THE PASSIONS OF THE EARTH

I. THE PASSIONS OF THE SOUL CHARACTERIZING THE HUMAN BEING: THEIR NATURE AND ROLE

In our times, owing to the great advances of science and technology and to the enormous increase of our individual knowledge and awareness of the world around us, of our human nature, old visions of the “whole” that we humans had entertained and within which we felt englobed like a butterfly in a chrysalis have collapsed. We feel estranged from previously familiar surroundings. We feel uprooted as if thrown into the thin air, incapable of finding our bearings and our compass. In the midst of this disarray, we need to look into the situation of the human condition, the ontopoietic situation within which we subsist, unfold, generate. We need specifically to look into its deepest and most significant level—a level at which we throw hooks toward the circumambient world, nature, universe, and beyond and with which we maintain ties that sustain us—namely, the sphere of the ontopoietic becoming and existence that I have called elsewhere the realm of the “elements.” It is on the side of nature-life that we throw out our hooks, which are received. And on the side of the inner ontopoietic processes through which the living being filters the vital forces and distills a specifically human significance of life that makes it fully human there are corresponding human “elemental passions of the soul.”

It is indeed within this elemental (not “elementary”) realm of the soul as the full expanse of all individual functions of life, that we will, very briefly, investigate our specifically human situation, the situation of the human condition within the unity-of-everything-there-is-alive.

We have devoted individually and collectively much attention to the elemental passions of the soul. (See among others these volumes: The Elemental Dialectic of Light and Darkness: The Passions of the Soul and the Ontopoiesis of Life, Analecta Husserliana XXVIII; The Elemental Passion for Place in the Ontopoiesis of Life, Analecta Husserliana XLIV; Passion for Place, Book II: Between the Vital Spacing of the Creative Horizons of Fulfillment, Analecta Husserliana LI; Passions of the Earth in Human Existence, Creativity, and Literature, Analecta Husserliana LXXI; Gardens and the Passion for the Infinite, Analecta Husserliana LXXVIII; Mystery and Its Passions: Literary Explorations, Analecta Husserliana LXXXII.) In this study, we will focus on a
specific passional fascicle, one that appears at once most visceral and most “lofty,” transposing us unto infinite spheres: the passions of the earth.

It is true that our attention is first drawn to the passions of the soul—our subliminal passions—which originate, bring about, and develop our specifically human, creative, significance of life. These passions conduct our search for significance in all directions: moral, intellec tive, aesthetic. They appear first on our horizon owing to their aesthetically uplifting nature. I mean here the elemental passions of the soul that we have previously isolated as emerging in response—in an aesthetic response—to the most elementary conditions of existence, to light, water, the sea, air, fire, soil, place, and that in their emergence make us conceive of the elementary basics of our “physical” existence in terms of their human shape as “elements.”

The so conceived elemental passions of the soul pinpoint the striking transformatory transit of the vital, physical elements of nature-life through the specifically human creative forge and into elemental—aestheticized—molds that the logos of life prepares in differentiating specifically human experience.

It appears, however, that one passional sphere has been left out in the investigations we have hitherto conducted. One could say that the last to be confronted is, as in this case, the one that encompasses them all: the sphere of the passions of the earth, which carry the entire ontopoietic course of human life.

In what follows I will succinctly pinpoint some of the main ways in which the passions of the earth carry our existence.

The most intimate and essential bond of the living human being with “mother earth” lies at the very heart of our beingness. Unraveling this bond will enlighten our situation, provide us with a compass, and help us find our bearings.

Before we outline the scope of the passions of the earth let us briefly gather the glimmerings of what I mean by “passions” in general. As has already been mentioned, by “passion” in the largest sense I understand a response to a stimulus, a response that comes from the inward sphere of life-inspired beingness to a stimulus from the “outer” existential region, a stimulus that meets with a response particular to it, one attuned to it, so that we may speak of that response as a target. That stimulus activates this particular response, affects the person in a given way. This active encounter means that there is an encounter with constructive or destructive life forces in which the stimulus transmits a signal and the recipient is transmuted by it: an encounter that is a transferal of forces effecting a transmutation of sense in the individual.

This description applies directly to the sphere in which the outward stimulus assumes the form of an “element” that inspires generative and vital passions