

# The creativity of creatures in a coherent cosmos

## Reading Hedwig Conrad-Martius in the direction of eco-phenomenology

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- 1 Hedwig Conrad-Martius, one of the earliest students of Edmund Husserl and an important but underappreciated phenomenologist, is one of the very few phenomenological thinkers to take the natural sciences seriously and to focus her phenomenological investigations on physical and natural phenomena, such as plants, animals, and the cosmos as a whole.<sup>1</sup> Angela Ales Bello calls her “the leading exponent of the philosophy of nature in the whole school of phenomenology.”<sup>2</sup> Almost none of her work is translated into English, and she is frequently overlooked even in historical accounts of phenomenology, yet not only is she a significant phenomenological thinker in her own right, but her work also has the potential to make provocative and fruitful contributions to the emerging field of eco-phenomenology or environmental philosophy more broadly. From her earliest texts to her

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1 Together with her husband Theodor Conrad, Hedwig Conrad-Martius was at the center of a group of phenomenological thinkers that included Jean Héring, Hans Lipps, Alexandre Koyré, and Edith Stein, many of whom considered her an important mentor. The group dispersed after Reinach was killed in World War I and Husserl moved on to Freiburg, although several of them continued to meet at the apple farm in Bergzabern that the Conrads purchased in order to have sufficient financial independence for Conrad-Martius to continue her philosophical work after her stymied attempts to pursue a Habilitation. Joachim Feldes argues that this group was systematically marginalized as interpreters of Husserl or representatives of phenomenology because of their religious interests (and perhaps because its membership included several prominent women like Conrad-Martius, Edith Stein, and later Gerda Walther). See Joachim Feldes, *Das Phänomenologenheim*.

2 Angela Ales Bello, “What is Life?,” 24.

final works, Conrad-Martius is dedicated to investigating the being of plants, animals, the human, and various other inhabitants of the cosmos in phenomenological terms.<sup>3</sup> She read widely in the natural sciences and discussed the biology, geology, and physics of her day in great detail, in order to develop a phenomenology of nature or the cosmos that would take scientific insights seriously at the highest and most rigorous level. Not only did she argue vigorously against the social Darwinism of National Socialism, but above all she sought to provide an ontological and metaphysical grounding for the natural sciences that would undergird their empirical approach. Although she wrote long before the current ecological crises became obvious and does not directly engage environmental questions, her work has profound ecological ramifications. Her reflections on the nature of plants, animals, and humans, her discussions of the creativity of all natural beings, and her convictions about the coherence and meaningfulness of the cosmos not only display interesting areas of overlap with claims being made by deep ecologists, ecofeminists, eco-phenomenologists, new materialists, and other ecologically oriented philosophies, but may, indeed, be able to address some of the intractable problems and persistent critiques many of these approaches face, such as the question of the intrinsic value of the other-than-human, the overcoming of pernicious forms of dualism, or the worldview best suited to inspire ecological action.

The present article will lay out the phenomenological cosmology of the philosophical work of Conrad-Martius in order to reveal its potential for ecological debate.<sup>4</sup> The argument will proceed in five

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3 For more detailed accounts of her phenomenology as a whole, see James G. Hart, *Hedwig Conrad-Martius' Ontological Phenomenology* and Ronny Miron, *Hedwig Conrad-Martius: The Phenomenological Gateway to Reality*. Both books include discussions of her biography and the broader phenomenological context. Miron focuses heavily on the early work, especially *Realontologie*. For a summary account of her ontology, see also Jerzy Machnac, "Treue zur Wirklichkeit: Hedwig Conrad-Martius über Realität."

4 For a more general discussion of her cosmology, see Eberhard Avé-Lallemant, "The Problem of Philosophical Cosmology in the Work of Hedwig Conrad-Martius." He argues that providing a phenomenological basis for cosmology is her most significant achievement (Avé-Lallemant, "The Problem of Philosophical Cosmology," 402).

steps. The first section will highlight her phenomenological presuppositions and show how they apply to her elaboration of a phenomenology of nature, demonstrating that such a phenomenology would be open to ecological concerns.<sup>5</sup> The second section will explore her phenomenological methodology more fully, with special attention to how it is applied to other-than-human phenomena, in order to propose it as a fruitful way of working in eco-phenomenology today. The third section will explain her notion of *entelechy* and its implications for the creativity of each creature, so as to suggest that this creative approach might help overcome some of the controversy surrounding the nature-culture divide and the attribution of agency or vitality to nature. The fourth section will explore her interaction with evolutionary biology and her arguments regarding the relationship between chance and meaning in the development of the species as a potential contribution to the discussions regarding a more holistic worldview. The fifth section will focus on her claims about the meaningfulness of the cosmos as a whole and conclude that her cosmological phenomenology can make a genuine contribution to the ecological debate and is worth exploring further.

- 3 Even an article of this length cannot truly explore all the concrete ways in which her cosmological vision could be put in conversation with contemporary eco-phenomenological thought or could respond to or possibly even resolve particular dilemmas in present environmental philosophy. Obviously, Conrad-Martius does not have all the solutions—she was not even aware of the problem! All the present discussion of her phenomenological cosmology seeks to show is that the potential for such contributions is to be found in her work and that they are worth exploring in

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5 For a discussion of her philosophy of nature that focuses especially on its implications for the human being, see Angela Ales Bello, "The Human Being in the Context of Nature: Philosophical Anthropology and Natural Sciences in Hedwig Conrad-Martius." Bello also shows the ways in which Conrad-Martius tries to find a middle way between Darwinian evolution and Bergsonian vitalism in both this and the earlier piece.

more detail, that is to say, that the philosophical work of Hedwig Conrad-Martius could—and perhaps ought—to become an important conversation partner in contemporary eco-phenomenology.<sup>6</sup>

### ***Ontologische Phänomenologie: The Goals of a Phenomenology of the Natural World***

It is not always easy to ascertain whether Conrad-Martius is a phenomenologist or a metaphysician, partly because she and her colleagues in the Göttingen circle of phenomenologists did not follow Husserl's "transcendental" turn but were actively opposed to it, partly because she speaks of her work in both phenomenological and metaphysical terms.<sup>7</sup> Phenomenology and metaphysics work together in her overall philosophy, and she employs them in essentially collaborative and supportive fashion. A case in point is her earliest published book, *Metaphysische Gespräche* (*Metaphysical Conversations*), which is identified as *metaphysical* by the title, but in the text

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6 That is, this article seeks to open the possibility for conversation; it does not itself undertake the conversation. For one attempt in that direction, which tries to suggest specific ecologically-oriented contributions of her thought to Richard Kearney's phenomenologically-inflected "carnal hermeneutics," see my "The Embodied Human Being in Touch with the World: Richard Kearney and Hedwig Conrad-Martius in Conversation." For main eco-phenomenological sources, see *Eco-Phenomenology: Back to the Earth Itself*, ed. Charles S. Brown and Ted Toadvine; Simon James, *The Presence of Nature: A Study in Phenomenology and Environmental Philosophy*; *Nature and Experience: Phenomenology and the Environment*, ed. Bryan E. Bannon; David Wood, *Reoccupy Earth: Notes toward an Other Beginning*; and David Wood, *Deep Time, Dark Times: On Being Geologically Human*.

7 Although she admits that the transcendental version of phenomenology is probably most faithful to Husserl's mature position, she contends that it abandons important early insights that the Göttingen circle continued to maintain in their work. Her work is definitively opposed to idealist positions, and she describes her approach to phenomenology as "ontological" to distinguish it from two other versions: on the one hand, what she calls Heidegger's "existential" phenomenology and, on the other hand, Fink and Landgrebe's "transcendental" approach to phenomenology, all three flowing from Husserl's original impetus. See several of the essays included in the third volume of her *Schriften zur Philosophie*, especially 370-84, 395-402.

presents itself as a *phenomenological* dialogue.<sup>8</sup> On the one hand, her work is consistently phenomenological, even when she does not explicitly identify it as such. This is especially true of her extensive investigations into the nature or *Wesen* of body, soul, and spirit, or plants, animals, and humans, or even of spirits, light, force, color, materiality, time, space, and much more. Whenever she is concerned with these phenomena or with the distinctions between them, she turns to phenomenology in order to intuit their nature, delineate their characteristics, and unfold their particular ways of being. On the other hand, her work also has profound metaphysical concerns. She not only wants to investigate the nature of light but wants to know why there is light rather than darkness. She not only seeks to explore the nature of humans but is also interested in their origin and destiny. She not only tries to ascertain the being of plants and animals but desires to uncover the causes of the cosmos and its creative principles. Both types of concern work hand-in-hand, and sometimes metaphysical concerns inform the phenomenological investigations.

- 5 Yet, Conrad-Martius distinguishes quite clearly in many places between the respective tasks and methods of phenomenology and metaphysics. She describes phenomenology consistently as the investigation of the being or nature of things. Her goal is to examine the *Wesen* of the natural world and everything within it, both physical and psychic realities. *Wesen* in her work can refer to being as such, to nature or kind, to the core or essence of something, or even to a particular being or entity. In Husserl studies, the term is usually translated as “essence,” but this translation is misleading for Conrad-

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8 Hedwig Conrad-Martius, *Metaphysische Gespräche*; English translation forthcoming with DeGruyter. This text was cited extensively after its publication. For example, it is one of the key sources in Jean Héring's *Phénoménologie et philosophie religieuse. Étude sur la théorie de la connaissance religieuse* (1926), the first phenomenological work published in French. Edith Stein employs it repeatedly as a major source in her own work. I will be relying on this text especially heavily, because it shows her phenomenological way of proceeding most clearly, although I will obviously supplement the analysis with references to her other writings.

