



## Michel Serres Foundation for the Natural Contract

### **Acting for the *Natural Contract* - Acting in the *Natural Contract***

The explosion, since the 1950s, of interactions between economic activities and natural processes has altered the planet's major biogeochemical cycles, affecting the dynamics of the System that human societies form with the Earth. The continued growth on which the political viability of the global socio-economic system depends disrupts the global physical, chemical and biological conditions of the ecosystems that have regulated the human environment for millennia. However, the biosphere is as much the condition as the product of the emergence of all the forms of life that constitute it. To "live well" within the ecological limits of the planet, production and consumption systems, which are the root cause of environmental and climatic pressures, must therefore evolve. *These transformations imply profound changes in dominant institutions, practices, technologies, policies, lifestyles and ways of thinking because they challenge the conventional separation established by modernity between humanity and nature.*

In 1990, Michel Serres published the *Natural Contract* to meet these conditions, which were unprecedented in the history of humanity. By recognizing all natural beings as subjects of law, the *Natural Contract* imagines a symbiotic organization of interactions between humans and other living beings to learn to inhabit the new Earth that is being born before our eyes. The *Natural Contract* does not only offer us a renewed interpretation of our earthly condition. It is literally part of the world whose integrity it works to preserve. *The Natural Contract is "performative", because the actions it inspires and enlightens contribute directly to*

*the maintenance of the Earth System under conditions favourable to the quality and sustainability of human habitats.*

Human communities are indeed ecological communities whose metabolism is simultaneously cultural, social, biological and physical. Their government must also take care of the common world they compose with the living diversity that populates the earth's habitat. The line of demarcation that thus fades between local and global issues reveals the socio-ecological solidarity of all territories whose interdependence manifests the uniqueness, consistency and vulnerability of the Earth. *The challenge now is to integrate this ecosystem understanding of human existence into cultural, socio-political and economic organizations.*

Why would it be easier to predict the violent collapse of "thermo-industrial civilization" than to conceive that we could collectively, both locally and globally, peacefully establish institutional recognition of the value inherent in all forms of life? We can use the knowledge and powers of our societies to promote the development and diffusion of practices that are conducive to the regeneration of the ecosystems on which we depend. This transformation seems unlikely only insofar as it results from a logical break with prevailing and circulating opinions. Faced with the danger of a nature which, in reaction to the prodigious change in the scale of human intervention powers, behaves in a new and unpredictable way, the Natural Contract finds its intelligibility in itself, in the fertility of the future that its implementation makes possible. *By encouraging us to imagine institutions to "represent seawater or mountain glaciers", to take into account, in other words, the fundamentally ecological meaning of human affairs, it awakens us to the possibility of negotiating peace with the Earth, allowing everyone to contribute to increasing the inclusive health (the CommonHealth) of natural environments, societies and people.*

The Natural Contract provides a framework for understanding the systemic links between a civilization and its environment, i.e. between human health, political health and ecological health. It thus provides the principles for founding public institutions for a fair transition to an ecologically and socially supportive society by bringing together the metamorphoses inspired by the experimentation with

relationships to life that are different from those that are leading us to a catastrophe unlike any we have seen to date.

It is not enough to reduce or compensate for the impacts of economic activities on natural environments. Existing ecological cost assessment systems (impact studies, safety standards, etc.) make it socially acceptable to artificially create environments and overexploit resources. This is why destruction is accelerating at the same time as information and scientific warnings about the risks of collapse of global ecosystems are becoming commonplace. The Foundation for the Natural Contract commits itself to work not only for the conservation and preservation but also for the restoration, regeneration and enhancement of the ecological resources that constitute the common goods on which the long-term fulfillment of human needs depends.

The imprecision of the concept of "sustainability", which makes, at best, a vision or transition to 2050 or 2100 a kind of goal, as if the existence of the world beyond that period was not a matter of concern, allows for organized irresponsibility on the consequences of the dominant development model. The significance, on the scale of the planet's major biogeochemical and bioclimatic cycles, of the environmental transformations resulting from the Industrial Revolution is measured in tens of thousands of years. The present generations must ensure precisely that the resources necessary for the common health of living environments, of the people and of the societies they compose, are guaranteed to succeeding generations by taking due account of the long duration of the evolution of living organisms.

In order to fully assess the meaning of socio-economic and political decisions, it is also necessary to consider, as rigorously as possible, their impact on other ecological communities within the framework of a right that does not separate people from the Earth. To move from parasitism to symbiosis, the Foundation for the Natural Contract defends a right free of the exclusive privileges and properties that humans claim for themselves over the world and its wealth. It thus paves the way for legal recognition of the integrity of natural entities (forests, rivers, glaciers, lakes, mountains, etc.) with regard to the specific characteristics of different living territories where people live.

It is clear, finally, that we are not acting in coherence with what we know. To remedy the neglect of technosciences whose objectivity is based on distance and the desire for control, and to break with the hyperspecialization of tasks and disciplines that tears apart nature and makes us lose sight of the concern for the unity, uniqueness and vulnerability of the world, we must create conditions favourable to the emergence of educational models based on a peaceful relationship with the Earth. To learn to use natural resources well rather than exploit them, to put them at the service of collective needs rather than individual profits, to renew them rather than consume them, the Foundation for the Natural Contract is a living school that gives place to processes of knowledge resulting from the listening and cooperation of all the actors of society.

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