



The Ethical Image in a Topological Perspective: the Poetics of Gaston Bachelard

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1 – CONCEPT OF THE ETHICAL IMAGE

The term “ethical image” is derived from the term “moral imagination”, used by Gaston Bachelard. In this conceptual derivation, two moments are immediately to explain. In a first moment, as principle, the image is taken semantically related to the imagination, while being attentive to the theoretical consequences thereof. In this sense, the line of Bergson-Deleuze tending to separate the image from the imagination is meaningful in opening another direction of considering the images as fundamental units for an ontology of multiplicity. Similarly, the priority of perception may endorse the distance between the visual experience in the images and the psychical function elaborated by the imagination. On the contrary, guided by the transcendental subjectivity, the focus on a certain productive imagination from Kant to Schelling (even to Heidegger) is relevant in this philosophical tradition. Within such a framework, the position of Bachelard in crediting a high esteem of the imagination, inscribed in the metaphysics of the subjectivity. In a second moment, the emphasis lies on the connection of the aesthetical with the ethical (or the moral)¹, at least on a certain correspondence of the two due to the foundation of imagination.

¹ I assimilate the ethical and the moral in taking the “ethical imagination” not being different from “moral imagination”. The distinction between the ethical from the moral may introduce some other theoretical discussions such as the position of Hegel that I will not consider here.



This idea is not innovatory, but can be found in a Kantian idea that the beauty is a moral symbol, even though Kant himself did not allow the confusion of type (*Typus*)² with symbol and endorsed a use of reason rather than that of imagination in a moral action.

In Bachelard, the moral imagination as a philosophical term was mentioned in relation to the awaking dream of Robert Desoille, and then in the analysis of Nietzsche. Bachelard affirms, in the method of Desoille, "a transformation from oneiric energy to moral energy" (Bachelard 1988: 112). Bypassing the function of the intelligence in the moral action, Bachelard talks about the moral heroism provided by the moral imagination. As Desoille affirms it, the sublimation of the subject works together with the oneiric image of ascension. The ascension incarnates "the verticality of aerial imagination" (*Ibidem*: 111). Bachelard goes further to assent that "imaginary lines are the real life lines". The verticality is not taken as a geometrical index but as a living indication or a dynamic direction of life. The concept of moral imagination, besides its *Ascensional Psychology* in Desoille's use, joins together the imaginary line and the life line; but its presupposition is that the working together of imagination and the will, or their unity, as Bachelard comments it:

Imagination and Will are two aspects of a single profound force. Anyone who can imagine can will. To the imagination that informs our will is coupled a will to imagine, a will to live what is imagined. (*Ibidem*: 111-112).

Being attentive to the coupling of the will and the imagination, a reader will find again a trace of subjectivity as presented without hesitation. The subject of the will is a continual aspect in Bachelard, based on a metaphysics of will, of action, and of force. In a similar way, he takes the moral imagination as a key term to interpret Nietzsche, especially the aerial images. But Bachelard makes also a distinction between the will to power and the will to work in his later studies on the terrestrial images (Bachelard 2002: 23).

However, in principle, Bachelard continues to affirm the affinity or even an identity of the imagination and the will:

It is not my intention to study these psychological activities in isolation. On the contrary, I intend to establish that the imagination with the will, which could in a simplistic view pass for antithetical, are in truth profoundly interdependent. (Bachelard 2002: 6).³

² That is "the type of the moral law (*Typus des Sittengesetzes*)". (Kant 1985: 81-82).

³ In the original text, the sense of "au fond, étroitement solodaires" may be stronger than the English



Between *L'air et les songes* (1943) and *La terre et les rêveries de la volonté* (1947), Bachelard didn't change his idea; the equation of the imagination and the will is ontological. The formula of Schelling may be useful in giving a determination of the metaphysics of the will: "In the final and highest instant, there is no other being than willing. Willing is original Being"⁴.

