

A Contractual Consciousness: Michel Serres and the Natural Contract.

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"Is it true that she [the Earth] is moved ?" (Serres, 1995, p122)

What often gets overlooked by many when we consider anthropogenic climate change is the astonishing fact that humanity's history has arrived at the point where we exist at such a scale, and have such immense effect with our techno-science, that we have disturbed a global physical system billions of years old. This reversal can be described as our journey from an ancient and local necessity binding us to nature, through to a modern emancipation from nature, and finally due to our technical action, a late modern return to necessity, which once again ties us anew to nature. This reversal exposes humanity and the planet to immense risk, as our violent treatment of the planet has created the conditions for global nature to emerge and interact with humanity. In large part the French philosopher Michel Serres' 1990 publication *The Natural Contract* describes and responds to this particularly unique ecological predicament.

A "natural contract" with the Earth, described by Serres as a philosophical concept, is I will argue a novel way to conceptualize and contend with the nature-culture nexus and the current global ecological crisis, particularly anthropogenic climate change. Within *The Natural Contract* is a very rich and complex description of what a contract means which transcends our exclusive social and local understanding of it. I will show that what is sometimes referred to by radical ecology as an ecological consciousness is expressed in *The Natural Contract* as a contractual consciousness. Furthermore, I want to demonstrate that a contractual consciousness can help us understand that humanity is in-the-environment and that nature or Earth behaves as if it were a subject.