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When it comes to the environmental crisis, it is disheartening to realize that even if some of the books written in the previous millennium were republished today, their insights would remain just as relevant, reflecting the lack of meaningful progress. *The Natural Contract*, written by French philosopher Michel Serres in 1990 and originally titled *Le Contrat Naturel*, is one such work. No one could dismiss the book's central message as outdated. To put it simply, as evident from the book's title, Serres proposes a new kind of contract between humanity and planet Earth if we genuinely desire peace (20). However, this contract is not meant to be merely a set of rules for protecting the environment or following regulations; Serres presents a new ontological perspective on humanity's existence on Earth's surface.

Before proceeding, it is important to note that Serres is a master of language, adept at using metaphors, and expert on various disciplines, through which he is able to transcend classical conceptualizations. This is evident in the translators' acknowledgement at the beginning of the book, where they express their astonishment, noting that they had to consult statisticians, lawyers, mathematicians, and even sailors to accurately convey his ideas (Translators' Acknowledgement). Thus, one should approach Serres' new conceptualizations and metaphors with care, as the author simultaneously prefers to be direct and simple while remaining highly imaginative. Keeping that in mind, Serres introduces two significant conceptualizations: one of these is *subjective wars*, which refers to any legal fight between two parties; and the other is *objective violence*, which denotes one-directional harm inflicted on something (10-11). To illustrate these concepts, Serres opens the first chapter by portraying a fight between two duelists, each wielding sticks and attacking one another in the midst of a quicksand (1-2). Each action by the fighters causes them to sink deeper into the quicksand, yet both they and their spectators continue to expect one of them to win the battle in the end. The unnoticed reality, however, is that both will ultimately perish in the end, as their struggle gradually traps them in the mire.

For Serres, wars between nations and states resemble the struggle of the two duelists in the mire (10). In the short term, there may appear to be winners in the fight (5). For the writer, this represents the *subjective wars* that have occurred throughout history. However, the objective reality reveals that *subjective wars* ultimately result in pure violence against the planet Earth, which often goes unnoticed. Serres refers to this unseen struggle against nature as *objective violence*, as *subjective wars* ultimately inflict severe harm on Earth in the long run (11-12).

Serres makes a curious distinction between war and violence, defining the terms as follows (13-14): War is, by definition, a legal contract between sides, governed by rules and limitations that must be followed for it to take place. Otherwise, it would consist of random and disorderly assaults by individuals against others–essentially,

violence. Through a written or verbal agreement or contract, the parties impose boundaries on such raw violence, making war a legally defined act. For Serres, this constitutes the social contract; it elevates humanity to a certain level of civility (25). Yes, peace is the ideal state, but war is at least preferable to pure violence. Once the distinction between war and violence is established, Serres contends that the struggle between humanity and nature is a form of violence, devoid of any written or verbal contract. With a natural contract between humanity and nature, we can raise pure violence to at least the level of war, which Serres considers a preferable alternative. As mentioned, the ideal is a state of peace between humanity and nature; however, war is still preferable to one-sided violence against nature.

Serres, in the second chapter of the book—the heart of the text—titled "*Natural Contract*," elaborates on his concept of a new vision of a contract by highlighting what was missing in previous social contracts throughout history. Keeping in mind that Serres broadens the conventional meanings of concepts, he uses the term "contract" to refer to any form of reciprocal written or verbal agreement between any two parties (34-35). In other words, it is not merely a concept of the Enlightenment, where humans—at least theoretically—discovered a way to share the world peacefully, but a notion encompassing the entirety of human history. Once men—the term 'men' is deliberately used by the author for obvious reasons—adopted a sedentary lifestyle and began possessing the material world—perhaps dating back to the first agricultural practices—they required a contract to maintain *equilibrium* among themselves. This contract might have been a simple verbal agreement or a rudimentary form of a signature. Similarly, all forms of agreements, such as political contracts, scientific contracts, or local arrangements, are regarded by Serres as forms of the social contract (38). Serres highlights a common characteristic of all types of social contracts: they all pertain to relationships exclusively between humans, while nature is either intentionally or unintentionally unseen.

