whole.

Preserving the indeterminacy of a seed, which may be the vehicle for vegetal or animal reproduction, Lactantius patiently follows the movement of the phoenix from absolute singularity through anonymous massification to another such singularity. Gradual transitions from a mass of ashes to a seed, a worm without limbs, an egg, and finally a hatchling move at the pace of spirited matter, or, in other words, of materiality imbued with the energies and changing forms of spirit, which it successively gives to itself. Reproductive capacities are not the ideal and idealizing iterations of the same mediated through the genetic code and its transmissions or recombinations; they are dispersed throughout the world, generously allocated to the powers of fire and the sun, moisture and clouds, rotting, a generative mass, a seed. In them, the infinite peers out of the finite otherwise, as the spirit of matter morphing into the matter of spirit, with enough time and patience to undergo a chain of metamorphoses, yet without a guarantee that this chain would not, at some point, break, giving finitude its due.[46]

# Notes

## PREFACE

1. For a defense of a certain notion of essence, consult my "Musings on Vegetality," in *Botanical Speculations: Plants in Contemporary Art*, ed. Giovanni Aloi (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2021), pp. 19–27. For a defense of the phenomenological notion of truth, refer to my "Betrayal: A Philosophy," *Research in Phenomenology* 50 (2020): pp. 79–98.
2. This is not a sheer coincidence: despite their oppositional framing, nature and spirit presuppose one another, as Hegel showed, without necessarily drawing the right conclusions from the insight he stumbled upon.
3. Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 1.
4. Lorraine Daston, *Against Nature* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2019), p. 7.
5. Daston, *Against Nature*, p. 13.
6. For an antidote, consult Hans Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life: Toward a Philosophical Biology* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2001).
7. R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of Nature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1945), p. 43.
8. In a more restricted sense, Elizabeth Spragins uses the term *necroepistemology* in her recent book, *A Grammar of the Corpse: Necroepistemology in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2022).
9. William Arthur Heidel, "*Peri Phuseos*: A Study of the Conception of Nature among the Pre-Socratics," *Proceedings of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 45, no. 4: (1909): p. 129. In this, it might not be so different from all other materials processed by the cognitive machinery of understanding.
10. In turn, many of the contemporary negative reactions to nature are rejecting the largely Latin or Latinate heritage of this concept, without touching on its older and more heterogeneous layers.

11. The distinction of note here is more subtle than a banal contrast between darkness and light. Whereas, designated as *phusis*, nature is awash in active verbal connotations (it *loves to hide*: two verbs), philosophy falls on the substantive side (*a love* of *wisdom*: two nouns combined). Nature and philosophy, then, embody two forms of energy—activity and actuality—united around a double hinge—love/to love and that which hides/to hide. The task of articulating them is none other than the endeavor to reunite the cleaved halves of energy, emitted by love and by hiding.

12. F. W. J. Schelling, *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*, trans. Keith R. Peterson (Albany: SUNY Press, 2004), p. 14.

13. This is essentially what Engels says in his *Dialectics of Nature*: "The metaphysical conception has become impossible in natural science owing to the very development of the latter." Friedrich Engels: *Dialectics of Nature*, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Collected Works, vol. 25 (New York: International Publishers, 1987), p. 313.

14. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 5.

15. Reiner Schürmann, *Broken Hegemonies*, trans. Reginald Lilly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), p. 514.

16. An earlier version of this preface and the conclusion was published under the title "Is a Philosophy of Nature Still Tenable?" in *The Harvard Review of Philosophy*, XXIX, 2022.

## CHAPTER 1

1. Michael Marder, *Pyropolitics in the World Ablaze* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020), p. 149.

2. Likewise, this term alludes to a short story by Jorge Luis Borges, titled "La secta del Fénix." Jorge Luis Borges, "The Cult of the Phoenix," in *Collected Fictions*, trans. Andrew Hurley (London: Penguin Books, 1999), pp. 171–173, which will be discussed in the conclusion of the present study.

3. Heraclitus, frag. 90, "All things are an equal exchange for fire and fire for all things [*puros te antamoibē ta panta kai pur apantōn*], as goods are for gold and gold for goods," in G. S. Kirk and J. E. Raven, *The Presocratic Philosophers: A Critical History with a Selection of Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), p. 199.

4. Gaston Bachelard, *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*, trans. Alan Ross (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), p. 12.

5. Bachelard, *Psychoanalysis of Fire*, p. 16.

6. Pedro Sanchez et al., "Alternatives to Slash and Burn," in *Slash-and-Burn Agriculture: The Search for Alternatives*, ed. Cheryl Palm et al. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 5.

7. The expression "green phoenix" was used by Paul Lurquin in *The Green Phoenix: A History of Genetically Modified Plants* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001) and by William

Allen in *Green Phoenix: Restoring the Tropical Forests of Guanacaste, Costa Rica* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). It also serves as the title for a 1972 novel by Thomas Burnett Swann.

8. François Ruf and Frederic Lançon, "Innovations in the Indonesian Upland," in *From Slash and Burn to Replanting: Green Revolutions in the Indonesia Uplands*, ed. François Ruf and Frederic Lançon (Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2004), p. 2.
9. Spanish: "La esperanza es lo último que muere"; German: "die Hoffnung stirbt zuletzt"; Russian: "Надежда умирает последней"; Portuguese: "A esperança é a última que morre."
10. Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. and ed. James Starchey (New York: Basic Books, 2010), p. 468.
11. All references to Spinoza's works rely on Baruch Spinoza, *Spinoza: Complete Works*, ed. Michael L. Morgan (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002). Henceforth, abbreviated as *CW*.
12. Carl Jung calls their figural dimension "archetypes."
13. Not surprisingly, this is Freud's interpretation of the phoenix. Already the bird that feeds on the liver of chained Prometheus is understood in terms of masculine desire, with liver being the traditional "seat of passion." "A short step further brings us to the phoenix, the bird which, as often as it is consumed by fire, emerges rejuvenated once more, and which probably bore the significance of a penis revivified after its collapse rather than, and earlier than, that of the sun setting in the glow of evening and afterwards rising once again." Sigmund Freud, "The Acquisition and Control of Fire," in *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis and Other Works*, standard ed., vol. 22 (1932–1936), ed. James Starchey et al. (London: Vintage Classics, 2001), pp. 190–191.
14. "The rising sun is, moreover, very often compared to a bird. In Egypt, the god Atum is called "the great Phoenix who lives in Heliopolis" and prides himself on "having placed the crown of feathers on his own head." Gilbert Durand, *The Anthropological Structures of the Imaginary*, trans. Margaret Sankey and Judith Hatten (Brisbane: Boombana Publications, 1999), p. 145. See also Roel van den Broek, *The Myth of the Phoenix According to Classical and Early Christian Traditions* (Leiden: Brill, 1972), p. 15. For a more recent cultural-intellectual (and popularized) history of the phoenix, including its derivation from the Egyptian *bennu* and relation to the Chinese *fenghuang*, refer to Joseph Nigg, *The Phoenix: An Unnatural Biography of a Mystical Beast* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016). *Bennu* articulates the primordial mound, *Benben*, with the the watery abyss *Nu,* whence it rises. The mound is revered as the dwelling place of the god Atum.
15. Porphyry, *On Aristotle's Categories*, trans. Steven K. Strange (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), p. 68.
16. Here, Phoenix is the name of a genus comprising fourteen species. Refer to Reem A. Al-Alawi et al., "Date Palm Tree (*Phoenix dactylifera* L.): Natural Products and Therapeutic Options," *Frontiers in Plant Science* (May 2017), doi: 10.3389/fpls.2017.00845. In the Egyptian tradition, the bird *bennu* is also associated with a sacred tree—the tree of life, *ished*, or the evergreen persea (*Mimusops schimperi*).

17. Refer to Nigg, *The Phoenix*, p. 7.

18. In this respect, Roel van den Broek notes that "the homonymy of phoenix and palm caused confusion even in Classical times," in *Myth of the Phoenix*, p. 57.

19. Along with the daily sunrise, the cycle of the seasons, and the germination of seeds, among other things, the phoenix supplies one of the emblematic "proofs" of resurrection (*insignia resurrectionis*) in Clement of Rome, Tertullian, Ambrose of Milan, Zeno of Verona, and Cyril of Jerusalem.

20. Laurence Gosserez expresses such astonishment in the section of his introductory chapter, "The Phoenix and Time, between Reality and Fiction" ["Le phénix, le temps et l'éternité"], in *Le Phénix et son autre: Poétique d'un mythe des origines au XVI siècle*, ed. Laurence Gosserez (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2013), p. 37.

21. In this respect, it bears mentioning that eco-phenomenology implicitly positions itself at antipodes to the phoenix complex. For the roots of this alternative mode of relation to ecology and nature, see Hans Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life: Toward a Philosophical Biology* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2001). More recent studies in this vein include *Rethinking Nature: Essays in Environmental Philosophy*, ed. Bruce V. Foltz and Robert Frodeman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004); works on Merleau-Ponty, such as Ted Toadvine, *Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy of Nature* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2009) or David Morris, *Merleau-Ponty's Developmental Ontology* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2018); and collections on ecology and deconstruction, such as Matthias Fritsch, Philippe Lynes, and David Wood, eds., *Eco-Deconstruction: Derrida and Environmental Philosophy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018).

22. We will explore this "highway" in chapter 2 of this book.

23. Due to the intricacies of the phoenix's sexuation (and, at times, asexual nature), I will alternate the use of pronouns "she," "he," and "it" throughout this text, unless a particular author under discussion insists on one of these pronouns. For a detailed discussion of the phoenix's "uncertain sex," see Françoise Lecocq, "Le sexe incertain du phénix : De la zoologie à la théologie," in *Le Phénix et son autre: Poétique d'un mythe des origines au XVI siècle*, ed. Laurence Gosserez (Rennes : Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2013), pp. 187–210.