Martius, who is using it far more frequently in the sense of “nature” or “kind,” for determining the sort of phenomenon something is, i.e., for investigating its nature or peculiar characteristics that show that it is this kind of phenomenon rather than another one. *Wesen* also frequently means “being,” both in the sense of the being of (all) things (or, again, the *nature* of things) and also in the sense of particular beings (the plural of *Wesen* in German is still *Wesen*; just the article changes to the plural).<sup>9</sup> Conrad-Martius seeks to examine both the reality or nature of the world as such and that of the beings within it. In the latter regard, she is particularly interested in the distinctions between matter, body, soul, and spirit, or between plants, animals, and humans, drawing extensively on insights from biology, geology, physics, and other natural sciences, including providing discussions of the nature of matter, temperature, light, and sound.<sup>10</sup>

Such search for the *Wesen* of things is an essentially ontological project. Not only does Conrad-Martius speak of her own approach to phenomenology as “ontological” in contrast to the later Husserl’s “transcendental” and to Heidegger’s “existential” phenomenology, but she often equates ontology and phenomenology.<sup>11</sup> Phenomenology is most fundamentally concerned with the nature of beings, with what is, not just of our own being but the being of all of reality, including that of

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9 Conrad-Martius uses the following terms and compounds: *Wesen*, *Wesenheit*, *wesenhaft*, *wesenlos*, *Wesenshaftigkeit*, *Wesung*, *Wesenslehre*, *Wesensforschung*, *Wesensphilosophie*, *Wesenserkenntnis*, *Wesensentelechie*, *Wesensort*, *Gestaltswesen*, *Unwesen*, *Wesenswurzel*, *Wesensmerkmal*, *Wesenszusammenhang*, *Wesensrichtung*, *Wesensartung*, *Wesensmoment*, *Wesensblick*, *Wesensschau*, *Wesensverkehrung*, *wesensverschieden*, and *wesen* (as a verb). This obviously poses significant challenges to any translation of her work.

10 See her extensive examinations of all of these topics in shorter essays and several books, including *Realontologie*, *Das Sein*, *Die Zeit*, *Der Raum*, *Der Selbstaufbau der Natur*, *Bios und Psyche*, *Geistseele des Menschen*, etc.

11 E.g., *Schriften zur Philosophie*, Vol. I, 77 (but also many other places). For the most thorough discussion of this, see her early texts *Realontologie* and “Zur Ontologie und Erscheinungslehre der realen Außenwelt,” which in its original form won the 1912 Göttingen University essay competition (competing with around 200 other entries). For a discussion of her ontological phenomenology, besides the books by Hart and Miron already mentioned, see also Alexandra Elisabeth Pfeiffer, “Ontological Phenomenology: The Philosophical Project of Hedwig Conrad-Martius.”

mythical or fantastic beings, such as spirits, to whom she devotes extensive discussion in the *Metaphysical Conversations*, albeit always with the goal of understanding the being of body, soul, and spirit more fully in the most general—or fundamental—sense. Conrad-Martius is strongly critical of what she considers Husserl's abandonment of the reality of the world. Although she recognizes that the *epochē* or the reduction is not meant to eliminate the *existence* of the world, as in traditional idealist approaches, in her view its focus on consciousness becomes so interior that it ultimately never retrieves the world from its brackets and refuses all obligation or possibility to explore the being of the world it had initially set aside. Conrad-Martius thinks that Husserl's phenomenological reduction, by suspending the reality of the world, ends up in a Cartesian-like dead-end of focusing solely on the realm of consciousness itself. In her view, one cannot reach facticity either by a Platonic-idealist elevation above the realm of the world or by an idealistic (Husserlian) bracketing of the affirmation of the reality of the world as it is accessible within consciousness. Consciousness itself must be examined for what it shows us about the "truly real" or the reality of the world.<sup>12</sup> She argues that consciousness always goes beyond itself, and thus a careful examination of consciousness can actually also gain the reality of the world.<sup>13</sup> In order to accomplish this, consciousness itself has to be examined for its ontic dimensions. Consciousness always points beyond itself and thus reveals its own ontic limitations.<sup>14</sup>

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12 Conrad-Martius, *Schriften I*, 22.

13 She asks: "Why would we not turn directly to the specific consciousness of facticity that lies already in the I, instead of bracketing it and thereby lifting the existing [*daseiende*] world from its anchors of being [*Seinsangeln*] and wholly reevaluating it!?" (Conrad-Martius, *Schriften I*, 25)

14 This idea of consciousness going beyond itself is later developed in more detail by Stein, who was deeply influenced by her older mentor and godparent. The idea is the central claim of *Finite and Eternal Being*, but was first developed in her *Akt und Potenz*, which includes a careful discussion of the *Metaphysical Conversations* and which Stein sent to Conrad-Martius for approval. For discussions of the relationship between Conrad-Martius and Stein, see Bello's article mentioned above and the volume *Hedwig Conrad-Martius and Edith Stein: Philosophical Encounters and Divides*, eds. Antonio Calcagno and Ronny Miron.

Conrad-Martius thinks that it is Heidegger's great contribution to have recognized the failure of Husserl's reduction of the ontic dimension and thus opened the door to a true analysis of being, both of consciousness and of the world. Heidegger's crucial insight in her view is that the form or way of being of the human is *Seinsverständnis* (an understanding of being) in the sense of "knowing how to" or "being able to" (*sich-verstehen auf*), a form of being that is particular to the being of consciousness: "human existence [*Dasein*] is from its ownmost ground and in itself an understanding of being."<sup>15</sup> This is an achievement, a concern (*Sorge*), something that *Dasein* has to do. While Husserl can only get out of or beyond idealism by bracketing the reality of the world, she acknowledges that Heidegger "gets into the world" by defining the being of consciousness as always already engaged with the world. Thus, the human being is always already beyond itself; that is to say, while rooted in being, its very mode of being and existing is thrownness into the world, projection into things, concernedness with being. Thus, it is never grounded in itself, but ecstatically stands out into the reality of the world. This gets to the "true, inner nature of the being that is attached to its I [*ichhaft*]."<sup>16</sup> Heidegger's analysis of *Dasein* provides a key for investigating the being of other things or beings, yet he does not actually use this key, but instead he locks the door and throws away the key. She finds that Heidegger "immediately slammed shut the door he had opened, bolting and locking it, even more than had been the case for idealism," by focusing solely on human beings and shifting aside the being of all other beings (as supposedly not "existing" but merely *vorhanden*).<sup>17</sup>

She particularly objects to his strong divisions between *Zuhandenheit*, *Vorhandenheit*, and *Existenz/Dasein* and does so precisely because it abandons the being of other beings to a mere tool-like

15 Conrad-Martius, *Schriften I*, 26, 27. She reiterates this as Heidegger's central insight in multiple places, including her initial review of *Sein und Zeit*. See Conrad-Martius, *Schriften I*, 185-93.

16 Conrad-Martius, *Schriften I*, 28.

17 Conrad-Martius, *Schriften III*, 373.



thingness by depriving them of existence. In her view, animals and plants are not simply “present” but also maintain relationships with their own bodies and live their own existences; the human is not the only being to have *Dasein*. Heidegger thus overcomes idealism with regard to human existence, but not with regard to anything else. Instead, she suggests that the being of most living beings—not only of humans—is a “being-itself” (*Selber-Sein*), a being-able to be its own being (*selbsthaftes Können des eigenen Seins*).<sup>18</sup> There can be no real being “without beings being able to be in their own being.”<sup>19</sup> Every being is a dwelling for its own being and thus has existence or *Dasein*. A living being has the existential potency to live its own being in a “self-owning” (*selbsteigene*) manner.<sup>20</sup> Conrad-Martius concludes that although Heidegger had a true concept of reality, he was wrong to employ it only for the human. Instead, she insists that human consciousness and the world cannot be separated and that phenomenology can give us access to the reality of the world.<sup>21</sup>

- 9 Conrad-Martius is convinced that not only is consciousness able to explore the being of other beings and of the world, it has a philosophical obligation to do so. That is precisely the task of phenomenology. Phenomenology can investigate the cosmos and can become a truly phenomenological philosophy of science by investigating the nature of light, force, matter, and similar questions.<sup>22</sup>

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18 Conrad-Martius, *Das Sein*, 95. She distinguishes here between aseity, perseity, inseity and simple “seity” (*Sēitāt schlechthin*), claiming only the latter for all beings, not the former.

19 Conrad-Martius, *Das Sein*, 96.

20 At the same time, she argues that “the real difference is not that humans as such are immersed in themselves to a ‘greater’ extent, that they are rooted more ‘deeply’ in their own being, but that they are immersed in themselves at all, that they are at all poured into their own being, so to say. What is particular is not the degree of ‘self-rootedness’ but its pure fact.” Conrad-Martius, *Metaphysische Gespräche*, 58.

21 Conrad-Martius, *Schriften III*, 374. “Reality or substantiality consists in ‘being-itself,’ consequently substances of spirit have their ‘being-themselves’ in the transcendental self-founding of their primordially, matter-of-factly unfounded being.” (Conrad-Martius, *Das Sein*, 134)

22 For the most detailed discussions of this, see her *Realontologie*, especially 246–333.

Much of her own work is devoted to doing this: she explores the nature of plants, animals, humans, light, force, color, and many related topics. Science certainly has things to say about matter or color or light, but in all cases these are merely measurements of actually occurring instances, rather than a penetration to the *Wesen* of the matter. Physics never even asks and certainly does not answer the question of what light is, what makes it light in all cases—whether it appears as waves or particles—and what makes light different from force or another sort of phenomenon. This is the task of phenomenology: investigating not the causes of things or their particular manifestations, but their nature or kind.<sup>23</sup> Phenomenology is, then, not simply epistemological, but fundamentally ontological in character and interest, although that does not thereby render it metaphysical.

She distinguishes this from an approach that would seek to determine the causes of being, whether psychological, developmental, scientific, or metaphysical. In the *Metaphysical Conversations*, this is urgently repeated by the teacher Montanus in various iterations. For example, he questions his interlocutor: “you don’t mean all of this in a psychological fashion?” and warns: “But we would not want to connect genetic or developmental points of view with this formulation.”<sup>24</sup> Later it is stressed yet again: 10

Certainly one could fix its position and significance in general being and in existence as such more exhaustively on the basis of a truly comprehensive ontology or metaphysics. Especially if it were possible to explain the fundamental contrast between “outer” or “exterior” and “inner” or “immanent” existence and being, which continually haunted us, in its specific sense. Surely

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23 She distinguishes this from a metaphysical approach: “The question about the nature of being [*Wesen des Seins*] is a general philosophical, a phenomenological, but not a metaphysical question.” (Conrad-Martius, *Schriften I*, 38).