The natural contract, by introducing a new dimension to the social contract, emphasizes *symbiosis*—specifically referring to a mutualistic relationship, to be terminologically precise—and reciprocity, this time between humanity and the Earth (34). Serres provides the example of an abusive parasite (36-37): a parasite takes what it needs from its host without giving anything in return. It confuses use with abuse and, without realizing it, continues to exploit its host relentlessly, ultimately leading to its own demise. A *symbiotic* relationship resolves this issue by creating a reciprocal interaction between two organisms that is both mutually beneficial and sustainable. For Serres, a social contract is essentially a *symbiotic* relationship that benefits both parties—but those parties are exclusively humans. Meanwhile, humans have been exploiting nature like parasites, without realizing it until recently. The *natural contract* addresses humanity's *parasitism* by recognizing a *symbiotic* relationship between men and the world. Serres explicitly states that humanity should give back to the Earth as much as it takes. This, in turn, should establish an *equilibrium* between the "power of humanity" and the "forces of nature" (37-38).

The reader should not expect a detailed formulation of this idea, despite its reliance on biological metaphors, as Serres is a postmodern thinker who decidedly questions

the traditional capacities of reason. Serres criticizes humanity's dominance over non-human entities, rooted in reason, as the foundation of our exploitation of planet Earth (32). Unsurprisingly, Chapter two, which forms the heart of the book, concludes with an abstract vision of love and peace between humanity and the world. Just as humans have emphasized loving one another in social contracts, they must also extend that love to the Earth, as this is a fundamental requirement of the natural contract. He simply states: "There is nothing real but love, and no other law" (50).

Chapter three, *Science, Law,* presents a lengthy and insightful discussion on the historical interplay between science and law. It traces this dynamic from early Egyptian geometry and legal systems, through Greek philosophy and Roman law, all the way to Galileo's trial. An enthusiastic reader might delve into those extensive passages on the history of law and science, as curated by Serres. After dedicating this chapter to an extensive historical account, the author highlights the eventual triumph of science over law in the last three hundred years (84, 86). Before that, according to Serres, law took precedence over anything else, despite objections from religious leaders such as Jesus and Martin Luther, as well as scientific figures like Galileo. Whatever the Judge declared was regarded as divine truth in court. Serres highlights Galileo's plea, in which he asserted that his world was distinct from that of the jurists (81-82). Galileo appealed to a *non-existent authority* beyond the court, but at that time, the jurist held absolute power to render judgment. Today, however, science—or scientific truth—has the last word.

On the other hand, it appears that, for Serres, scientific knowledge alone is no longer sufficient in today's world (86). In the past, judgment determined actions on its own and safeguarded humanity from death, even though it was not based on scientific truth, says Serres. However, given the extensive damage humanity has inflicted on the Earth, science alone is clearly not protective. Serres suggests that we need to revisit the vision of ancient judgment, which, at least in practice, might have offered a means of protection. Thankfully, the author does not outright reject reason, nor does he advocate for the return of old religious or totalitarian judgment. Instead, he proposes a mixture of both: scientific truths combined with wise, traditional judgment. Serres, once again employing artistic and literary descriptions, paints a portrait of a new-age *Sage* (94-95). This figure embodies the heroic wisdom of the past and the rational knowledge of the present, blending our Egyptian and Roman heritages. Moreover, the Sage is depicted as a traveler of nature, well-versed in the natural sciences and beyond. This poetic and lengthy passage, of which I have mentioned only a small part for the curious, is, unfortunately, another disappointment for those seeking concrete solutions to environmental problems. We are left with an imaginary—and, in my view, an impossible—Sage at the end of the chapter. Moreover, it sounds more like an expectation of a new-age prophet to save our planet.

Clearly, this book is not suited for those who are seeking concrete solutions, as it lacks a logical, reasoned flow, offers no standard conceptual definitions, and is filled with metaphors and poetic imagery. Most notably, despite numerous references to philosophers, ideas, events, and mythology throughout its lengthy passages, it provides no citations or references–a deliberate choice by the author. For instance, a

researcher will find no explicit scholarly dialogue with the existing recent literature on the topic, which can be quite frustrating at times. However, by reading this book, they may gain insight into how postmodernist thought can influence ecological thinking, particularly if they are unfamiliar with a school of thought such as deep ecology. Apart from that, any reader will encounter a gentle and detailed portrayal of the necessity to love *Mother Earth*, as Serres puts it (124). Those who experience mystical and indescribable feelings overflowing from the heart—whether on a journey through the jungle, standing atop a mountain watching clouds meet the blue sky at the horizon where sea and sky converge, diving underwater and sensing their own heartbeat alongside the rhythm of the ocean, or standing in complete darkness in the middle of nowhere, attuned to their deepening breath, heightened sense of smell, and sharpened hearing—will find resonance in Serres' poetic lines. For anyone who feels excitement and love in nature, reading his work with patience offers a chance to become aware of the profound, mystical *bond* between humanity and *Mother Earth* (106).