24. G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature: Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, pt. 2, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 305.

25. According to Gosserez, "*le symbolisme du phénix est . . . lié à la renaissance de la végétation lors des crues du Nil* [the symbolism of the phoenix . . . is tied to the rebirth of vegetation after the floods of the Nile]." Gosserez, "Le phénix, le temps et l'éternité," p. 27.

26. Michael Marder, *The Philosopher's Plant: An Intellectual Herbarium* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), p. 179.

27. Although the sunray is a classical phallus replacement, in Tzetzes we find a rather castrated version of the phallic substitute that retains only one of the two main powers of solar fire, namely heat. The absence of the other power—light—from this description removes the

regenerative impetus from the sphere of visibility and preserves the chthonic character of rebirth through decay.

28. Kirk and Raven, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, p. 199.

29. Like the oriental phoenix, the Egyptian *bennu* is a "star-bird," *astre-oiseau*, replete with a "cosmic and divine dimension [*une dimension cosmique et divine*]." Gosserez, "Le phénix, le temps et l'éternité," p. 27.

30. Timothy Mousseau et al., "Highly Reduced Mass Loss Rates and Increased Litter Layer in Radioactively Contaminated Areas" *Oekologia* 175 (2014): pp. 429–437.

31. V. I. Yoschenko et al., "Resuspension and Redistribution of Radionuclides during Grassland and Forest Fires in the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone: Part I. Fire Experiments" *Journal of Environmental Radioactivity* 86, no. 2 (2006): pp. 143–163.

32. van den Broek, *Myth of the Phoenix*, p. 205.

33. Thomas of Cantimpré expresses the same basic idea in book 17 of his *Liber de natura rerum*, pp. xlv, 8–10. Having built for itself "a nest-like altar [*altare quasi nidum*]" atop a beautiful tree, the phoenix whips up a solar storm with its wings, creating an aureole around itself and casting the sun's heat down to the nest, which is thus ignited: "*fervidos solis orbes alarum agitatione in se concitans super struem ruit et solis ardore accensis aromatibus ipsa partier accensa comburitur*."

34. In its contemporary configuration, the technology of artefacts claims for itself the status of a secular technology of salvation.

35. Bernard Stiegler, *Technics & Time I: The Fault of Epimetheus*, trans. Richard Beardsworth and George Collins (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 142.

36. For more on this theme, refer to Michael Marder, *Dump Philosophy: A Phenomenology of Devastation* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020).

37. —. "Ageing." *United Nations: Global Issues*, 2019. https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/ageing

38. See Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 106.

39. Hildegard von Bingen, *Hildegardis Bingensis Epistolarium*, pt. 2, XCI-CCLr, ed. L. Van Acker, Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis, vol. 91A (Turnhout: Brepols, 1993), p. 484.

40. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood's English translation of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* gives this example in a footnote. Refer to Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason (The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*), ed. and trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 264.

41. Frank Heynick, *Jews and Medicine: An Epic Saga* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 2002), p. 238.

42. In a later passage in *De generatione animalium*, Aristotle writes, "Those animals which are formed as a result of the copulation of animals of the same kind, themselves generate in turn

after their own kind; those, however, which arise not from living animals but from putrescent matter [*ek sēpomenēs tēs hulēs*], although they generate, produce something that is different in kind, and the product is neither male nor female" (715b).

43. In Portuguese, sunrise retains a literal trace of rebirth: *o nascer do sol*, "the birth of the sun."
44. This last designation may be found in Gosserez, "Le phénix, le temps et l'éternité," p. 44.
45. van den Broek, *The Myth of the Phoenix*, pp. 151ff.
46. A version of chapter 1 was published as an essay titled "The Phoenix Complex" in the special issue 22(2) of *CR: New Centennial Review* on "(In)Finite Ecologies."

### CHAPTER 2

1. The replaceability of speakers, who inherit arguments from others, is a common strategy Plato resorts to, for example, in *Philebus*, where Protarchus steps in to flesh out the thesis of Philebus concerning the goodness of pleasure for living beings. Performatively, Plato implements in his own philosophical practice the very principle that the characters are discussing. Nonetheless, the structure of the relation Socrates/Diotima as played out in *Symposium* is not only that of *supplanting* but also that of *supplementing*. According to Frisbee Sheffield, "Diotima embodies the euporetic aspect of *eros* which transcends the limitations of a mortal, deficient, nature," represented by Socrates. Frisbee C. C. Sheffield, *Plato's* Symposium: *The Ethics of Desire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 67.
2. One exception to this general rule is the warrior Er, from a myth believed to be original to Plato and narrated at the end of *The Republic*. Er is killed during battle, his body staying uncorrupted on the battlefield for eleven days. On the twelfth day, "at the moment of his funeral, as he lay upon the pyre [*epi tē pura keinomenos*], he revived, and after coming to life [*anabious*] related what, he said, he had seen in the world beyond" (614b). Although Er is not actually burned, the position of his corpse on a funereal pyre, its incorruptibility, and its subsequent revival are evocative of the myth of the phoenix. And although he comes back to life in the same shape as before (as does the phoenix), his narrative revolves around the transformations of vitality; around the cyclicality of life, death, and a return to life; and around the allotment of life's shapes to various souls that return in the guise of the other, in a variety of animal forms. For more on the myth of Er, consult Claudia Baracchi, "Animals and Angels: The Myth of Life as a Whole in *Republic* 10," in *Plato's Animals: Gadflies, Horses, Swans, and Other Philosophical Beasts*, ed. Jeremy Bell and Michael Naas (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), pp. 209–224.
3. Of course, in sexual reproduction, qualitative novelty arises from new genetic combinations, since there are two (and now, with cutting-edge reproductive technologies, potentially more than two) progenitors, rather than one.
4. See Stella Sandford, "'All Human Beings Are Pregnant, Both in Body and in Soul': The Bisexual Imaginary in Plato's *Symposium*," in *Embodied Selves*, ed. Stella Gonzalez-Arnal, Gill Jagger, and Kathleen Lennon (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2012), p. 56.

5. The semantic provenance of the word I am translating as "harmonious ordering," *diakosmēsis*, is the verb *kosmeo*, from which *kosmos* also derives. Claudio D. Conenna and Kyriaki Tsoukala, "Ethic and Ornament in the Modern and Contemporary Age," in *Intersections of Space and Ethos*, ed. Kyriaki Tsoukala, Nikolaos-Ion Terzoglou, and Charikleia Pantelidou (London: Routledge, 2015), p. 41. Connoting adornment, harmony, a good order, *diakosmēsis* is directly linked to beauty, which, for Diotima, is the universal object of love. The shining, indeed fiery, nature of the ornament-order that is the Greek *kosmos* places it in the vicinity of the phoenix, as we will see in the next chapter.

6. Edward Cohen, *The Athenian Nation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), pp. 38–39.

7. Maria A. Liston and Susan I. Rotroff, "Babies in the Well: Archaeological Evidence for Newborn Disposal in Hellenistic Greece," in *The Oxford Handbook of Childhood and Education in the Classical World*, ed. Judith Evans Grubbs, Tim Parkin, and Roslynne Bell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 77.

8. Roel van den Broek, *The Myth of the Phoenix According to Classical and Early Christian Traditions* (Leiden: Brill, 1972), p. 72. See *Timaeus* 39c-d. In the classical world, there was no consensus regarding the life span of the phoenix, which, nevertheless, was an important issue. The earliest extant mention of the phoenix by Hesiod focuses exclusively on its longevity and the exact life span. Refer to Sister Mary Francis McDonald, "Phoenix Redivivus," *Phoenix* 14, no. 4 (Winter 1960): p. 187.

9. In Portuguese, the same word is used for "new" and "young": *novo* / *nova*.

10. Refer to Joseph Nigg, *The Phoenix: An Unnatural Biography of a Mystical Beast* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), pp. 61ff and van den Broek, *The Myth of the Phoenix*, pp. 27ff.

11. Nigg, *The Phoenix*, pp. 19ff. For more on *fenghuang*, consult chapter 7 of the present study.

12. W. Carl Rufus and Hsing-Chih Tien, *The Soochow Astronomical Chart* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1945), p. 5.

13. The perfect number is a geometric number, divisible without remainder and computed with the help of "the smallest numbers with which the theorem of Pythagoras can be proved" (van den Broek, *The Myth of the Phoenix*, p. 99).

14. As John Sallis puts it, "Timaeus' description of *poiēsis* (making, fabricating, production) brings to light its mimetic structure. In fabricating something, the maker looks to the model or paradigm (*paradeigma*) in order to form the product, to fashion its look and its capability, in such a way that it looks like the paradigm and has the capacity for whatever functions belong to something with such a look. Looking in advance to the paradigm, the maker gives the work the same look." John Sallis, *Chorology: On Beginning in Plato's* Timaeus (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020), p. 51.

15. "Time imitates eternity and circles round according to number [*chronou tauta aiōna te mimoumenou kai kat' arithmon kukloumenou gegonen eidē*]" (*Timaeus* 38b).

16. van den Broek, *The Myth of the Phoenix*, p. 43.

17. There are many reasons for discussing Levinas side by side with Plato. One of them is that the former thinker characterized the project of his *Totality and Infinity* as "a return to Platonism." Quoted in Francisco J. Gonzalez, "Levinas Questioning Plato on Eros and Maieutics," in *Levinas and the Ancients*, ed. Brian Schroeder and Silvia Benso (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), p. 40.

18. As Stella Sanford puts it, in Levinas's works, "each time fecundity is said to overflow its purely biological signification, the biological origin of the concept is nevertheless affirmed." Stella Sanford, "Masculine Mothers? Maternity in Levinas and Plato," in *Feminist Interpretations of Emmanuel Levinas*, ed. Tina Chanter (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), p. 189].

19. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), p. 267[299].

20. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 268[301].

21. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 284[317].

22. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 282[314].

23. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 268[301].

24. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 268[300].

25. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 277[310].

26. Claire Elise Katz adds that Levinas "writes from the position of a Jew—specifically, a Jewish man." Claire Elise Katz, *Levinas, Judaism, and the Feminine: The Silent Footsteps of Rebecca* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), p. 71.

27. I mean the Oedipus and the Electra complexes.

28. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, pp. 278–279[311].

29. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 269[301].

30. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 272[306], translation slightly modified.

31. Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being, or Beyond Essence* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1973), p. 13[29].

32. Emmanuel Levinas, *On Escape*, trans. Bettina Bergo (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

33. Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, p. 56[95].

34. Levinas confirms this line of thinking later on in the book: "What can it [the passivity of a recurrence] be but a substitution of me for the others? It is, however, not an alienation, because the other in the same is my substitution for the other through responsibility, for which I am summoned as someone irreplaceable." Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, p. 114. Again, the sense of responsibility and of response as *t'shuvah* is paramount here.

35. Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, pp. 110–111[175].

36. Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, p. 57[95].

37. Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, p. 52[88].

38. Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, p. 54[91].

39. Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, pp. 75–76[121].

40. But *mediation* is not to be conflated with the middle, here or elsewhere!

41. Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, p. 105[165].

42. Emmanuel Levinas, "Enigma and Phenomenon," in *Emmanuel Levinas: Basic Philosophical Writings*, ed. Adriaan Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), p. 77.

43. Emmanuel Levinas, *Entre Nous: Thinking-of-the-Other*, trans. Michael Smith and Barbara Harshav (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), p. 88.

44. Emmanuel Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings*, trans. Annette Aronowicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 187[165]

45. van den Broek, *The Myth of the Phoenix*, pp. 59ff. The reference to sand (an inorganic, loose multiplicity, containing, among other things, remnants of past life) harks back to the blessing of Abraham, whose issue will be as numerous as the stars in the sky or sand on the seashore (Genesis 22:17). The context is extremely important here: the luxuriance of biological reproduction, with which God blesses Abraham, is a reward for his unconditional obedience in heeding God's command to sacrifice his only son, Isaac. We have the logic of the phoenix in reverse in this story: by agreeing to sacrifice the future, rather than the past or a life nearly at its limit, Abraham gains a wider foothold in that future.

46. Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings*, p. 188[165].

47. Levinas, *Entre Nous*, pp. 92–93.

48. Emmanuel Levinas, *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, trans. Sean Hand (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), p. 53[89].

49. Levinas, *Difficult Freedom*, p. 263[391].

50. Levinas, *Difficult Freedom*, p. 263[391], translation lightly modified.

51. Levinas, *Difficult Freedom*, p. 262[390].

## CHAPTER 3

1. Roel van den Broek, *The Myth of the Phoenix According to Classical and Early Christian Traditions* (Leiden: Brill, 1972), p. 144. As van den Broek notes, "In the later symbolism the phoenix was the paramount symbol of the fate of the soul after death" (p. 145). The same idea is echoed in the *Eclogues* of Asonius (Bk. 7). This is also the myth that Plato recasts in his own manner in Book 10 of *The Republic*, narrating the story of Er.

2. On this point, consult Jean Hubaux and Maxime Leroy, *Le Mythe du phénix dans les littératures grecque et latine* (Paris: E. Droz, 1939), p. 73.

3. Amelie Rorty calls this approach "philosophical bio-psychology." Amelie Rorty, "*De Anima*: Its Agenda and Its Recent Interpreters," in *Essays on Aristotle's* De Anima, ed. Martha Nussbaum and Amelie O. Rorty (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 7. Along similar lines, Claudia Baracchi writes that *psuchē* "names the vitality of the living being, including the automatic metabolic processes, whereby life is maintained, and unconscious emotional contents, feelings, thoughts, and so on." Claudia Baracchi, *Aristotle's Ethics as First Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 110. That Aristotle elaborates a "philosophical bio-psychology" is only half of the story; he also develops a philosophical biophysics, fastened to his psychology through a shared concept of *bios*, life.

4. For more on this inversion, see Michael Marder, *Energy Dreams: Of Actuality* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017).

5. That is why Aristotle often equivocates between *to threptikon* (the nourishing faculty) and *to genetikon* (the reproductive faculty), reducing the latter to the former: a plant's reproduction of itself is already reproduction in the other, and vice versa. Hegel will later adopt this idea in his *Philosophy of Nature*.

6. Aristotle views semen, seeds, and fruit as residue, the by-products of the digestive process (see, for instance, *De generatione animalium* 725a.1–5).

7. "The greater part of *De Anima* is devoted to an analysis of how the psychological activities of living things are organized to maintain a specific sort of life. Psychological activities are individuated and identified not only by their contributions to sheer maintenance for survival, but also by their contributions to the organism's realizing the potentialities of its species" (Rorty, "*De Anima*," p. 10).

8. G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature: Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences, Part II*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 344, translation slightly modified.

9. Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 344.

10. "But the plant does not attain to a relationship between individuals as such but only to a difference, whose sides are not at the same time in themselves whole individuals, do not determine the whole individuality" (Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 343). More generally, as Alison Stone notes, in Hegel's system, "Paradoxically, organisms at first are not properly 'alive' at all." Alison Stone, *Petrified Intelligence: Nature in Hegel's Philosophy* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2005), p. 51.

11. Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 322.

12. Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 343. Hegel affirms this point more clearly later on: "All that is necessary for the production and ripening of the buds is the arrest of luxuriant growth" (*Philosophy of Nature*, p. 346).

13. Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 343.

14. Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 346.

15. Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 346.

16. Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 350.

17. Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 336.

18. Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 351.

19. Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, pp. 336–337, translation modified.

20. G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 420. For more on "God as Light," consult Jon Stewart, *The Unity of Hegel's "Phenomenology of Spirit": A Systematic Interpretation* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2000), pp. 392ff.

21. Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 351.

22. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 438.

23. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 438.

24. G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 2, *Determinate Religion*, ed. Peter C. Hodgson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), p. 744.

25. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 2, p. 453.

26. On fire as the material medium of ideality and "liberated negativity," consult Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, pp. 106ff and Michael Marder, *Pyropolitics*, passim.

27. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 2, p. 453.

28. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 2, p. 453.

29. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 2, p. 743. Differently put, "if [divine] power and substance are to become spirit, this moment of antithesis [anguish in a finite subject] and its resolution are indispensable" (p. 742).

30. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 2, p. 454.

31. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 2, p. 743.

32. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 2, p. 453.

33. G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Nature*, ed. and trans. M. J. Petry, vol. 3 (London: Humanities Press, 1970), p. 212. This contrasts sharply with Terry Pinkard's argument about Hegel's *Naturphilosophie* to the effect that "as a whole, nature aims at nothing, even if there are some creatures in the natural order that do aim at some things. In fact, taken as a whole, nature does not constitute a genuine 'whole' at all, at least in the sense that nature 'as a whole' cannot be made fully intelligible to pure reason." Terry Pinkard, *Hegel's Naturalism: Mind, Nature, and the Final Ends of Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), p. 23.

34. G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, ed. and trans. Robert Brown and Peter Hodgson, vol. 1, *Manuscripts of the Introduction and the Lectures of 1822–3* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2011), p. 142.

35. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, p. 142, translation modified.

36. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, p. 142, translation modified.

37. There is, then, a tinge of irony in assessments such as these: "Questions of what is 'living and dead' in Hegel's thought have been asked for over a century, yet before each wave of skepticism, his ideas seem to revive, Phoenix-like, and surprise with their continued relevance." Will D. Desmond, *Hegel's Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), p. 2.

38. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, pp. 142–143, translation modified. In this sense, a total identification of Hegelian dialectics with the phoenix is wrong, or, at most, half-right. I have in mind Derrida's 1975–76 *Life Death* seminar, with its proclamation, in the very first session, that "the great syllogism of life at the end of Hegel's *Science of Logic* . . . follow[s] a movement that is everywhere marked in Hegel (let us call it the movement of the phoenix)." Jacques Derrida, *Life Death*, ed. Pascale-Anne Brault and Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2020), p. 2. Similarly, reading Levinas in "At This Very Moment in This Work Here I Am," Derrida exclaims in response to the "consummation [of subjectivity] for the other without the act being able to be reborn out of the ashes of that consummation": "I again interrupt: no Hegelian Phoenix after this consummation." Jacques Derrida, *Psyche: Inventions of the Other*, vol. 1, ed. Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 170. In a more political, rather than ethical, key, Shu-mei Shih endeavors to compare the Western and the Eastern, the Hegelian and the Chinese phoenixes: "While the Chinese phoenix had to die to be reborn a totally new being . . . , the Western phoenix in Hegel's conception draws strength from its previous incarnation to engender a new form." Shu-mei Shih, *The Lure of the Modern: Writing Modernism in Semicolonial China, 1917–1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), p. 52. Nevertheless, the passage from *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* that is under discussion here rejects wholesale "the conception of the phoenix" as suitable for Hegel's dialectics or for the Western idea of spirit.

39. G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy: Greek Philosophy to Plato*, trans. E. S. Haldane (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), p. 90.

40. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, p. 90.

41. G. W. F Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Kunst (1823)* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2003), p. 3.

42. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Kunst (1823)*, p. 22.

43. G. W. F. Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, trans. and ed. George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 677.

44. Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, p. 676.

45. Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, p. 677.

46. Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, p. 679.

47. Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, p. 687.

48. Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, p. 687.

49. Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, p. 687.

50. Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, p. 687.

51. Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, p. 688.

## CHAPTER 4

1. John Donne, "The Canonization," in *The Complete Poems of John Donne*, ed. Robin Robbins (London: Longman, 2010), pp. 151–152.

2. Stephen Clark writes: "We know nothing about Plotinus's ancestry or early childhood. He does refer to native Egyptian practices and theories, but probably no more knowledgeably than should be expected of a resident of Egypt educated in the Hellenic tradition." Stephen Clark, *Plotinus: Myth, Metaphor, and Philosophical Practice* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016) p. 4.