24 Conrad-Martius, *Metaphysische Gespräche*, 44, 103.

I need not stress that it is not a psychological but an ontic or even metaphysical contrast.<sup>25</sup>

11 Phenomenology is not psychology or genealogy; it does not examine how things develop, what causes them, or how they proceed historically or developmentally, either in the case of the child or in that of the history of the cosmos. Phenomenology does not posit a cause for phenomena, but rather tries to figure out what sort of phenomena they are, regardless of what caused them. Ontology (that is, phenomenology) “grasps the real world in its reality” and investigates its particular make-up, but it leaves open the question whether this world in its particularity really is what it shows itself to be.<sup>26</sup> Before turning to the question of how phenomenology can concretely accomplish this in her view, its overall relevance for eco-phenomenology might already be noted.

12 Most 20th century phenomenology has focused on human consciousness, human existence, or human experience in its manifold aspects of being temporal, embodied, affected, and so forth. Conrad-Martius, from the very start, is instead interested not only

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25 Conrad-Martius, *Metaphysische Gespräche*, 84-85.

26 Conrad-Martius, *Schriften I*, 81. Interestingly, she speaks of metaphysics, instead, as an investigation into facticity rather than into nature or kind (“eine Faktizitäts- und keine Wesenswissenschaft”). Metaphysics thus deals with the facticity of the “really real” (*wirkliche Wirklichkeit*) in the most fundamental sense (Conrad-Martius, *Schriften I*, 82-85). Metaphysics requires reality: “Without the question of being there is no metaphysics. ... The true field of metaphysics can only be found if *the factual reality of the world is presupposed*.” (Conrad-Martius, *Schriften I*, 38) Unlike the empirical sciences, however, it does not *establish* facticity, but investigates what *grounds* this facticity, why there is something rather than nothing. Metaphysics is related to the world as experienced and serves as its foundation. Both natural science and metaphysics require the facticity of the world, but metaphysics contains an essential incommensurability with things. This questionability and impossibility should neither be ignored (as the sciences do) nor explained away (as idealism does). Accordingly, there can be no metaphysics for idealism, even a modified idealism that supposes at least the being of consciousness. Metaphysics is directly tied to the reality of the world; it cannot coexist with idealism. (Conrad-Martius, *Schriften I*, 45) Only pure existence as fact gives rise to metaphysics, because it wonders at its existence.

in humans but in many natural phenomena. Her phenomenological approach is committed to investigating the reality of the world and all its earthly inhabitants and things. In her work, Conrad-Martius has laid the groundwork for what it would mean to investigate the natural world phenomenologically. It would involve a deep penetration into the nature of natural phenomena, not in terms of their chemical make-up or merely physical characteristics, but in terms of examining the sorts of phenomena they are, what makes them these kinds of phenomena rather than others. Such investigation involves unfolding carefully their manifold and different forms of manifestation. This does not simply distinguish humans from everything else in some absolute or at least dualist sense, but rather works with a plethora of similarities, relations, and distinctions, such as those between color and light, plants and animals, simple animals and more complex ones, “spirits” of flora or fauna and spirits of the deep or the heights, and so forth. At the same time, it involves drawing intimate connections between what is often separated: physical force and mental or spiritual force, physical light and mental or spiritual illumination, manifestation of “soul” in plants, animals, and humans, the manner in which both animals and humans inhabit their bodies, and many other topics. In all of these ways, Conrad-Martius is not only actively trying to overcome traditional Western dualisms by diversifying the phenomena under consideration, she is also committed to understanding these manifold phenomena more fully, instead of focusing solely on human existence or human being in the world—especially in distinction from everything else.<sup>27</sup>

Such dualism has been criticized by many environmental philosophers as one of the primary culprits for the environmental

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27 In her examination whether plants have a soul, she emphatically claims that “there is nothing more absurd” than the pretense that body and soul are merely parallel and “run next to each other like two animals in a harness” or two cogs in a machine. (Conrad-Martius, *Schriften I*, 289) Similar critical remarks about soul-body dualisms in general or Descartes in particular are found throughout her work. For a particular extensive analysis, see *Bios und Psyche*, 75-137.

crisis, as directly linked to the logic of domination and exploitation of nature, and as what is most in need of overcoming.<sup>28</sup> Biocentrism, ecocentrism, deep ecology, social ecology, and ecofeminism all argue in different ways for breaking down the divides between nature and culture, for recognizing how all of life is connected, and for returning to a more holistic way of seeing nature. Thus, even before exploring any of the concrete ways in which Conrad-Martius works this out for specific phenomena, the overall goal and impetus of her work reveals it be of immediate relevance to the primary thrust of almost all contemporary environmental philosophy. Regardless of whether her specific claims about, for instance, the particular phenomenality of plants, are ultimately acceptable in all their specific detail, at the very least it is clear that her work holds out promise for a far more multi-layered and diversified approach to a much broader range of phenomena. It is thus open to ecological considerations and can contribute to an eco-phenomenology, even though Conrad-Martius herself does not explore ecological questions directly. This promise consists both in her commitment to explore the nature of physical phenomena as such and in her profound interest in the plurality of such phenomena from matter, color, light, and force, to plants, many types of animals, humans, spirits, and so forth. Yet, she does not simply conflate these phenomena with each other, but also draws careful distinctions between them. Such distinctions are manifold and often gradated; this is not a dualistic worldview. Before exploring some of her concrete claims more fully, however, some attention to the specific methodology she employs to do so is needed, partly because this method differs from that of some later phenomenologists in an important fashion.

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28 Perhaps the most well-known condemnation of “value-hierarchical dualism” and the “logic of domination” is Karen Warren’s “The Power and Promise of Ecological Feminism,” although most environmental proposals reject attitudes that draw dualistic distinctions between soul and body, mind and matter, culture and nature, etc.

## ***Wesensforschung*: The Method of a Phenomenology of the Natural World**

The most important phenomenological tool employed by her phenomenological approach is the *Wesensschau*, often translated as an “intuition of essences,” but for Conrad-Martius and other early phenomenologists, this functions more as a systematic and thoughtful investigation into the nature of phenomena, a consideration of what makes a being the sort or kind of being it is, thereby distinguishing it from other beings or things, and providing insight about its ontic nature. Conrad-Martius calls this *Wesensphilosophie*, *Wesenswissenschaft*, or *Wesensforschung* (probably best translated as something like “investigation into the nature of things”) and she proclaims emphatically: “*Phänomenologie gleich Wesensforschung!*” (i.e., phenomenology equals investigation into the nature of things).<sup>29</sup> Insight into the nature of a thing or being is gained through imaginative variation (in the sense of *Wesensschau*) in which one tries to ascertain what belongs essentially to the being and what can be “taken away” without harm, without turning it into something else or destroying its nature. Thus, “clear intuition” allows us to pinpoint the boundary that distinguishes one nature from another by varying their potential attributes and seeing which are crucial to the identity or definition of a thing or being.<sup>30</sup> Drawing such distinctions carefully helps us ascertain when a difference consists only in degrees and when it is a distinction in quality or in the fundamental constitution of something. She consistently considers her

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29 Conrad-Martius, *Schriften III*, 377.

30 For example, the idea of weight cannot be taken away from a stone; it belongs to it by its very nature. This also allows us to draw distinctions: “It is fundamentally different whether something is constitutively light and so outside and beyond any weight or whether the constitutively weighty is protected, so to say, via a ‘counterforce’ or a ‘countermove,’ from falling prey to itself and its immanent burden and fixation. Like the weight on a scale or attached to a cord that holds and lifts it.” (Conrad-Martius, *Metaphysische Gespräche*, 75)

task of penetrating to the *Wesen* of things an authentic phenomenological approach faithful to Husserl's early work, even if Husserl himself diverged from it in his later writings.

- 15 In this context, she frequently distinguishes this phenomenological attitude from an empirical investigation that would simply collect data about things. A phenomenological approach, instead, selects paradigmatic or representative cases that are then analyzed carefully to understand their nature as fully as possible. The *Metaphysical Conversations* constitutes an exemplary model for such a search for the essential characteristics of things or the nature of beings. It is modeled on a Socratic dialogue, with Montanus serving as the wise guide and Psilander as the skeptical student, the two joining together to search for further insight in mutual collaboration that (despite the title) is repeatedly identified as *phenomenological*. At the same time, the investigation is not an abandonment of the factual or practical world; instead, these scientific "facts" are germane, especially for providing specific illustrative instances to help the investigation. Such examples help us observe what is crucial or central and what merely peripheral or contingent. Thus insight about the nature of anything (*Wesenserkenntnis*) can be attained through careful analysis in this mental "seeing" or intuition and via genuine acquaintance. Such work can uncover and explore the ontological pre-suppositions that undergird natural science, but are left entirely unexamined by scientists themselves.

- 16 Conrad-Martius is firmly committed to getting at what is most fundamental or foundational rather than being stuck in a mere accumulation of data. She excoriates the natural scientists who think they do not need philosophy, because data will give them everything.<sup>31</sup> Philosophy answers the fundamental questions of being, nature, and meaning, to which the sciences have no access, because

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31 See especially the essay on "Phenomenology and Speculation" (in Conrad-Martius, *Schriften III*, 370-84), but this is a point raised in many other essays and some of her longer works on philosophy of nature as well.

their very method makes them blind to such questions. Phenomenology investigates “what makes force into force, energy into energy, light into light, matter into matter.”<sup>32</sup> While physics can measure the speed of particles or the length of wave functions, it pays no attention to the very nature of light. It does not want to know what light *is*. That is an ontic question that requires phenomenological analysis.<sup>33</sup> This can be a tedious and difficult process: “To carve out slowly the nature of the specific matter usually requires long and very precise philosophical labor, in which the eye must be directed ceaselessly to the initially only vaguely suspected place of meaning [*Sinnstelle*] of what is to be examined according to its nature.”<sup>34</sup> The natural sciences themselves do not investigate the *Wesen* of the phenomena they measure; this is the task of phenomenology. Phenomenology can actually engage in “speculation” in the ancient meaning of the term as “spelunking,” digging for gold amid the mass of debris, penetrating deeply into the ground when all else remains on the surface. The empirical should not be ignored or shoved aside—the phenomenological and the empirical will never be in opposition to each other or contradict each other—but it requires a deeper grounding and a more fundamental investigation, which is the task of an ontic phenomenology.

This constitutes real labor: one must “work out” or “uncover” the true *Wesen* of things by peeling back layers and digging deeply into the ways they really are and manifest. She will often have the teacher Montanus make remarks like “we have a characteristic aspect, but not the thing itself” or: “Just use your penetrating glance for the essential. Nothing else is at stake here.”<sup>35</sup> This is a process of investigation, a search, not an accumulation of claims. The teacher insists:

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32 Conrad-Martius, *Schriften III*, 378.

33 At the same time, she affirms that what phenomenology uncovers cannot and does not contradict the insights of the natural sciences; they complement each other by operating on different levels (Conrad-Martius, *Schriften III*, 380).

34 Conrad-Martius, *Schriften III*, 377.

35 Conrad-Martius, *Metaphysische Gespräche*, 194.



“We do not want to posit but to search.”<sup>36</sup> In this regard—and unlike the sciences and their empirical approach—a particularly revealing or paradigmatic example or a limit-case might show more than accumulating many trivial or unremarkable cases: “The point here is the theoretical distinction of types via especially vivid examples.”<sup>37</sup> This also implies that finding one counter-example or even a small group of marginally different cases does not necessarily invalidate the overall insights. For example, a group of birds having malfunctioning wings because of pollution of their food and water sources does not invalidate the fact that flying is essential to the nature of birds.<sup>38</sup> This can also include the investigation of purely imaginative examples, drawn from imagery, metaphor, story, even fairytale. When the student balks at a discussion of fairies and wood sprites, the teacher insists that these “fantastic” creatures can still provide significant insight if we pay attention to the way in which they are envisioned and how we give consistent accounts of them.<sup>39</sup> A philosopher can deal with anything in thought or imagination. At one point, Montanus chides his companion:

You are still a bad philosopher, Psilander. Don’t you think that a philosopher can “encounter” any being between heaven and hell if he or she really wants to encounter it? Obviously not in the meadows, in the woods, or in the heavens themselves, but surely in the marvelously inexhaustible “realm of intuition”?<sup>40</sup>

- 18 The cultural heritage that posits consistent images of beings such as spirits can give us insight into how we think spirit (*Geist*) operates, what its nature is, and how it must manifest to be consistent with its nature.

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36 Conrad-Martius, *Metaphysische Gespräche*, 132.

37 Conrad-Martius, *Metaphysische Gespräche*, 8.

38 She works out such distinctions between “essential” and “accidental” characteristics far more fully in *Realontologie* and *Das Sein*. (The example is mine, not hers.)

39 Conrad-Martius, *Metaphysische Gespräche*, 224.

40 Conrad-Martius, *Metaphysische Gespräche*, 28-29.

How does she put this to work in her phenomenology of nature? 19 Let us use one of her favorite topics, namely the *Wesen* of plants, as a brief illustration, before returning to her broader claims about nature and the cosmos. In her earliest texts, such as the *Metaphysical Conversations*, she examines the phenomenon of the plant via its bodily forms of expression. The plant has a specific basic ontic structure (*ontische Grundstruktur*), which ultimately turns out to concern primarily its form: plants are “beings of figure” (*Gestaltswesen*).<sup>41</sup> Concrete comparisons—like the distinction between mimosa and polyp or creeping plant and amoeba—help us see that the movements of the plant are in principle different from those of the animal.<sup>42</sup> The animal has a freedom to respond, even when a response is purely instinctual or seemingly automatic, in a manner in which the plant does not. Plants certainly respond to stimuli, but they are, in a sense, moved rather than initiating movement; we can grasp the difference of such a response phenomenologically by focusing, for example, on the different manifestation of the reaching arms of a creeping plant versus the tentacles of an amoeba. The issue is not that plants have no muscles or central nervous system, but they relate to their body in a way that ties them to it differently than is the case for animals, who have a relationship with their bodies, own their bodies in a way that plants do not.<sup>43</sup> The plant is sunk into itself and, although it reaches upward to the light, it does not stand out over and against itself as animals do. Conrad-Martius thus contends that plants do not have souls, in the sense of the kind of manifestation associated with the phenomenon of the soul. We can imagine a tree as a “character” in a story or place a soul “imaginatively” into a narcissus, but this does not fully succeed; such imaginative variation defies our experience of plants and hence suggests that plants do not have soul in this sense.<sup>44</sup>

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41 Conrad-Martius, *Metaphysische Gespräche*, 6-7, 24.

42 Conrad-Martius, *Metaphysische Gespräche*, 7-16, 20-23.

43 Conrad-Martius, *Metaphysische Gespräche*, 23.

44 Conrad-Martius, *Metaphysische Gespräche*, 17-20, 27-33.

20 In her later texts, such as “The Soul of the Plant” or *Bios and Psyche*, her analysis becomes far more differentiated, now suggesting at least a certain minimal “soul-principle” or “entelechial soul” in plants, based on their forms of manifestation. The essay that investigates whether plants have a soul combines an extensive review of recent biological insights and experiments with phenomenological reflection in order to conclude while plants can be said to have moods (*Stimmungen*), to be affected by their environment in a variety of ways, and to respond to it quite actively, in the final account they cannot be said to have genuine experiences (*Erlebnisse*) or feelings in the way animals do.<sup>45</sup> This is the case because plants are sunk into themselves; they do not have the kind of interiority that allows them to have a sense of self as is the case for animals, and they cannot learn from what happens to them.<sup>46</sup> Yet, plants can certainly shape and form their own life (*Selbstgestaltung*); they embody precisely this force of life in growth and development.<sup>47</sup> Their individuality is “open” and branches out (*Selbstverzweigung*), while that of the animal is closed in on itself.<sup>48</sup> She insists throughout that it is crucial to examine the phenomena on their own terms and thus to allow the particular lifeform of the plant to show itself (rather than, say, seeing it as a deficient animal or, conversely, a kind of machine).<sup>49</sup> It is not

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45 Conrad-Martius, *Schriften I*, 276-92.

46 Conrad-Martius, *Schriften I*, 293-314. She distinguishes between the “Eigenbewegung” of the plant and the “Selbstbewegung” of the animal (Conrad-Martius, *Schriften I*, 312-13). The animal has an inner self in a way the plant does not (Conrad-Martius, *Schriften I*, 313-14).

47 Conrad-Martius, *Schriften I*, 329. Plants do organize their own bodies and shape their own life as an organism, even if they do not have an inner self that relates to their own body in movement and affect (Conrad-Martius, *Schriften I*, 329).

48 Conrad-Martius, *Schriften I*, 337. It is perhaps also worth pointing out that she does not merely speak of the plant as such but considers many different types and groupings of plants in the essay. She also considers spores, seeds, pollen, stem, root system, types of leaves, petals, etc.

49 E.g., Conrad-Martius, *Schriften I*, 284. She also argues strongly against a purely mechanistic view of nature or an imposition of assumptions from physics or chemistry onto biology and botany (e.g., Conrad-Martius, *Schriften I*, 286-92). The third part of the article compares plants to crystals in order to show that the growth of the plant is quite different from the formation of a crystal (Conrad-Martius, *Schriften I*, 315-33).

merely the data collected by botany and laboratory experiments on plants that suggest these forms of manifestation, but imaginative variation or *Wesensschau* demonstrate the fundamental phenomenality of plants. Even fables and fairytales show that it is ultimately impossible to envision plants with the kind of soul we easily attribute to animals in storytelling. That is to say, they do not match our sense of the *Wesen* of plants.

The analysis of plants that Conrad-Martius provides is considerably 21 less anthropomorphic than many contemporary discussions that exhort us to “think like a mountain” or to think of all beings—perhaps all matter—as having agency.<sup>50</sup> While not every detail of her phenomenological description of the being of the plant or that of other natural phenomena might ultimately prove convincing, it does provide a model for considering many natural phenomena on their own terms while not eliding the hermeneutic standpoint of the human investigator and pretending that we can speak from the standpoint of plant, animal, or ecosystem. It enables us to focus more fully on the manifestation of such phenomena, recognizing both that *within our investigation* such manifestation is to us as investigators and, at the same time, that such manifestation must always be of *the specific nature and ground of their very phenomenality* rather than something simply imposed upon them. This may well provide a way forward for eco-phenomenology by addressing at least some of the difficulties with phenomenological approaches to nature that contemporary thinkers have highlighted.<sup>51</sup> Even aside from these more methodological points that would obviously need to be worked out in far more detail in order to develop concrete aspects of an eco-phenomenology, some of her proposals about the development of species and the nature

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50 Most famously, Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*. For an ecological extension of new materialism, see Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. For a recent discussion of the hermeneutic difficulties in taking the standpoint of animals or plants, see Brian Treanor, “Thinking Like a Jaguar: Carnal Hermeneutics, Touch, and the Limits of Language,” in *Anacarnation*. For environmental hermeneutics more broadly, see *Interpreting Nature: The Emerging Field of Environmental Hermeneutics*, ed. Forrest Clingerman, Brian Treanor, Martin Drenthen, and David Utsler.

51 See, for example, Simon P. James, “Phenomenology and the Charge of Anthropocentrism.”

of the cosmos are particularly provocative and suggestive. The rest of this contribution will now explore some of these elements of her phenomenology of nature in more detail.