3. W. Spiegelberg, "Der Name des Phoenix," in *Strassburger Pestschrilt zur XLVI Versammlung deutscher Philologen und Schulmänner* (Strasburg: Karl J. Trübner, 1901), pp. 163–165.

4. Roel Van den Broek, *The Myth of the Phoenix According to Classical and Early Christian Traditions* (Leiden: Brill, 1972), p. 16.

5. Plotinus formulates the theme of the double most clearly in Ennead 2.3, "On Whether the Stars Are Causes." As he writes there, "Every man is double, one of him is the sort of compound being and one of him is himself; and the whole universe is, one part the composite of body and a sort of soul bound to body, and one the soul of the all which is not in the body but makes a trace of itself shine on that which is in the body" (2.3.9.28–34). Similarly, in Ennead 6.4, "The Presence of Being Everywhere," Plotinus advances a theory of "another man [*anthrōpos allos*]," who, "wishing to exist, approached that man [the authentic I]; and when he found us—for we were not outside the all—he wound himself round us and attached himself to that man who was then each one of us. . . . And we have come to be the pair of them" (6.6.14.20–30). For more on the theme of the double in Plotinus, see chapter 5 of Charles Stang's *Our Divine Double* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).

6. An "echo" of primordial nature's absolute quietude is apparent in the quietness of "things which are uniformly in accord with nature [*kata phusin echontōn hēremēsis*]" (3.4.4.12).

7. Concerning the soul "uttering and propounding" the rational principle with which it has reunited, Plotinus writes, "For it [this soul] is not full, but has something wanting in relation to what comes before it; yet it itself sees also quietly what it utters. For it does not go on uttering what it has uttered well already, but what it utters, it utters because of its deficiency, with a view to examining it, trying to learn through what it possesses" (3.8.6.25–30). For Plotinus, at the level of the soul as well, utterance is deficient compared to silence and quiet contemplation.

8. I touch on this theme in Michael Marder, *Energy Dreams: Of Actuality* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), pp. 42ff.

9. See also the designation of the eternal as *telos ameres*, "partless completion," or "indivisible perfection," in 3.7.3.19.

10. Apropos of this idea, Pierre Hadot writes that "concentrated in the original and absolute One, divine power is diffused and unfolds itself, first at the level of thought and then at that of the soul, which are unified multiplicities, to be then, finally, dispersed into the sensible world and in matter. We rediscover here, then, the representations of imperial ideology." Pierre Hadot, *The Selected Writings of Pierre Hadot: Philosophy as Practice*, trans. Matthew Sharpe and Federico Testa (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), p. 250.

11. The act of turning (around and toward oneself; later on, this act will signify conversion and a turn to God) raises the entity that so turns to "the theoretical and primary intellect [*theōrētikos nous kai prōtos*]," which "is what is in its own power in this way, that its work in no way depends on another, but it is all turned to itself and its work is itself [*to ergon autou autos*]" (6.8.6.31–34).

12. In this vein, Plotinus composes a short treatise against suicide (Ennead 1.9) and saves his disciple, Porphyry, from suicidal thoughts by sending him to Sicily.

13. Clark notes that "it was at least a widespread opinion, in his day, that souls transmigrated—and must therefore somehow retain their own identity through time and their distinctness from all other souls" (*Plotinus*, p. 31).

14. In Plato's probably original myth of Er, the determination of a future form of existence by habits in a past life is coupled with choice, the opportunity to select the kind of animal a soul prefers (*Rep*. 620a).

15. F. W. J. Schelling, "System of Philosophy in General and of the Philosophy of Nature in Particular," in *Idealism and the Endgame of Theory: Three Essays by F.W.J. Schelling*, trans. and ed. Thomas Pfau (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994), p. 153.

16. This passage is not included in the English translation of the text. For the original, consult F. W. J. Schelling, *von Schellings Sämmtliche Werke*, vol. 6 (Berlin: Total Verlag, 1997), p. 352.

17. F. W. J. Schelling, "Stuttgart Seminars," in *Idealism and the Endgame of Theory: Three Essays by F.W.J. Schelling*, trans. and ed. Thomas Pfau (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994), p. 218.

18. F. W. J. Schelling, *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*, trans. Keith R. Peterson (Albany: SUNY Press, 2004), p. 29.

19. Schelling, *First Outline*, p. 29.

20. F. W. J. Schelling, *The Ages of the World*, trans. Jason M. Wirth (Albany: SUNY Press, 2000), p. 36, translation modified.

21. Schelling, *The Ages of the World*, p. 29.

22. On liberation from the cycle of rebirth in Jainism, see Brianne Donaldson and Ana Bajželj, *Insistent Life: Principles for Bioethics in the Jain Tradition* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2021), pp. 39ff.
23. Schelling, *The Ages of the World*, p. 27.
24. F. W. J. Schelling, "On the Nature of Philosophy as Science," in *German Idealist Philosophy*, ed. Rüdiger Bubner (London: Penguin Books, 1997), pp. 220–221.
25. Schelling, *First Outline*, p. 14.
26. Through his father, who taught him Hebrew, Schelling was familiar with Jewish theology and mysticism. In *The Ages of the World*, he interprets *netzach*, one of the *sefirot*, or the emanations of divinity in the Kabbalah, in keeping with the double sense of the Hebrew word as eternity and victory (over time, Schelling speculates) (p. 43). For more on Schelling's relation to mysticism, see Friedmann Horn, *Schelling & Swedenborg: Mysticism and German Idealism*, trans. George F. Dole (West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation Publishers, 1997).
27. Schelling, *First Outline*, p. 15.
28. Schelling, *First Outline*, p. 14.
29. Schelling, *First Outline*, p. 40.
30. Also, as Schelling writes, "Since everything in Nature—or rather, here just that absolute product—is conceived continually in becoming, then it will neither be able to achieve absolute fluidity nor absolute nonfluidity (solidity). This will furnish the drama of a struggle between form and the formless." Schelling, *First Outline*, p. 28. This drama, too, is that of the phoenix complex.
31. Schelling, *First Outline*, p. 35.
32. Schelling, *First Outline*, p. 46.
33. Schelling, *First Outline*, p. 36. This assertion is applicable to other thinkers of sexual difference, including Jacques Derrida and Luce Irigaray. According to Slavoj Žižek, "It was possible for Schelling to accomplish the unheard-of step to radical contingency only in the guise of a 'regression' to the pre-modern mythology of a sexualized universe." Slavoj Žižek, *The Indivisible Remainder: On Schelling and Related Matters* (London: Verso, 2007), p. 73.
34. Werner Beierwaltes, "The Legacy of Neoplatonism in F.W.J. Schelling's Thought," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 10, no. 4 (2002): pp. 393–428.
35. Schelling, *First Outline*, p. 39.
36. Schelling, *First Outline*, p. 51.
37. Schelling, *First Outline*, p. 49.
38. "This absolute organism could not be presented through an individual product, but only through an infinity of individual products which, seen singly, depart infinitely from the ideal, but taken in the whole are congruent with it." Schelling, *First Outline*, pp. 49–50.

39. Schelling, *First Outline*, p. 64.
40. Schelling, *First Outline*, p. 58.
41. Schelling, *First Outline*, p. 59.
42. Schelling, *First Outline*, p. 95.
43. Schelling, *First Outline*, pp. 67–69.
44. Schelling, *First Outline*, p. 69.
45. Schelling, *The Ages of the World*, p. 43.
46. Schelling, *The Ages of the World*, p. 44.
47. F. W. J. Schelling, *Clara, or On Nature's Connection to the Spirit World*, trans. Fiona Steinkamp (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002), pp. 24–25.
48. Schelling, *The Ages of the World*, p. 20.
49. Schelling, *The Ages of the World*, pp. 20–21.
50. Schelling, *The Ages of the World*, p. 20.
51. Schelling, *First Outline*, p. 86.
52. Schelling, *The Ages of the World*, p. 21.
53. Schelling, *First Outline*, p. 86.
54. Refer to Michael Marder, *Dump Philosophy: A Phenomenology of Devastation* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), and Michael Marder, "On Art as Planetary Metabolism," in *Reading by Osmosis: Nature Interprets Us*, ed. Sema Berikovic (Rotterdam: Nai010 Publishers, 2020).
55. Schelling, *The Ages of the World*, p. 11.
56. Schelling, *The Ages of the World*, p. 21.
57. Schelling, *First Outline*, p. 5.
58. Schelling, *First Outline*, p. 5.
59. Schelling, *First Outline*, p. 17.
60. Schelling, *The Ages of the World*, p. 5.
61. Schelling, *The Ages of the World*, p. 24.
62. Schelling, *The Ages of the World*, p. 16.
63. Schelling, *The Ages of the World*, p. 92.
64. Schelling, *The Ages of the World*, p. 94.
65. F. W. J. Schelling, *Ages of the World*, 2nd draft, trans. Judith Norman, in Slavoj Žižek / F. W. J. Schelling, *The Abyss of Freedom / Ages of the World* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997), p. 121.

66. Schelling, *Clara*, p. 81. At the everyday level, life is possible thanks to the "attenuation and suppression of that force which, when actuated (activated) or spiritualized, is a consuming fire." Schelling, *The Ages of the World*, p. 96. In turn, the phoenix is reborn, receiving a brand-new life thanks to its transformation in fire. Finally, when the previously concealed fire gains an upper hand over all external forms, it transforms the world into postworldly, spiritual existence. But this last possibility is already assumed in the description of everyday life that carries on thanks to the attenuation of the fiery force that, if given sway, spiritualizes reality and takes life itself to a new level.
67. Schelling, *The Ages of the World*, p. 96.
68. In line with the external and internal representations of the phoenix, the cosmic witness is reflected deep within the recesses of the soul, which, "eternally young," "must turn to an inner oracle, the only witness from a time before the world." Schelling, *Ages of the World*, 2nd draft, p. 114.
69. Schelling, *The Ages of the World*, pp. 96–97.
70. John Goodridge, *The Phoenix: An Essay* (London: Wells & Grosvenor, 1781), pp. 45–46. A bright star on some ancient Roman coins representing the phoenix may be a visual reference to a comet.
71. Schelling, *The Ages of the World*, p. 97.
72. Schelling, *The Ages of the World*, p. 97.