### **Artlogos: The Particular Creativity of Each Natural Species**

- 22 Conrad-Martius is firmly convinced that she can establish the particular nature or *logos* (or even *eidos*) of each kind (*Art*) on phenomenological terms, and much of her work is preoccupied with precisely this task. *Wesensschau* enables us to penetrate to the nature of plant, animal, human, and many other kinds. She investigates these differences—parsed primarily in terms of the distinctions of the “having” of body, soul, and spirit—in the most detail in her earliest work, but they continue to underlie even her later writings. Partly in response to the social Darwinism of National Socialism, to which she objected fiercely, Conrad-Martius initially claims that there can be no transition between fundamental kinds, that each has its own unique *Wesen* that is inviolable. Convinced by further scientific evidence, she will later admit that there are more transitional forms, at least at the level of species and genera, than she originally thought.<sup>52</sup> Yet, even in her later work she continues to maintain an *Artlogos* for each kind. This is not a Platonic *eidos*, existing in some other reality, but it is an *eidos* or type in the sense of *logos* or intelligible idea that is expressed in each being in specific ways.<sup>53</sup> It is also not a demiurge who puts to work some sort of masterplan in the sense of intelligent design. Rather, it is about the coherence and creativity of each *Wesen* or kind in its phenomenological and ontological integrity.
- 23 She maintains that the specific “word” or “logos” of the being or species must be worked out by each creature (or *Gestaltswesen*) as a task of formation and self-realization (*Ausgestaltung*). The seeds of the *logos* are there, but the creature—even the most basic plant or one-celled organism—has the creative potential for unfolding it freely in a variety of ways.

52 See her explicit acknowledgment of the change of her thinking in *Bios und Psyche*, 67.

53 See especially the first set of lectures in *Bios und Psyche*, 7-74.

In *Bios und Psyche*, she describes this as an objective soul-principle that allows a living being to emerge and form itself out of its seed or core (*Keim*) and to develop its structures and principles in a harmonious overall sense, such that it achieves the “goal” of its particular species.<sup>54</sup> This is a purposeful formation both into the interior and out to the exterior according to its kind. She calls this its “seelische Grundprinzip” (basic principle of soul) or “Wesensentelechie” (entelechy of nature or kind) or even “entelechiale Seele” (entelechiaal soul), which functions as the driving principle of its development and self-realization, as an objective vital principle for “building up” its own lived body.<sup>55</sup> The “Wesensentelechie” contains the *logos* of the organism, which as *Artlogos* or *Artplan* functions as a sort of impetus for the living organism to unfold this plan.<sup>56</sup> She often labels this a “zielursächliche Dynamik,” i.e., a dynamism that functions as both goal and origin in a primordial sense.<sup>57</sup> (This is where she is perhaps closest to Aristotle—especially his notion of *aitia* as both efficient and final cause—although she is quite critical of him in other contexts.<sup>58</sup>) Although she occasionally calls this “plan” or “logos” an intelligible idea or even employs the medieval term *lumen naturale*, it does

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54 Conrad-Martius, *Bios und Psyche*, 83-84.

55 Conrad-Martius, *Bios und Psyche*, 85, 90. More specifically, it actually functions in three-fold fashion: out into the material body (*Leib*), into the body via senses and affect, and up to the self via imagination and spirit (*Geist*).

56 Conrad-Martius, *Bios und Psyche*, 98.

57 “I have called entelechiaal acting goal-originating [*zielursächliches*]. That means first of all that *due to* the entelechiaal effecting factor a substance is able to perform the respective effecting effort according to its goal (in accordance with plan and sense). Due to this the substance is one that ‘has its effective goal in itself’ and is constituted in entelechiaal fashion. Yet that is only possible because the realizing goal, turned into taskmaster [*Werkmeister*], it itself nothing other than an effecting potency that aims at such a realization in a dynamic autonomous manner. The goal or plan of realization could be the taskmaster *in* the substance any number of times, what is supposed to come out of it will not come out, namely an objective goal-oriented causality, if this taskmaster (the old ‘Archeus’) were not *itself* and as such an objective goal-dynamic; if it were not what we determined as ‘autonomous dynamic effective tendency of an autonomous dynamic effective potency in regard to its corresponding effective goal’ [*autonom dynamische Wirktenz einer autonomen dynamischen Wirkpotenz auf das ihr entsprechende Wirkziel hin*].” (Conrad-Martius, *Der Selbstaufbau der Natur*, 383)

58 Pfeiffer claims that Conrad-Martius “stands in the Aristotelian tradition,” but this is only true in the most general sense. (Pfeiffer, “Ontological Phenomenology,” 452)

not refer primarily to a divine idea but rather to the root of all physiological, psychical, and physical processes in the organism, akin to its genetic information, what allows the particular being to live its body, to “have” it, to develop it, and to master it.<sup>59</sup> It is the actualizing or realizing principle of formation in each being—plant, animal, or human—by “harboring” (or containing) its *Artlogos* and bringing it to realization in “zielursächlich” fashion, according to the “energized plan of spirit (*geistig*)” at work in it.<sup>60</sup>

24 In her earliest work she employs the late 16th century mystic Jakob Böhme’s idea of a qualifying source (*Quell* or *Quall*) that is the primordial root of each being and expressed in each according to its kind. It is what allows a thing to be “substantivized” and to become what it is by unfolding its particular characteristics to achieve the fullness of its being. It serves as an impetus and driving force of development, allowing the being to adapt to its particular circumstances and to shape its environment in optimal fashion for its full self-realization. This is not merely an accident; the creature is driven by this qualifying source to “settle” into its specific surroundings and make them its own.<sup>61</sup> Thus, whether given by God or in some other way, nature contains its own potential of development, its own source of growth that enables it to unfold its potential. The “subs-

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59 Conrad-Martius, *Selbstaufbau*, 100.

60 Conrad-Martius, *Selbstaufbau*, 124-25.

61 “Are you really prepared to see here again everywhere only mere happenstance or external conditions? Really, one day the relationship might turn upside down, as Üxkiüll says, even if in a slightly different sense, so that the surroundings don’t create the animal, but the animal its surroundings. Or, better, and employing our own formulations: that, driven and led by the qualifying source that works in it and drives it to bodily configuration, the substantivizing being ‘chooses’ these narrower or wider surroundings, settles into precisely those surroundings, adapting to them, in which the vital impetus, the vital range, the intensity of life, the ‘temperature,’ the mobility of its source of life and configuration, or whatever one should and could call this, achieves specific satisfaction of configuration. In that case the surroundings and the final shape would similarly turn out to be adapted to each other precisely. And the species could be explained in its particular actual manner similarly entirely out of the drive not only to preserve itself in material existence as a consequence, but first of all to substantivize itself, settle into, and *form itself* into it in *bodily* and thus essential fashion.” (Conrad-Martius, *Metaphysische Gespräche*, 109-10)

tantial source” in each being “nourishes, constructs, and protects it *within itself*.”<sup>62</sup> Although she believes that God initially creates it and in some way maintains it in its substantiality, “once it is created and sustained, it stands within itself on its own ground.”<sup>63</sup> She credits Scholasticism with having recognized this essential insight.<sup>64</sup>

These convictions are worked out the most fully in her extensive 25 engagement with Hans Driesch in *Selbstaufbau der Natur*, which went through several editions.<sup>65</sup> In typical fashion, she includes long reviews and analyses of current biological and other scientific theories or specific recent discoveries. She thinks that Driesch has retrieved some valuable insights that were already implied in medieval philosophy, but because of his naturalistic and scientistic standpoint, he is unable to explore their potential fully. Entelechy for Driesch realizes the *Artnatur* of each living organism by developing its incipient characteristics, giving it a “typical Wesen” in its individual particularity.<sup>66</sup> Entelechy is a “causal factor” that “makes whole” according to meaning and kind (*ein sinn- und artgemäß ganzmachender Kausalfaktor*).<sup>67</sup> She argues that this cannot be understood as a conscious, free, or rational agent, as Driesch and other vitalist theories suggest. Instead, she contends that each nature includes its own *logos*, which it develops to its fullest, not as an external plan imposed

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62 Conrad-Martius, *Metaphysische Gespräche*, 113.

63 Conrad-Martius, *Metaphysische Gespräche*, 113.

64 Already here she employs the language of entelechy: “Thus here this *logos* would have to effectuate itself simultaneously as what pulls and guides toward the light, by entering into and sinking into the primordial life rising up into existence with its embodying force and in this way grant it the possibility and force of self-delimitation in new and ever new figures and supporting and securing these figures by granting it. The potency that streams into them always anew from this *logos* would have to be in its striving and seeking burdened in a sense as with an entelechy.” (Conrad-Martius, *Metaphysische Gespräche*, 198)

65 On this, see James Hart’s detailed account of Driesch in his *Hedwig Conrad-Martius’ Ontological Phenomenology*, especially chapter 4.

66 Conrad-Martius, *Selbstaufbau*, 48–49.

67 Conrad-Martius, *Selbstaufbau*, 50. She claims that this is often understood in a “psychologistic” sense as an independent agential force.



from above or below, but as an inherent unconscious potency of the seed or egg.<sup>68</sup>

26 We must thus move beyond a quasi-medieval dichotomy between nominalist and realist interpretations, in order to see that the morphological search for the identification of kinds by evolutionary biology and geology presupposes a shared nature that is neither just a subjective idea nor a separately existing objective reality but rather a distinctive *Wesen* developed in the particularity of the specific organism in its concrete environmental situation at a given place and time. This typical idea of its figure or shape (*Gestaltsidee*) is found through comparative research.<sup>69</sup> She concludes: “Only when this plan of the genre [*Artplan*], this logos of the kind [*Artlogos*] is truly grasped in effective, innersubstantial singularity and becomes as such the individually concrete ground and bearer of the organismic whole, only then has the desired solution been found and ‘Platonism’ been overcome.”<sup>70</sup> We require an “individually substantial entelechy” that is “internally suffused” by the nature of the kind (*Artwesen*) as its causal and unifying factor.<sup>71</sup> That is to say, entelechy functions, on the one hand, as a principle of individuation and, on the other, as a marker of belonging to and contributing to a whole.

27 She distinguishes between three aspects of entelechy: (1) the metaphysical “*Artlogos*” that maintains a typical nature across each individual of a species or kind (*der überindividuell metaphysische Artlogos*); (2) the causal factor that works out this particular kind in each individual of the species and develops it in a way that unfolds that nature (*der individuell substantiierte Artlogos*); (3) the foundation of organic development of the whole within the evolutionary process (*die Bildungsentelechie*).<sup>72</sup> Entelechy functions as the causal determination of the morphological process (*der ganzheitlich kausale*

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68 Conrad-Martius, *Selbstaufbau*, 56-57.

69 Conrad-Martius, *Selbstaufbau*, 68-69. She frequently appeals to Goethe in this and similar contexts.

70 Conrad-Martius, *Selbstaufbau*, 71.

71 Conrad-Martius, *Selbstaufbau*, 72.

72 Conrad-Martius, *Selbstaufbau*, 74.

*Werdebestimmer der ganzen Morphogenese*) according to the nature of the kind (*Artwesen*).<sup>73</sup> She is convinced that the plan or “effective goal” (*Wirkziel*) dwells within each individual substance in order to drive its self-realization in accordance with this biological plan. In this sense, nature must be self-generating: “Nature without the ability to generate itself is no ‘nature.’ Yet, it could only be self-generating if—permeated by the logos and creating itself out of itself—it were to include this very logos as an immanent causing and generating factor at every substantial point of itself.” Accordingly, every entelechy of nature has an actualizing potency that pushes the actual being in its concrete corporeal existence to realize the whole that is already immanently and constitutively present within it.<sup>74</sup>

Each natural substance or being rises up from its material ground of being (*dem Wesensstoff der materialen Wesensgrundlage*) to become itself as it realizes its nature in its particular corporeality. In the case of inorganic substances, this develops into a full corporeality, while in the case of living organisms, it creates a generating corporeality that not only posits itself (*eigene Seinsstellung*) but can stand over against itself as it organizes the corporeal substrate. Thus, living substances are self-generative in twofold fashion, both in the constitutive foundation and as fully constituted.<sup>75</sup> Both organic and inorganic substances are thus self-generating, but in different ways. Both have an inner driving force that develops its *Artlogos* into a fully organized body by virtue of this logos.<sup>76</sup> 28

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73 Conrad-Martius, *Selbstaufbau*, 76.

74 Conrad-Martius, *Selbstaufbau*, 389.

75 Conrad-Martius, *Selbstaufbau*, 414.

76 “For they both have their own being and nature [*Sein und Wesen*] only through the many-layered and pluriform being-energetic actuality of its own inner-substantial self-effectivity [*seinsenergetische Aktualität eigener innersubstantieller Selbstbewirkung*], the not living material entity in *this* way, the living organismic substance in *that* way. The former generates itself by virtue of itself and in the final account by virtue of its own ‘*Artlogos*’ out to a bodily substance that is already fully organized, the latter by virtue of itself and in the final account by virtue of its own ‘*Artlogos*’ out to a bodily substance that is capable of self-generation [*selbstzeugungsfähigen Körpersubstanz*].” (Conrad-Martius, *Selbstaufbau*, 415) Bello regards this as the most independent contribution of Conrad-Martius to a philosophy of nature. Bello, “What is Life?” 24.

Living organisms are able to organize and develop this entelechy in independent fashion (*die existentiell verselbständigte Bildungsentelechie*) by actualizing the potentialities of their lived body (*Leib*) in their own way from the seed or germ material (*Keimmaterial*).<sup>77</sup> At the end of the book, she summarizes her insights as follows: first, there is no direct linear progressive entelechial development; second, the entelechial potencies have no independent being in a substance, but are connected to each other in a whole; third, there is no ontic entelechy without corresponding material substructure; fourth, ontic formation is not just a privilege of organic substances but applies to all finite being; fifth, the higher potencies work through and influence the lower ones.<sup>78</sup>

- 29 This provides at least a glimpse of the kind of overcoming of divides between nature and culture her work might be able to propose. Her analysis of the inner driving force and its concrete creativity grants a kind of agency to all beings, on some level even purely “material” phenomena, without conflating it with human or even animal agency and action. (This is partly why she rejects many of the vitalist approaches of her time.) Furthermore, it grants such impetus and unfolding not only to the individual being but to the species as a whole in related but differing ways. For Conrad-Martius, everything in the cosmos is intimately connected, and yet, each kind and each individual has its own particular being and phenomenality. The creature and the species are both free in their near-infinite potential for variation and, at the same time, oriented such that they have their own meaning and potential. This is a kind of self-realization that offers profound “power” to each and all natural phenomena, albeit in a multitude of diverse ways as appropriate to their particular phenomenality. All of “nature” is inherently creative and each phenomenon free to develop its particular nature in open-ended and manifold fashion. How can such freedom be reconciled with the idea of the specific “logos” of each being?

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<sup>77</sup> Conrad-Martius, *Selbstaufbau*, 421.

<sup>78</sup> Conrad-Martius, *Selbstaufbau*, 426-28.

### ***Selbstschöpfung: The Tension Between Logos and Chance in the Development of the Species***

As we have seen, Conrad-Martius attributes self-generating force to each individual substance, to each living species, and to the cosmos as a whole. Each develops the plan or genetic potential inherent in its kind, but does so with a certain amount of freedom and in adaption to its particular circumstances and environment, which it simultaneously shapes and transforms in turn. In this regard, nature has creative potencies; the source of its own being lies in itself and in its generating and formative roots contained in its material and corporeal substructure.<sup>79</sup> She goes so far as to call this a “self-creation” (*Selbstschöpfung*) that operates in “absolutely free self-formation” (*in absolut freier Selbstgestaltung*).<sup>80</sup> The entelechial principle operates even on the level of the cosmos that turns it from chaos (the primordial *tohuwabohu*) to an organized, figured, and “infinitely diverse fullness of beings” (*unerschöpflicher Fülle von Gestalten*).<sup>81</sup> The *logos* infuses a vivifying power that each being is then able to realize within its specific circumstances in an endless variety of manifold possibilities.<sup>82</sup>

She compares this to the rolling of dice: a number of options are possible, none are pre-determined, but some are more successful than others. She describes it as follows: “One has not yet apprehended nature, if one has not also apprehended at the same time the

79 Conrad-Martius, *Metaphysische Gespräche*, 113. When Psilander objects to attributing creativity to nature, Montanus distinguishes between immanent and transcendent creation: God gives a substantial and formative source to each thing that it is then free to develop in its own way according to this source or plan.

80 Conrad-Martius, *Metaphysische Gespräche*, 140. She attributes these ideas most frequently to the late 16th/early 17th century mystic Jakob Böhme and the 18th century enterprising industrialist Franz von Baader, although Schelling is also occasionally mentioned. There might also be interesting parallels to the sophiological theories of her Russian contemporaries, such as the philosopher Pavel Florensky and the theologian Sergey Bulgakov.

81 Conrad-Martius, *Metaphysische Gespräche*, 190.

82 Conrad-Martius, *Metaphysische Gespräche*, 198.

ever new dead ends, strayings, half and grotesque attempts and rolls of the dice that lead first to this kind then to some other—by chance in possession of *one* form of true embodying and being—and now further propagate and protect it as such across unfathomable time periods.” She contends that, on the one hand, this serves as “the indestructible ground for all evolutionist, for all ‘vital’ conceptions of nature, for any conception that knows how to look into the depths, into the chaotic, that is founded on a feeling for the ‘immense urge of life.’” Yet, on the other hand, “the logos sanctioning it stands above any figure as it is, the logos that gives it its name and encompasses its entire nature...”<sup>83</sup> A guiding star (or perhaps God) “stands” over the randomness and affirms the more successful “rolls of the dice” with a kind of divine blessing or protective agency that supports the ones that “hit” the mark rather than the ones that are “off.” She asks: “The logos, which like a guiding star, granting strength, travelled before the fashioning search, must it not now stand still in blessing above the happily newborn, sealing it in the specific particularity it has achieved and discovered with the name that corresponds to it?”<sup>84</sup> In the *Metaphysical Conversations*, she describes the process as follows:

At first it is still given out from it to the materiality of its own embodying and as if distributed out to it, yet in some cases already the first vague possibilities emerge of a personal stirring in this body, announcing the very first beginning of withdrawal and internalizing. It goes through all the steps and attempts and rolls of the dice, in which at one time the immediate possibility of action in body via something like a disembodying and de-substantiating is increased

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83 Conrad-Martius, *Metaphysische Gespräche*, 179.

84 Conrad-Martius, *Metaphysische Gespräche*, 201. In a different context, she comments that a special “transcendental star” stood over the emergence of the first mammal: *Schriften II*, 261. Pfeiffer rightly recognizes that Conrad-Martius “in no way supports the idea that God unrelentingly operates in the world by somehow speaking through things and in this way grants them cognizability.” (Pfeiffer, “Ontological Phenomenology,” 455)

to the highest degree, at another time conversely the self-enclosing and deeper and deeper nestling into in its own self is driven via capsules and shells and embodiments all the way to immovability (although both moves are completely different from the nature of the plants!), all the way to the marvelous configurations of the highest animals, in which a perfect balance seems to be achieved between highest possible mastery over the body and deepest possible dwelling into and within itself. Here the guiding *logos*, from which the embodying potency streams inexhaustibly, guides not to the heights but to the depths.<sup>85</sup>

The *logos* does not guide in the sense of determination or originating impetus, but acts as a kind of confirmation or validating source. 32

She insists that this does not take away the creatures' capacities for self-development and even what seems like wholly random variation. Thus, no particular evolutionary pathway is preordained; God does not micromanage the process. Yet, certain paths or possibilities work better than others and seem to be pursued again and again.<sup>86</sup> 33  
The creature is free to experiment as much as it likes, but some experiments are apt to fail. All the various attempts are manifold manifestations of the central idea of configuration that the being is trying to work out more or less successfully:

Yet seen from here, what are these singular kinds of figures that are enclosed with themselves in their being and ever positing themselves anew? Are they not all manifestations of this one idea of configuration, more or less lucky and completed, in one case

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85 Conrad-Martius, *Metaphysische Gespräche*, 204-5.