## CHAPTER 5

1. All Latin citations from St. Hildegard's *Physica* are drawn from *Physica liber subtitilitatum diversarum naturarum creaturum*; Migne, PL 197, pp. 1117–1352. *Patrologiae cursus completus: series latina* (also known as *Patriologia Latina*), ed. J.-P. Migne, 221 vols. (Paris, 1841–1864) is cited as "PL."
2. Hildegard von Bingen, *Hildegardis Bingensis Epistolarium*, first part, 1–90, ed. L. Van Acker, Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis, vol. 91 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1991), cited as "CCCM 91."
3. Hildegard von Bingen, *Hildegardis Scivias*, ed. A. Führkötter, Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis, vol. 43 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1978), cited as "CCCM 43."
4. The expression *in viriditate animae* also appears in *Scivias* 3.3.12; CCCM 43, p. 387. There, it announces the patience and perseverance of believers in the face of adversity.
5. The apparent tautologies that keep cropping up here are justifiable with respect to the way Hildegard expresses her insights, as in a letter where she writes, "But life is in life. A tree flourishes from nothing else but *viriditas*, and even a stone is not without moisture, nor is any other creature without its power. For eternity itself is alive and not without floridity [*Sed vita est in vita. Arbor enim non floret, nisi de viriditate, nec lapis est sine humore, nec ulla creatura sine vi sua. Ipsa etiam vivens eternitas non est sine floriditate*]" (Epist. 31r, 18–21; CCCM 91,

p. 83). “Life is in life” means that the enlivening *viriditas* dwells within and animates living beings, not excluding even stones.

6. “A human is the edifice of God, in which he dwells because he sent a fiery soul into it, the soul that flies with rationality in expansion, just as a wall encompasses the breadth of a house [*Homo enim edificium Dei est, in quo ipse mansionem habet, quoniam igneam animam in illum misit, que cum rationalitate in dilatatione volat, quemadmodum murus latitudinem domus comprehendit*]” (Epist. 45, 10–13; CCCM 91, p. 114).

7. Hildegard von Bingen, *Ordo virtutum*, ed. P. Dronke, in *Hildegardis Bingensis Opera Minora*, Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis, vol. 226 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), pp. 503–521, cited as “CCCM 226.”

8. Interestingly, Hildegard shares the understanding of the body as a garment of the soul with Hindu and Amerindian philosophies. Eduardo Viveiros de Castro notes that the “notion of the body as clothing can be found among the Makuna, the Yagua, the Piro, the Trio, and the Upper Xingu societies. The notion is very likely pan-American, having considerable symbolic yield for example in Northwest Coast cosmologies, if not of much wider distribution.” Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *Cosmological Perspectivism in Amazonia and Elsewhere* (Manchester: HAU, 2012), p. 48n4.

9. Hildegard von Bingen, *Symphonia: A Critical Edition of the “Symphonia Armonie Celestium Revelationum” (Symphony of the Harmony of Celestial Revelations)*, 2nd ed., ed. and trans. Barbara Newman (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), cited as “*Symph*.”

10. Hildegard von Bingen, *Hildegardis Bingensis Liber Divinorum Operum*, ed. A. Derolez and P. Dronke, Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis, vol. 226 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1996), cited as “CCCM 92” and abbreviated as “LDO.”

11. Michael Marder, *Green Mass: The Ecological Theology of St. Hildegard of Bingen* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2021), p. 95.

12. Roel Van den Broek, *The Myth of the Phoenix According to Classical and Early Christian Traditions* (Leiden: Brill, 1972), p. 239.

13. It is not by chance that the extreme monotheism of Plotinus and Spinoza results in their commitment to philosophies of pure immanence. I cannot, however, agree with Lenn Goodman that “the fullest elaboration of the monotheistic idea [in Spinoza] will take normative rather than narrative form.” Lenn Goodman, “What Does Spinoza’s *Ethics* Contribute to Jewish Philosophy?” in *Jewish Themes in Spinoza’s Philosophy*, ed. Heidi M. Ravven and Lenn E. Goodman (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002), p. 27.

14. When “our mind, as we have said, reproduces nature as closely as possible . . . , it possesses in the form of thought the essence, order and unity of nature” (*Emendations* 99; *CW* 27).

15. “‘Part’ and ‘whole’ are not true or real entities, but only ‘things of reason,’ and consequently there are in nature neither whole nor parts” (*CW* 44).

16. In *Emendations*, Spinoza specifies that “an idea is situated in the context of thought exactly as is its object in the context of reality. Therefore, if there were something in nature having

no interrelation with other things, and if there were also granted its objective essence (which must agree entirely with its formal essence), then this idea likewise would have no interrelation with other ideas [*nihil etiam commercii haberet cum aliis ideis*]; that is, we could make no inference regarding it" (41; *CW* 12). A lot could be said on the subject of this specification; here, I will limit myself to two crucial points. First, while Spinoza considers ideas and things in the respective contexts of thought and reality, he does not contemplate the idea and the thing that furnish and, indeed, *are* these contexts: God, substance, nature. (There is no context for the context is an implicit Spinozan axiom we should always keep in the back of our mind.) These are, at one and the same time, totally separated and intimately interrelated with everything they encompass. As a result, inferences about them are easily possible from all that is and entirely impossible in a mélange of intelligibility and unintelligibility that turns out to be a major roadblock on the path of Spinozan philosophy. Second, assuming, as Spinoza does, that to be interrelated with other things and ideas is to be produced and to produce the other ideas and things, only mediated (rather than immanent) causality is accounted for in this scheme of what in later philosophy will be called *the world*. The sites of meaning, generation, life and death, intelligibility and perceptibility are the interactions between the texts and the contexts of existence and of thinking, and it is there that the phoenix complex thrives, condensing their relation into a thought-image.

17. One of the paradoxical ways in which Spinoza defines nature, along these lines, is as an infinite extension without division (*CW* 44).

18. In his take on Spinoza's notion of beatitude, Deleuze intellectualizes love and desire forgetting a birth, a birthing, and a rebirth *through* love, rather than *of* love: "From the joy that flows from an adequate idea of ourselves is born a *desire*, a desire to know ever more things in their essence or *sub specie aeternitatis* [under the aspect of eternity]. And there is born, above all, a *love*." Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Zone Books, 1990), p. 305.

19. G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 10, translation modified.

20. Refer also to *The Principles* 1.xii.pr: "God preserves all things; that is, he has created, and still continues to create, everything that exists" (*CW* 141).

21. This logic is most compellingly spelled out in Charles Stang's *Our Divine Double* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).

## CHAPTER 6

1. Laurence Gosserez, "Le Phénix, le temps et l'éternité," in *Le Phénix et son autre: Poétique d'un mythe des origines au XVI siècle*, ed. Laurence Gosserez (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2013) p. 21.

2. All citations from Book 1 of *The Mahābhārata* are drawn from the van Buitenen translation: *The Mahābhārata. I. The Book of the Beginning*, trans. and ed. J. A. B. van Buitenen (Chicago:

The University of Chicago Press, 1973). The title of *The Mahābhārata* is abbreviated as "M" for citation purposes.

3. Christopher Key Chapple, "The Setting of The *Bhagavad Gītā*," in *The Bhagavad Gītā*, 25th anniversary ed., trans. Winthrop Sargeant, ed. Christopher Key Chapple (Albany: SUNY Press, 2009), p. 9.

4. All citations from the *Bhagavad Gītā* are drawn from the Sargeant translation: *The Bhagavad Gītā*, 25th anniversary ed., trans. Winthrop Sargeant, ed. Christopher Key Chapple (Albany: SUNY Press, 2009). The title of the *Bhagavad Gītā* is abbreviated as "BG" for citation purposes.

5. "The two words 'everlasting' and 'indestructible' are not repetitive, because everlastingness and indestructibility are of two kinds. As for instance, a body which is reduced to ashes and has disappeared is said to have been destroyed. (And) even while existing, when it becomes transfigured by being afflicted with diseases, etc. it is said to be 'destroyed.' That being so, by the two words 'everlasting' and 'indestructible' it is meant that It [*ātman*] is not subject to both kinds of destruction. Otherwise, the everlastingness of the Self would be like that of the earth, etc." *Bhagavad Gītā, with the Commentary of Śankarācārya*, trans. Swami Gambhirananda (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2018), pp. 28–29.

6. Refer to *Ethics* 5.lxvii: "A free man thinks of death least of all things, and his wisdom is a meditation of life, not of death" (*CW* 355).

7. Stephanie W. Jamison and Joel P. Brereton, "Introduction," in *The Rigveda: The Earliest Religious Poetry of India*, trans. Stephanie W. Jamison and Joel P. Brereton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 46; Klaus Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism*, 3rd ed. (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007), p. 312.

8. Gilbert Durand, *The Anthropological Structures of the Imaginary*, trans. Margaret Sankey and Judith Hatten (Brisbane: Boombana Publications, 1999), p. 142.

9. "As the recurring dawn, Uṣas is not only celebrated for bringing light from darkness. She is also petitioned to grant long life, as she is a constant reminder of people's limited time on earth." David Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 8.

10. All Vedic hymns are drawn from *The Rigveda: The Earliest Religious Poetry of India*, trans. Stephanie W. Jamison and Joel P. Brereton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). The title of *The Ṛg Veda* is abbreviated as "RV" for citation purposes.

11. This is in line with the Heraclitus fragment 67: "God is day night [*o theos hemerē euphronē*], winter summer, war peace, satiety hunger; he undergoes alterations in the way that fire, when it is mixed with spices, is named according to the scent of each of them." G. S. Kirk and J. E. Raven, *The Presocratic Philosophers: A Critical History with a Selection of Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), p. 191.

12. For a detailed exegesis of this phrase, refer to Jean-Louis Chrétien, *L'Intelligence du Feu* (Paris: Bayard, 2003).

13. “What was the wood, and what the tree from which they carved out heaven and earth, the two that stand together, unageing and enduring? But the days, the many dawns, grow old” (10.31(857).7).

14. Stephanie W. Jamison and Joel P. Brereton, “Mitra and Varuna,” in *The Rigveda: The Earliest Religious Poetry of India*, trans. Stephanie W. Jamison and Joel P. Brereton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 752.

15. Karl Hoffmann, *Aufsätze sur Indoiranistik*, vol. 3, ed. S. Glauch, R. Plath, and S. Ziegler (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1992), p. 723.

16. Refer to RV 1.83.5. See also Stephanie W. Jamison and Joel P. Brereton, “The Soma Carts,” in *The Rigveda: The Earliest Religious Poetry of India*, trans. Stephanie W. Jamison and Joel P. Brereton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 1388.

17. Wendy Doniger, *On Hinduism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 277–278.

18. “What they [the authors of early Hindu texts, MM] feared most of all was what they called *punar mrityu*, recurrent death: how terrible to go on getting old and dying, over and over again. Re-death may have meant merely a series of ritual deaths within a natural lifespan, but it may have foreshadowed an actual series of rebirths and re-deaths.” Doniger, *On Hinduism*, p. 92.

19. All citations from the *Upaniṣads* are drawn from the Patrick Olivelle translation: *The Early Upaniṣads: Annotated Text and Translation*, trans. and ed. Patrick Olivelle (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). In the Graeco-Egyptian context, the riddle of the sphinx resonates with the Upaniṣadic question of the moon. Both pertain, in one way or another, to the problem of self-knowledge and to matters of life and death.

20. Doniger, *On Hinduism*, p. 92.

21. It could well be the case that *puruṣa* and *ātman* are used interchangeably. See P. T. Raju, *Structural Depths of Indian Thought* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1985), p. 29.

22. Chapple, “The Setting of *The Bhagavad Gītā*,” p. 9. I wonder to what extent the Hebrew root *b.r.ā.*, meaning “to create” and appearing as the first verb in the Hebrew Bible, is cognate with the Sanskrit one.

23. This thought presages Nietzsche’s famous assertion that “there is no ‘being’ behind the deed, its effect and what becomes of it; ‘the doer’ is invented as an afterthought—the doing is everything.” Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 26.

24. See the note by Chappel in *The Bhagavad Gītā*, p. 351.

25. This allusion is important in light of the phoenix’s connection to the Great Year or cosmic seasonality. As the *Bhagavad Gītā* proclaims, “They who know that the day of Brahmā extends as far as a thousand yugas, and that the night of Brahma ends only in a thousand yugas; they are men who know day and night” (8.17). *Yuga* is an age of the world, a formative reference for Schelling. A thousand *yugas* last 4,320,000,000 years. Refer to the note by Chappel in *The Bhagavad Gītā*, p. 365.

26. Juergen Mittelstrass, "Nature and Science in the Renaissance," in *Metaphysics and Philosophy of Science in the 17th and 18th Centuries: Essays in Honor of Gerd Buchdahl*, ed. R. S. Woolhouse (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1988), pp. 25ff.
27. Indeed, this is the only time that references to a machine or a mechanism are made in the *Bhagavad Gītā*.

## CHAPTER 7

1. Joseph Nigg, *The Phoenix: An Unnatural Biography of a Mystical Beast* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), p. 19.
2. "*Fenghuang* [Chinese mythology]," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, https://www.britannica.com/topic/fenghuang.
3. For more on this distinction, see Jean-Pierre Diény, "Le Fenghuang et le Phénix," *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie*, 5 (1989–1990): pp. 1–13.
4. While writing this text, I was listening, on a loop, to Jean-Philippe Rameau's "Le rappel des oiseaux" in an incomparable rendition by Víkingur Ólafsson.
5. *Fantastic Creatures of the Mountains and Seas: A Chinese Classic*, trans. Howard Goldblatt (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2021).
6. Burton Watson, "Introduction," in *The Analects of Confucius*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), p. 11.
7. All translations of the *Analects* refer to *The Analects of Confucius*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).
8. Diény, "Le Fenghuang et le Phénix," p. 10.
9. Watson's bewildered commentary in a footnote to this passage is, "One of the most famous passages in the *Analects*. What does it mean?" *The Analects of Confucius*, p. 62n9].
10. Huang Yushun, *Life Confucianism as a New Philosophy: Love and Thought*, trans. Xuening Li and Meirong Yan (Los Angeles: Bridge21, 2020), p. 270.
11. Lee Dian Rainey, *Confucius and Confucianism: The Essentials* (Chichester, UK: Wiley, 2010), p. 164.
12. Todd Cameron Thacker, "*Sheng sheng*," in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Confucianism*, ed. Xinzhong Yao (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 546.
13. Watson, "Introduction," p. 9.
14. Watson, "Introduction," p. 9.
15. Confucius, *Analects, with Selections from Traditional Commentaries*, trans. Edward Slingerland (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2003), p. 64.
16. Needless to say, rescue from forgetting and, therefore, from nonbeing was also the Socratic mission in Plato's *Republic*. "And so, Glaucon, the tale was saved, as the saying is, and was not

lost [*muthos esōthē kai ouk apōleto*]. And it will save us if we believe it," (621b-c). Their scope exceeding the myth of Er about the reincarnations of the souls of dead heroes, these words hold for the vital impetus of Plato's thought, with the paradoxical twist that what is saved is *muthos*, rather than *logos*.

17. See also Zisi's "The Doctrine of the Mean," *Zhongyong* 13.

18. Here is how Watson explains the uniquely Confucian conception of the Way, or *dao*: "In the *Analects*, Confucius frequently employs the term *dao*, which means 'a path or a way' and, by extension, 'a method of doing things.' In some contexts, such as the writings of the Daoist school, the word has more metaphysical connotations. But in Confucius's pronouncements, it refers specifically to the characteristics of peaceful, benevolent, and culturally distinguished government typical of the periods of ideal rule, particularly that of the early years of the Zhou dynasty" (Watson, "Introduction," pp. 8–9). Nevertheless, as I have already succinctly argued, contrasts between metaphysical and practical/cultural/political conceptions are strained with regard to ancient philosophical traditions, not least Confucianism. There will always be a metaphysical foundation to ancient political thought, and, vice versa, ancient metaphysics is not easily distinguishable from ancient political notions.

19. Nigg, *The Phoenix*, p. 26.

20. Confucius, *The Confucian Odes: The Classical Anthology Defined by Confucius*, trans. Ezra Pound (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959), p. 3.

21. For the background and interpretation of this work, see *Focusing the Familiar: A Translation and Philosophical Interpretation of the* Zhongyong, ed. Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001). Refer also to *Daxue and Zhongyong: Bilingual Edition*, trans. Ian Johnston and Wang Ping (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2012).

22. All references to the *Book of Changes* are drawn from *The I Ching, or Book of Changes*, trans. Cary F. Baynes (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), p. 10.

23. Of course, this is only a hypothetical division, given *Zhongyong* 26: "The *dao* of heaven and earth may be thoroughly described in a single phrase: As a thing, it possesses no duality, hence the way it gives birth to things cannot be fathomed. The *dao* of heaven and earth is broad, is deep, is high, is bright, is distant, is enduring."

24. This is as much the case in Western as in Chinese traditions. Consult Pauline C. Lee, *Li Zhi, Confucianism and the Virtue of Desire* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2012), particularly chapter 5, "Genuineness," pp. 101–114.

25. "It should by now be evident that Confucius's view of truth and truthfulness is quite different from empiricist 'referentialism,' or a 'correspondence theory' of truth. It is closer to Western ideas of truth as 'coherence' (Leibniz, Spinoza, Hegel, and F. H. Bradley), 'practice' (C. S. Pierce, William James, and John Dewey), and 'performance' (J. L. Austin, P. F. Strawson)." Christopher Hancock, *Christianity and Confucianism: Culture, Faith, and Politics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2022), p. 336.

26. For the translation of *The Great Learning*, I have relied on Daniel Gardner, *The Four Books: The Basic Teachings of the Later Confucian Tradition* (London: Hackett, 2007).

27. Kathryn A. Lowry, *The Tapestry of Popular Songs in 16th- and 17th-Century China: Reading, Imitation, and Desire* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), p. 222.

28. So, Legge adds to the opening words of the *Great Learning* traditional commentary from Tai Jia, a king from the Shang dynasty: “In the Tai Chia, it is said, ‘He contemplated and studied the illustrious decrees of Heaven.’” Peter Liebregts, *Ezra Pound and Neoplatonism* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2004), p. 240. A simpler translation would be, “Regard this bright mandate of Tian.” The decrees of Tian—heaven, the sky—are naturally luminous. Thus the luminosity of inborn virtue, cultivated here below as and at the root, emanates from the celestial sphere.

29. Gardner, *The Four Books*, p. 7.

30. Joseph A. Adler, “Introduction,” in Zhu Xi, *The Original Meaning of the Yijing: Commentary on the Scripture of Change*, trans. and ed. Joseph A. Adler (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), p. 23.

31. Confucius, *The Confucian Odes*, p. 143.

32. Confucius, *The Confucian Odes*, p. 139.

33. All renditions of the “Great Appendix” are from Zhu Xi, *The Original Meaning of the Yijing*.

34. In a similar blend of ontology and ethics, it is said that “the great virtue of heaven and earth is life [生, *shēng*]” (B.1.10.).