86 There is some affinity here with the arguments regarding convergence in the evolutionary process advanced by the Cambridge biologist Simon Conway Morris. See, for example, *Life's Solution: Inevitable Humans in a Lonely Universe* or *The Runes of Evolution: How the Universe became Self-Aware*. Conrad-Martius notes the parallel development of certain organs in some plants and animals in her essay on the soul of plants. (Conrad-Martius, *Schriften I*, 348)

“successful,” in another grotesque, some still on a preparatory level, others standing already on a highly developed level, an idea that is alive and effective in the entelechy governing them?<sup>87</sup>

34 When the creature manages to pursue its path according to the “guiding idea,” it achieves its true *Wesenheit*.<sup>88</sup> There is a kind of sacred benevolence shining over the whole process, even as it permits the process to proceed on its own without active interference. All beings have the capacity to explore various evolutionary pathways in freedom and creativity, even if nature seems to favor certain pathways over others: “But should not the embodying logos or the logos, which supports and secures each such kind of configuration in the potency of its actual form-being, bless precisely this kind of configuration that has achieved rest in itself?”<sup>89</sup>

35 In her later explorations into the topic of creation, she returns to these claims in a different sense, often in interaction with the notion of creation *ex nihilo*. In an essay on artistic creation, she draws a distinction between generation and creation in both a natural and an artistic sense.<sup>90</sup> She objects to evolutionary theories (such as the vitalism of Driesch and Bergson) that attribute creativity to nature in an absolute sense rather than just a generating force. In her view, they are simply substituting a creative life force for God, but this force functions in an essentially Nietzschean nihilistic sense as will to power. Assertions about creation—whether in a theological or biological sense—are evidently metaphysical claims. That is, biology becomes metaphysics when it posits freedom and creativity for the

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87 Conrad-Martius, *Metaphysische Gespräche*, 198.

88 “Yet, Psilander, wherever and however primordial life has found a possibility and a path to embody itself into existence, according to that guiding idea, there a true nature of being [*Wesenheit*] has developed, a whole, something encompassed with itself and resting in existence in its specific measure of configuration? A manifestation has now been accomplished, a symbol, something that witnesses to and expresses this primordial idea in itself and through itself...” (Conrad-Martius, *Metaphysische Gespräche*, 199)

89 Conrad-Martius, *Metaphysische Gespräche*, 200.

90 “Schöpfung und Zeugung,” from Conrad-Martius, *Schriften III*, 225–48.

development of species. Vitalism basically becomes a secular substitute for a creative sacred spirit.<sup>91</sup> The relationships between species cannot be explained on purely natural grounds; they require metaphysical justifications.<sup>92</sup> These metaphysical pathways are intricate and convoluted: “There are too many layers, divergences, and entanglements of the concrete metaphysical foundations and their metaphysical effective forces [*Wirkmächtigkeiten*].”<sup>93</sup> Vitalism operates with an unacknowledged metaphysics.

Conrad-Martius does not think that a notion of generation requires that what is generated is already fully contained within the generating origin. A living organism can generate offspring different from itself in a way that has a semblance of creativity in its novelty.<sup>94</sup> Similarly, the species as a whole has a formative drive that allows it to explore its various potential pathways. She describes it as follows: “The evolution of plant and animal required a forming, guiding power of the word that worked in it through and through and always anew, so that the abundance of figures could push up and become what is given. But it pushes up precisely from below; it grows up entirely and ultimately from the soil of nature craving upward and encloses itself in it as such.”<sup>95</sup> In one of her discussions of plants, she stresses: “A living organism does not already lie within matter in terms of its formation, *but it must be generated from itself by means of a creative potency* [schöpferische Potenz] *that is precisely appropriate only to living beings.*”<sup>96</sup> The cosmos is living and unfolds or realizes itself (*Selbstentfaltung*).<sup>97</sup> Yet, she warns that this quasi-creative force of all of life should not be absolutized. Any living being that “has” its own being and can realize it—something she

91 Conrad-Martius, *Schriften II*, 260.

92 Conrad-Martius, *Schriften II*, 260.

93 Conrad-Martius, *Schriften II*, 261.

94 Conrad-Martius, *Schriften II*, 238-39.

95 Conrad-Martius, *Metaphysische Gespräche*, 233.

96 Conrad-Martius, *Schriften I*, 325; emphasis hers. She also refers favorably here to Bergson's notion of “creative evolution.” (Conrad-Martius, *Bios und Psyche*, 32, 65)

97 Conrad-Martius, *Bios und Psyche*, 68-71.



thinks is true even of plants—has vital capacities in the sense of development, growth, regeneration, and procreation.<sup>98</sup> In this regard, she tries to find a middle way between those biologists who think everything is already contained in the seed and the “neo-vitalists” who attribute exorbitant creative and organizing powers to nature itself.<sup>99</sup> Every living being is beyond itself and contains more in itself than its own being, thus has “creative” or vital force, yet it is not capable of creating something out of nothing, of generating a being that is fundamentally different in kind or nature (*Wesen*).

37 Ecologically speaking, it is significant that she attributes creative force to all beings in the cosmos. Each creature has real creative power according to its kind in developing its *logos*, its plan, or its material and genetic possibilities in a variety of ways. Perhaps this could help overcome some of the bifurcation between humans and other beings that marks so much of contemporary thinking without collapsing into the kind of complete identification that is unable to maintain any meaningful distinctions between species. The challenges leveled at human superiority in different ways by deep ecology, ecofeminism, and new materialism often result in the opposite extreme of completely dissimilating the human into nature to such an extent that all responsibility is erased.<sup>100</sup> When the human becomes merely one indistinguishable actor among many other “material” agents, human violation of non-humans no longer carries any ethical censure, because it becomes simply part of the nature of things. It is possible that Conrad-Martius’ approach might point a way forward here, inasmuch as she does not erase all distinctions between beings, but rather maintains such distinction quite strongly in places, while also taking seriously the *Wesen* of all other beings and their particular *logoi*. This might lead us to a more holistic sense of the cosmos and its various creatures,

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98 Conrad-Martius, *Schriften II*, 240.

99 See Conrad-Martius, *Bios und Psyche*, 10-11. She calls this “Einzelheits-“ vs. “Ganzheitsbiologie,” i.e., a biology of singularity versus one of totality; in her view, the former is mechanistic, the latter is vitalist.

100 For one critique, see Tim Christion, “Ecofeminism, Ecophenomenology and the Metaphorics of Nature’s Agency.”

which does not make their value dependent on humans, while not eliminating particular human responsibilities. Each being and each species is free to develop its fullest potential in a variety of creative ways in a vibrant and living cosmos. There is nothing mechanistic about her view of the cosmos.

### ***Seinssinnkosmos: The Meaning and Coherence of the Cosmos as a Whole***

As already noted, Conrad-Martius insists at several points that the created world is comprehensible in its essential forms (*Wesensformen*), which is perhaps the place where her view of the cosmos is most influenced by her theological convictions. The world is no stranger to the *logos*, “it is what it is only *through the logos realized in it in incarnate form*.”<sup>101</sup> True insight is possible because of this “logos” in all things. She contends that at the core of reality the germ of all being is already contained *in nuce*, just as light makes visible because it contains all colors virtually.<sup>102</sup> The *logos* in all things is also in some way found in the human *logos* as *lumen naturale*. Thus human creativity puts us in touch with this essential material that lies in the nature of all created things. Even in artistic creation what seems like aesthetic “*creatio ex nihilo*” is, in fact, “generation out of the depths of our spirit” (*Zeugung aus der Tiefe des eigenen Geistes*).<sup>103</sup> In this sense, interestingly, phenomenology is like art: it penetrates to the *Wesen* of things through its own *Geist*. In the same way, God’s spirit is poured out over all of creation, which mirrors the divine *logos*.<sup>104</sup> The world

101 Conrad-Martius, *Schriften II*, 245; emphasis in the original.

102 Conrad-Martius, *Schriften II*, 245.

103 Conrad-Martius, *Schriften II*, 247.

104 Conrad-Martius, *Schriften II*, 247. She insists, however, on a fundamental distinction for divine creation: the world is created not generated, the Son is eternally generated of the Father not created. To change this would be to destroy the most fundamental ontic foundational substance of Christianity.

is not identical with the divine *logos*, but the “Sinngeshalt dieses Logos,” that is the meaning at the core of its spirit, is poured out on it. Thus, she concludes, “according to being, the world is out of nothing, but according to content it is out of God,” created inasmuch as generated out of God’s spirit, but generated inasmuch as poured from the divine meaning content.<sup>105</sup> There is thus a sense in which the world can be said to be divine or sacred despite its independence of creative self-realization.

- 39 Ultimately, she is firmly convinced that the cosmos is rational and coherent, because we would otherwise not be able to investigate it. Although at first glance this seems primarily a theological claim, she does justify it on philosophical grounds.<sup>106</sup> She argues that the totality of beings requires an organized cosmos in which everything has its place, although this is not the “real world” or nature, but a “noetic” or “meaningful” cosmos (*Seinsinnkosmos*).<sup>107</sup> This cosmos has an objective sense, a meaning of existence or “thatness.” Ideas or objective relations or logical relationships and categories have as much of a place in this cosmos as “actual” beings or structures. All things are situated in this cosmos not in their “factual” existence but in the particular and singular way in which they find a logical place in this cosmos and belong within its meaning, a meaning—it is worth pointing out—that is explored by phenomenology.<sup>108</sup> This place of belonging is thus an existence “as such” rather than as this specific actual being. All of the beings in this cosmos—including numbers and ideas—can be handled by spirit (in the sense of *Geist*): constructing geometrical objects, finding categories, establishing relationships, deriving logical proofs, making promises or conducting legal inquiries, and much more. To be directed to them “as such” is to be concerned with their *Wesen* rather than their facticity, i.e., it is

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105 Conrad-Martius, *Schriften II*, 248.