35. *Shēng shēng bu xi* “means that the very nature of cosmos is processive in nature, and that to have a cosmos means the generation of new and novel things and events.” John Berthrong, *Expanding Process: Exploring Philosophical and Theological Transformations in China and the West* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2008), p. 69. Nevertheless, according to the original phrase, the generativity of the cosmos—the generativity that *is* the cosmos—is neither haphazard nor committed to the qualitatively new, but to generation as regeneration, to birthing as a ceaseless rebirthing.

36. Yushun, *Life Confucianism as a New Philosophy*, p. 82.

37. Jingyi Liu, “Questioning Metaphysics,” in *A World in Discourse: Converging and Diverging Expressions of Value*, ed. Sydney Morrow and Matthew Izor (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), p. 55.

38. *The I Ching, or Book of Changes*, p. 97.

39. Adler, “Introduction,” p. 23.

40. Refer to Sun Xiangcheng, “Sheng-Sheng (生生) as Being-Between-Generations: On the Existential Structure of Confucian Ethics,” *Yearbook for Eastern and Western Philosophy*, 4 (2019), pp. 119–149.

## CHAPTER 8

1. George Young, *The Russian Cosmists: The Esoteric Futurism of Nikolai Fedorov and His Followers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 46–47.
2. Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Perennial Classics, 2001), p. 4.
3. N. F. Fedorov, "Vopros o vosstanovlenii vsemirnogo rodstva. *Sobor*," in N. F. Fedorov, *Collected Works*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Progress, 1995), p. 315. This and all subsequent translations of the Russian text are mine.
4. Fedorov, "Vopros o vosstanovlenii vsemirnogo rodstva. *Sobor*," p. 316.
5. Fedorov, "Vopros o vosstanovlenii vsemirnogo rodstva. *Sobor*," p. 330.
6. N. F. Fedorov, "Vopros o bratstve ili rodstve . . . ," in N. F. Fedorov, *Collected Works*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Progress, 1995), p. 40.
7. Fedorov, "Vopros o bratstve ili rodstve . . . ," p. 97. On the autotrophic project of Russian cosmism, see A. D. Moskovchenko, *Russkiy kosmism: Avtotrofnoe chelovechestvo buduschego* (Tomsk: TUSURA, 2012).
8. Fedorov, "Vopros o bratstve ili rodstve . . . ," p. 41.
9. Fedorov, "Vopros o bratstve ili rodstve . . . ," p. 81.
10. Fedorov, "Vopros o bratstve ili rodstve . . . ," p. 43.
11. Fedorov, "Vopros o bratstve ili rodstve . . . ," p. 45.
12. Fedorov, "Filosofia kak vyrazhenie nerodstvennosti i rodstvo." In N. F. Fedorov, *Collected Works*, vol. 3 (Moscow: Traditsiya, 1997), p. 253.
13. Fedorov, "Filosofia kak vyrazhenie nerodstvennosti I rodstvo," p. 254. Elsewhere, Fedorov concludes: "the whole of philosophy is a representation of clan being [*rodovogo byta*] in an estranged form" (Fedorov, "Vopros o bratstve ili rodstve . . . ," p. 96).
14. Refer to Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham, NC & London: Duke University Press, 2016).
15. N.F. Fedorov, "Roditeli i voskresiteli." In N. F. Fedorov, *Collected Works*, Vol. II (Moscow: Progress, 1995), p. 259.
16. Fedorov, "Roditeli i voskresiteli," pp. 259–260.
17. Fedorov, "Roditeli i voskresiteli," p. 260.
18. Fedorov, "Vopros o bratstve ili rodstve . . . ," p. 109.
19. Fedorov, "Vopros o bratstve ili rodstve . . . ," p. 82.
20. Fedorov, "Vopros o bratstve ili rodstve . . . ," p. 107.
21. Fedorov, "Vopros o bratstve ili rodstve . . . ," pp. 108–109.

22. Fedorov, "K voprosu o vremeni . . . ," in N. F. Fedorov, *Collected Works*, vol. 3 (Moscow: Traditsiya, 1997), p. 360.

23. Fedorov, "K voprosu o vremeni . . . ," p. 360.

24. Fedorov, "Vopros o bratstve ili rodstve . . . ," p. 41. On this point, Dipesh Chakrabarty presents an alternative view: "My point here depends on the validity of a distinction often made between a necessary and a logical relationship between two entities and a contingent and historical relationship between the same. Making this distinction allows me to make room within my framework for planetary processes that work regardless of how human societies are internally structured. The surface temperature of the planet depends on the extent of greenhouse gasses emitted into the atmosphere. The atmosphere does not care whether the gases come from a massive volcanic eruption or internally unjust human societies." Dipesh Chakrabarty, *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021), p. 57. Further down in this chapter, we will see that another Russian cosmist, Aleksandr Svyatogor, posits his ideal of creative humanity, precisely, in terms of a cultural, linguistic, political, and practical "volcanism."

25. Fedorov, "Vopros o bratstve ili rodstve . . . ," p. 101.

26. Fedorov, "Vopros o bratstve ili rodstve . . . ," p. 91.

27. Fedorov, "Vopros o bratstve ili rodstve . . . ," p. 44.

28. Fedorov, "Vopros o bratstve ili rodstve . . . ," p. 85.

29. Fedorov, "Vopros o bratstve ili rodstve . . . ," p. 89.

30. Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, "Introduction," in *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture*, ed. Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), p. 11. A similar critique was already leveled in the Soviet Union in the 1960s and 1970s by Pobisk Kuznetzov.

31. Fedorov, "Vopros o bratstve ili rodstve . . . ," p. 71.

32. Fedorov, "Vopros o bratstve ili rodstve . . . ," p. 91.

33. Fedorov, "Vopros o bratstve ili rodstve . . . ," p. 99.

34. Fedorov, "Vopros o bratstve ili rodstve . . . ," p. 100.

35. Fedorov, "Vopros o vosstanovlenii vsemirnogo rodstva. *Sobor*," p. 318.

36. N. F. Fedorov, "Bessmertie kak privilegiya sverkhchelovekov," in N. F. Fedorov, *Collected Works*, vol. 2 (Moscow: Progress, 1995), p. 136.

37. Fedorov, "Bessmertie kak privilegiya sverkhchelovekov," p. 138.

38. Fedorov, "Vopros o bratstve ili rodstve . . . ," p. 101.

39. Fedorov, "Vopros o bratstve ili rodstve . . . ," p. 106.

40. Fedorov, "Vopros o vosstanovlenii vsemirnogo rodstva. *Sobor*," p. 324.

41. Boris Groys, "Russkiy kosmizm: biopolitika bessmertiya," in *Russkiy Kosmizm: Antologiya*, ed. Boris Groys (Moscow: Ad Marginem Press, 2015), p. 6.

42. Aleksandr Svyatogor, *Poetica, Biokosmizm, (A)teologia*, ed. Evgeniy Kurchinov (Moscow: Common place, 2017), p. 56. I thank the editor of Svyatogor's collected writings, Evgeniy Kuchinov, for sharing these and other unique archival materials with me. This and all subsequent translations of the Russian text are mine.

43. Svyatogor, *Poetica, Biokosmizm, (A)teologia*, p. 44.

44. Svyatogor, *Poetica, Biokosmizm, (A)teologia*, p. 53.

45. Svyatogor, *Poetica, Biokosmizm, (A)teologia*, pp. 184–185.

46. Svyatogor, *Poetica, Biokosmizm, (A)teologia*, p. 70.

47. Svyatogor, *Poetica, Biokosmizm, (A)teologia*, p. 77.

48. In Judaism, *ḥayyot esh* is a similar notion of "fiery beings" or "fiery animals." Refer to Babylonian Talmud (BT), *Ḥagigah* 13a-b and *Zohar* 2.82a.

49. Svyatogor, *Poetica, Biokosmizm, (A)teologia*, p. 71.

50. Svyatogor, *Poetica, Biokosmizm, (A)teologia*, p. 131.

51. Svyatogor, *Poetica, Biokosmizm, (A)teologia*, p. 149.

52. Svyatogor, *Poetica, Biokosmizm, (A)teologia*, p. 149.

53. Svyatogor, *Poetica, Biokosmizm, (A)teologia*, p. 143. It is worth noting that Svyatogor defines Fedorov's teaching as "uncritical unitary anarchism," *Poetica, Biokosmizm, (A)teologia*, p. 131.

54. Svyatogor, *Poetica, Biokosmizm, (A)teologia*, p. 144.

55. Svyatogor, *Poetica, Biokosmizm, (A)teologia*, p. 159.

56. Olga Burenina-Petrova, "Bessmertie cheloveka i telesnye metamorfozy v tvorchestve anarcho-biokosmistov," *Quaestio Rossica* 7, no. 1 (2019), p. 223.

57. Svyatogor, *Poetica, Biokosmizm, (A)teologia*, p. 159.

58. Svyatogor, *Poetica, Biokosmizm, (A)teologia*, p. 25.

59. Svyatogor, *Poetica, Biokosmizm, (A)teologia*, p. 117.

60. Svyatogor, *Poetica, Biokosmizm, (A)teologia*, p. 160.

61. Svyatogor, *Poetica, Biokosmizm, (A)teologia*, p. 92.

62. Svyatogor, *Poetica, Biokosmizm, (A)teologia*, p. 97.

63. Evgeniy Kurchatov, "Predislovie," in *Poetica, Biokosmizm, (A)teologia*, ed. Evgeniy Kurchinov (Moscow: Common Place, 2017), p. 11.