106 For the most detailed analysis see the essay “Vom Wesen des Wesens,” in Conrad-Martius, *Schriften III*, 335–56.

107 Conrad-Martius, *Schriften III*, 336.

108 Conrad-Martius, *Schriften III*, 336.

to be doing phenomenology.<sup>109</sup>

Without such a rational cosmos we would have no access to the “nature of being” (*Wesen des Wesens*). Thus, just as the existence of the “actual” cosmos is needed for metaphysics, which examines the “really real” (*wirkliche Wirklichkeit*), so the noetic cosmos is an absolute requirement for phenomenological investigation. The totality of all beings, including imaginary or purely conceptual beings, forms this noetic or intelligible cosmos ordered via the relative nature of its beings and clarified through their relations of sense to each other and as a whole. The noetic cosmos is the *logos*-cosmos of all beings as such, and in this sense “ontology is the science of beings in their meaning-sense or nature” (*Seinssinn oder Wesen*).<sup>110</sup> As we have already seen, the philosopher contemplates the nature of things as such (e.g., force or energy as such), while the natural scientist only deals with their de facto existence (e.g., particular physical forces or specific forms of energy). Thus, a distinction must be made between what she calls the noetic conditions of constitution (*Sinnbezüge*) and the physical or physiological conditions of constitution.<sup>111</sup> The former are investigated through *Wesensforschung*, i.e., by phenomenology, the latter by natural science, although their insights will never contradict each other but can be integrated with each other (through a philosophy of nature).

She contends that sense or meaning (*Sinn*) is not meant in a subjective sense; it is not merely meaning attributed to things by us. The meaning of beings has a more objective sense that lies in the constitution of their nature or *Wesen*.<sup>112</sup> The meaning is not merely

109 “Thus this clear ‘that’ (*Quod*) of a being (*ens*), which emerges out of its unique locus of sense within the cosmos noetos, is its being or nature [*Wesen*]. This is where we catch sight of the nature of being [*Wesen des Wesens*]. We have found the grounded locus of sense [*fundierte Sinnstelle*] of being [*Wesen*] itself *as such* and thereby precisely its being or nature [*Wesen*]” (Conrad-Martius, *Schriften III*, 337; the first sentence and the phrase “as such” are italicized in the original for emphasis; the parenthetical Latin terms in the quote are hers).

110 Conrad-Martius, *Schriften III*, 339.

111 Conrad-Martius, *Schriften III*, 343.

112 Conrad-Martius, *Schriften III*, 346.

an arbitrary word attributed to a thing by the speaker but a word that it speaks itself; in some way it reveals its own being or meaning via the connectedness of the meaning of all things to each other: "Accordingly, sense [*Sinn*] is that in which a being [*ein Wesen*] communicates its meaning [*Bedeutung*], whereby it itself says what is 'meant' [*'gemeint'*] with it within the entire relationship of beings [*gesamten Zusammenhang des Seienden*]." <sup>113</sup> In the *Metaphysical Conversations*, the interlocutors explore this possibility by considering whether plants and animals could be imagined to speak, whether they can, in a sense, communicate the *logos* of their being. <sup>114</sup>

42 She insists that this is not theology or mysticism, but mere mundane phenomenology. Things have their own *logos* and speak of themselves, manifest themselves in their nature or being. It is not that God speaks them, but they are given to us immediately in their being and sense. To understand this, we have to penetrate to their *Wesen*. <sup>115</sup> They have such meaning precisely via their place in the overall meaningfully connected cosmos, not somehow behind or aside from it. Every matter or thing has a relationship to every other thing and thus a necessary place in the whole. This place is its *Seinssinn* and the meaning of its existence. <sup>116</sup> Accordingly, the objective sense grounds the *Wesen*. She makes an interesting distinction here between *Wesen* that requires a ground and *Wesen* that can be ascertained from connections or relationships. The former seems to require metaphysics, while the latter can be explored by phenomenology alone. Many beings have the "that" of their kind (*Wesensquod*) in a locus of sense (*Sinnstelle*) that consists in a "more or less complex knot in the net of relations of sense [*Netz der Sinnbezüge*]." <sup>117</sup> She reiterates that *Wesen* could not be investigated if the cosmos

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113 Conrad-Martius, *Schriften III*, 347.

114 Conrad-Martius, *Metaphysische Gespräche*, 173-78. They also return to this topic again later in the dialogue.

115 Conrad-Martius, *Schriften III*, 347.

116 Conrad-Martius, *Schriften III*, 348.

117 Conrad-Martius, *Schriften III*, 338.

were not intelligible.<sup>118</sup> Yet this noetic cosmos cannot be found via scientific empirical investigation or something similar. It requires “eidetic reduction” in Husserl’s sense. Everything has to be considered in its “Wesensquod,” i.e., its nature as such rather than its actual or empirical reality.<sup>119</sup> Thus the two worlds operate on different levels; one is not somehow magically contained in the other, although they are related.<sup>120</sup> The intelligible cosmos has its own being and nature.<sup>121</sup>

While her noetic cosmos is imbued with a theological significance as an essentially created cosmos, this need not necessarily be interpreted in Christian or even theistic terms. Perhaps thinking of the cosmos as a meaningful whole, interconnected in its manifold beings, might provide a vision and worldview that could potentially stem some of our destructive ways of behaving toward and within it. If we think of the cosmos itself as spiritual (in the sense of having *Geist*), as having internal coherence and meaning or even some sort of creative agency, then perhaps we will become more hesitant to exploit it with such great impunity—at least this is what many environmental thinkers have suggested. If the cosmos hangs together in meaningful ways that are intricately connected in their creative potency, we might approach something like new materialism’s diffuse notion of agency or of the acting of assemblages, without some of its aforementioned attendant problems. It should be clear that, at least on Conrad-Martius’ terms, this cannot take the form of vitalism, but requires a balance between the individual and the species.

For Conrad-Martius, the cosmos as a whole is both physical *and* spiritual (in the sense of *geistig* not *geistlich*). Aside from environmental

118 Conrad-Martius, *Schriften III*, 348.

119 Conrad-Martius, *Schriften III*, 349.

120 She asserts: “The real cosmos [*Wirklichkeitskosmos*] as such, as seen in its nature [*Wesen*], is ordered meaningfully into the cosmos noetos. Yet, the real cosmos as *existing* is not ordered into the cosmos noetos. That would be pure nonsense.” (Conrad-Martius, *Schriften III*, 351)

121 Interestingly, she identifies as metaphysical the question about the relationship between the two types of cosmos.

philosophy, in the contemporary political conversations generally, only humans matter (or, perhaps more precisely, only *some* humans matter).<sup>122</sup> When climate change is admitted as a threat or as something with regard to which action is necessary, this is usually for the harm it will cause to humans and human economies. Genuine change is only contemplated when rich people find themselves inconvenienced. Plants, animals, or the poor generally are not regarded as worth protecting, unless their welfare directly impinges on that of the rich and powerful. The fact that countless species are being eliminated on a daily basis often raises concern only inasmuch as those species might benefit us. Even when value is rhetorically attributed to nature directly (as in the Earth Charter and various environmental positions), this often relies on something like notions of beauty, thus still something of value *to us*, not truly in itself.<sup>123</sup> Yet, for Conrad-Martius the cosmos is valuable in itself; it exists in itself; it does not require humans for its beauty, order, and rationality. Although she does think of the human as microcosm or sometimes even as crown of creation, there is really no *philosophical* reason why any being in that cosmos could not be regarded as a microcosm, as the entire world in miniature. Her analysis of entelechy in each being, even on the inorganic level, certainly suggests as much. The famous phrase “we all are stardust” applies to everything on this planet or indeed most of the cosmos—animate or inanimate—not just to humans. Everything on this planet and on other second-generation stars and their planets, as well as these stars and planets themselves, is composed of the residues from the explosion of the first generation of stars.

45 As already noted, environmental philosophers and eco-theologians frequently condemn as pernicious the Western bifurcation between soul and body and the value-hierarchical dualisms it employs. When

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122 For some of the concrete ways in which this is the case, see *Faces of Environmental Racism: Confronting Issues of Global Justice*, eds. Laura Westra and Peter S. Wenz.

123 For two (quite different) critiques of this, see Wilfred Beckerman and Joanna Pasek, *Justice, Posterity, and the Environment* and Holmes Rolston III, “Value in Nature and the Nature of Value.”

souls are valued over bodies, minds over senses, men over women, Western European over all other cultures, and so forth, then it becomes easy to subdue or devalue the other, whether that “other” is nature, women, or people of other races and ethnicities. Instead, many thinkers suggest a new embrace of affect, the senses, the body, and our embeddedness in natural environments as a way forward. Yet, greater celebration of senses and emotions or even our corporeal nature is not necessarily a salvific panacea that will easily roll back the influences of a disembodied and “Cartesian” European philosophical anthropology. For hindering our destructive actions, it does not seem sufficient to help us get in touch with our corporeality or even to insist on greater continuity between us and other beings. We need more. Perhaps the notion of a rational or noetic cosmos, in which each plant and animal has its important role to play, could serve as a stronger deterrent to its destruction. It is not just that we will harm ourselves or that some specific species will die out, it is that we are destroying the spiritual fabric of the cosmos, that we are eliminating something with meaning and significance, perhaps even something holy or sacred. This surely need not be interpreted in a Christian sense (indeed, most contemporary Christians would probably disagree with such a position, even though precedent for it can be found in parts of the tradition).<sup>124</sup> At least some thinkers would suggest that nothing less than a conviction of the holiness of all things is needed for us to desist from violating and exploiting them. Our consumerist and capitalist behavior has become too much of a habit to be easily modified. It requires far more radical measures.<sup>125</sup>

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124 The question, of course, is whether such a worldview can be compelling without some sort of religious undergirding. Can the notion of a sacred cosmos be convincing and shape identity without a creator or without ritually supported sacred actions to inculcate and maintain the worldview? While I do not find her argument for God very convincing or some of her religious convictions especially palatable, I do think her descriptions of the cosmos and of nature are worth exploring further.

125 The shut-downs in the first months of the COVID pandemic demonstrated this forcefully, inasmuch as they were experienced as radical closures and extreme curtailments, yet were thoroughly insufficient to stop the output of carbon at anywhere near sustainable levels.



Punishment—even when it comes in the form of destructive fires, floods, and other disasters—clearly has not been sufficient deterrent. We need more “positive” measures, perhaps a complete rethinking of who we are within the cosmos and who the cosmos is on its own terms. The philosophy of Hedwig Conrad-Martius may be able to offer us resources for this kind of rethinking.

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