64. Svyatogor, *Poetica, Biokosmizm, (A)teologia*, p. 88.

65. Svyatogor, *Poetica, Biokosmizm, (A)teologia*, p. 68.

66. Svyatogor, *Poetica, Biokosmizm, (A)teologia*, p. 104.

67. Svyatogor, *Poetica, Biokosmizm, (A)teologia*, p. 104.

68. Svyatogor, *Poetica, Biokosmizm, (A)teologia*, p. 68.

69. Svyatogor, *Poetica, Biokosmizm, (A)teologia*, pp. 105, 106.

70. Svyatogor, *Poetica, Biokosmizm, (A)teologia*, p. 81.

71. Aleksandr Svyatogor, “Bessmert’ya komitety,” in *Universal*, 3–4, 1921, pp. 15–16.

72. Svyatogor, *Poetica, Biokosmizm, (A)teologia*, p. 27.

## CHAPTER 9

1. Roel Van den Broek, *The Myth of the Phoenix According to Classical and Early Christian Traditions* (Leiden: Brill, 1972), p. 181.

2. Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, trans. Averil Cameron and Stuart G. Hall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 181.

3. Laurence Gosserez, “Figurations Latines du Phénix de l’élégie érotique à l’épitaphe,” in *Le Phénix et son autre: Poétique d’un mythe des origines au XVI siècle*, ed. Laurence Gosserez (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2013), p. 50.

4. “The appearance of a new ruler on the scene and the beginning of a new era were seen as a return to the Golden Age, the fortunate state of things that prevailed at the beginning of the Great Year. This is clearly shown by the symbolism of the phoenix on a number of coins of Roman emperors” (van den Broek, *The Myth of the Phoenix*, p. 105).

5. van den Broek, *The Myth of the Phoenix*, pp. 115–116; Nigg, *The Phoenix*, pp. 54–55.

6. Joseph Nigg, *The Phoenix: An Unnatural Biography of a Mystical Beast* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), p. 28. Compare this crown to the rayed, radiant nimbus traditionally depicted around the phoenix’s head on Roman coins, epitaphs, and in other iconographic contexts. In the second century CE, Greek writer Achilles Tatius refers to the phoenix’s headpiece as “the crown of feathers [which] is an image of the sun” (in van den Broek, *The Myth of the Phoenix*, p. 235n3).

7. Nigg, *The Phoenix*, p. 21.

8. In van den Broek, *The Myth of the Phoenix*, p. 417.

9. Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), p. 413. The words *unica phoenix* are, of course, borrowed from Lactantius.

10. Elizabeth I, *Elizabeth I: Collected Works*, ed. Leah Marcus et al. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 326.

11. Refer to Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies*, p. 388n245.

12. “Once I am [was] married already to the Realm of England when I was crowned with this ring, which I bear continually in token thereof. Howsoever it be, so long as I live, I shall be queen of England; when I am dead, they shall succeed that has most right. . . . I am sworn when I was married to the Realm not to alter the laws of it” (Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, p. 65).

13. Shakespeare supports this line of thinking in *Henry VIII*: "Nor shall this peace sleep with her: but as when / The bird of wonder dies, the maiden phoenix, / Her ashes new create another heir, / As great in admiration as herself" (5.5).

14. *The Parliamentary or Constitutional History of England*, vol. 4 (London: Thomas Osborne, 1751), p. 67.

15. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, p. 385.

16. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, p. 387.

17. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, p. 388.

18. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, p. 385.

19. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, p. 394.

20. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, p. 387.

21. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, p. 389.

22. Commenting on Kantorowicz's analyses, Eric Santer calls this plane "royal physiology": "Much of the rest of Kantorowicz's study focuses on the ways these various virtual realities—dynasty, crown, dignity—were seen to enter into the constitution of the 'royal physiology,' which could then serve as the linchpin and the focal point guaranteeing the consistency and *undying nature* of the body politic." Ernst Kantorowicz, *The Royal Remains: The People's Two Bodies and the Endgames of Sovereignty* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), p. 42.

23. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, p. 391.

24. When in an interview Günter Gauss says, "I consider you to be a philosopher," Arendt immediately interrupts with a quip, "Well, I can't help that, but in my opinion I am not. In my opinion, I have said good-bye to philosophy once and for all. As you know, I studied philosophy, but that does not mean that I stayed with it." Hannah Arendt, *Essays in Understanding, 1930–1954: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1994), p. 2.

25. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 9. A sharp contrast between natality and mortality might not apply to the onto-theological rendering of these terms. As Kantorowicz reminds us, "The *natalicium* of saints and martyrs was the day of their death, and not their natural birthday." Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, p. 391n255.

26. In this sense, natality is not reducible to the framework of biologism. See, for instance, Theodore Kisiel, "Rhetoric, Politics, Romance: Arendt and Heidegger, 1924–26," in *Extreme Beauty*, ed. James E. Swearingen and Joanne Cutting-Gray (London: Continuum, 2002), pp. 94–109.

27. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, pp. 176–177.

28. The time span separating the first from the second birth does not matter, or matters little. Seyla Benhabib identifies the second birth with the beginning of the child's linguistic development, but this contraction of the distance between the first and the second birth does not invalidate the structure of repetition and rebirth I am exploring here: "The birth of the human infant has a biological as well as a psychic-social dimension. The human infant becomes a self by learning speech and action in the human community into which it is born. Through this process, the infant also becomes an individual, that is, the unique initiator of these words and deeds, the carrier of this life story." Seyla Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernity of Hannah Arendt* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), p. 109.

29. "To avoid misunderstanding: the human condition is not the same as human nature, and the sum total of human activities and capabilities which correspond to the human condition does not constitute anything like human nature." Arendt, *The Human Condition*, pp. 9–10.

30. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 62.

31. This, according to Lenin, is the conditio sine qua non of "communists who have no illusions." Embodying the Leninist phoenix, they who "do not give way to despondency, and who preserve their strength and flexibility 'to begin from the beginning' over and over again in approaching an extremely difficult task, are not doomed (and in all probability will not perish)." V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 33: August 1921–March 1923 (Moscow: Progress, 1980), p. 203.

32. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, pp. 177–178.

33. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 177.

34. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, new ed. (London: Harcourt, Brace, 1979), p. 465, emphasis added. In *Hannah Arendt and Human Rights: The Predicament of Common Responsibility* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), Peg Birmingham takes exception to a reading of the relation of the first birth to the second on the basis of the relation of potentiality to actuality (pp. 83ff). It is true that Arendt is thinking more along the lines of existential possibility than the classical teleology of the potential and the actual; however, her language, operating with potentialities, is not to be so easily dismissed.

35. Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Viking Press, 1961), p. 196.

36. Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, vol. 2: *Willing*, one-volume ed. (London: Harcourt, Brace, 1978), p. 109.

37. Refer to *Bereshith Rabbah* 19.5; van den Broek, *The Myth of the Phoenix*, p. 59. Kantorowicz confirms that the "Rabbinic tradition, for example, ascribed to the bird immortality because it refused to share in Eve's sin by tasting of the forbidden fruit, and therewith preserved its paradisean state of innocence." Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, p. 395.

38. Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, pp. 41–42.

39. Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, p. 42.

40. Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, p. 43.
41. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, pp. 18–19.
42. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 246.
43. Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, vol. 1: *Thinking*, one-volume ed. (London: Harcourt, Brace, 1978), p. 203.
44. Arendt, *Essays in Understanding*, p. 341.
45. Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, p. 168.
46. Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, p. 168.
47. Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, p. 168.
48. Anne O'Byrne accepts the prevalent view, according to which Arendt's thought is nondialectical: "What keeps Arendt's thought together *and* moving is the fact that it is a historical thinking that eschews both Hegelian dialectic and any Kantian notion that history is progressing toward perfection or completion." Anne O'Byrne, *Natality and Finitude* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), p. 79. Nevertheless, some of the speculative reversals that happen at crucial junctions in Arendt's thought are, properly speaking, dialectical.
49. It is this problem of (metaphysically framed) spontaneity that prompts Steve Buckler to write that, in Arendt's thought, "spontaneous foundational agency would seem akin to lifting ourselves up by our own bootstraps. Spontaneity remains the central problem and an absolute must be found somewhere, whether in the form of the general will, natural law, or, later, the logic of history." Rather than refocus the problem in postmetaphysical terms, Buckler follows Arendt, who, in this, follows Heidegger, in identifying philosophy tout court with metaphysics. Hence, for Arendt, this problem "may be insoluble from a philosophical point of view, but she does not see it as a philosophical question; it is rather wholly a political one." Steve Buckler, *Hannah Arendt and Political Theory: Challenging the Tradition* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), p. 118.
50. Hannah Arendt, *The Promise of Politics* (New York: Schocken Books, 2005), p. 127.
51. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, pp. 96–97.
52. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 98.
53. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 173.
54. Arendt, *Life of the Mind*, vol. 2, p. 212.
55. While Rome was "the paradigmatic example of a successful foundation," "it was of the greatest importance . . . to find that even the foundation of Rome, as the Romans themselves had understood it, was not an absolutely new beginning. According to Virgil, it was the resurgence of Troy and the re-establishment of a city-state that had preceded Rome." Arendt, *Life of the Mind*, vol. 2, pp. 211–212).
56. Arendt, *Life of the Mind*, vol. 2, p. 212.
57. Arendt, *Life of the Mind*, vol. 2, p. 212.

58. Quoted in L. B. T. Houghton, *Virgil's Fourth Eclogue in the Italian Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), p. 60.

59. *The Great Seal of the United States* (Washington, DC: US Department of State, 2003), p. 4, https://2009-2017.state.gov/documents/organization/27807.pdf.

60. Arendt, *Life of the Mind*, vol. 2, p. 193.

61. Arendt, *Life of the Mind*, vol. 2, p. 211.

## AFTERWORD

1. Jorge Luis Borges, "The Cult of the Phoenix," in *Collected Fictions*, trans. Andrew Hurley (London: Penguin Books, 1999), p. 171.

2. Borges, "The Cult of the Phoenix," p. 173.

3. Jean-Luc Nancy, "A Finite Thinking," in *A Finite Thinking*, ed. Simon Sparks (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 27.

4. Nancy, "A Finite Thinking," p. 27.

5. *The Book of Common Prayer: The Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662*, ed. Brian Cummings (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 172.