But for Bachelard, the intention is to explore the poetical dimension of morality, which can evoke the function of human will. He does not follow a speculative formulation of moral reasoning, but rather leans to a certain moral intuition implied in the poetic images. The philosophical significance is to recognize that "the *aestheticization of ethics* (*l'esthétisation de la morale*) is not something superficial"; this aestheticization is "not a metaphor that can be removed without risk", it is "a profound and urgent need" (Bachelard 1988: 144)⁵. With the poetic image of ascension in Nietzsche, and more generally, with "the aestheticization of ethics", Bachelard confirms again the function of moral imagination: "it is the imagination in this case that raises being to a higher level." One can also recognize here the ontological dimension of the engaged imagination.

Furthermore the imagination for Bachelard is not static⁶ but dynamic, which is in concordance with the idea of re-evaluation of all values in Nietzsche. The concept of moral imagination is adequate in both senses: in one way, it catches the aerial direction, "to the height", central to Nietzsche; in another way, it releases the dynamic forces implied in the violent transformation of values by a contact with the poetic images. So the moral imagination is justified in a second level in so far as a moral image is integrated in the process of evaluation. Bachelard gives his echo to Nietzsche in appreciating his image of "weigher (*peseur*)" related to the verticality of height and depth, of ascension and falling: "Nothing escapes this weighing by the soul; everything is value, life is valorization. What vertical life there is in this knowledge of a verticalized soul!" (Bachelard 1988: 158).

In ascribing Nietzsche an idealism of force, Bachelard elaborates also the ontological significance: "Here is the axiom of this idealism: the being who ascends or descends is the being through whom everything ascends or descends". (Bachelard 1988: 144)⁷.

An aestheticization of ethics does not contribute to restoring a banal ethical order, as happened in any pro-institutional aesthetics, for which the poetry is dependent on the

translation "interdependent".

⁴ "Es gibt in der letzten und höchsten Instanz gar kein anderes Seyn als Wollen. Wollen ist Urseyn, und auf dieses allein passen alle Prädicate desselben: Grundlosigkeit, Ewigkeit, Unabhängigkeit von der Zeit, Selbstbejahung. Die ganze Philosophie strebt nur dahin, diesen höchsten Ausdruck zu finden." (Schelling 1856-1861/7: 350).

⁵ The English translator does not distinguish the two terms *moral* and *ethic*.

⁶ Durand makes a remarkable distinction in this sense, he assigns to Bachelard "la phénoménologie dynamique et 'amplificatrice'", and to Sartre "la phénoménologie statique et nihiliste". (Durand 1968: 72).

⁷ Italics in the original text.



ethical order. Within the philosophical tradition, one has in mind the accusation of Plato counter the poets in the state. No, this idea of aestheticization of ethics gives respect to the independence of poetry, but admits a precedence of poetry in founding ethics, in guiding ethical action. A poem evokes a certain ethical image in a dynamic way and surpasses reason by activating ethical sense for action. Bachelard comments on a Nietzschean image of "constellation of being (*constellation de l'être*)" by consenting that "an aerial voyage ... yields to the poet constellation of being, the 'eternal necessity' of being, the 'stellar' witness to his ethical orientation (*l'évidence « stellaire » de l'orientation morale*)" (Bachelard 1988:152). The constellation in the sky shines with the moral laws in the human mind. But the "constellation of being" joins together the ontological, the cosmic, and the ethical. An ethical image can then give orientation for an ethical action, an ethical life. Again this is a function of psychosynthesis (Bachelard 1988: 113) that Bachelard prefers to psychoanalysis. In contrast to the analytical position, an ethical image is synthetic in animating actions and senses of value: "Matter, motion, valorization are all bound up in the same images" (Bachelard 1988: 152). The image actually engages the actor in the world in relating him to the connection with the concrete matters (in a cosmological dimension). Another formula is more audacious: "The imagination, more than reason, is a unifying force in the human soul" (Bachelard 1988: 152). The poetic synthesis unifies the theoretical (matter and motion) and the practical (valorization). A person in the universe would no longer be solitary in his pure law-giving status, but will act with other persons and other beings in the same world.

One question left: is this view of unifying imagination akin to that of Nietzsche? It seems that the "unifying force in the human soul" is not the major concern of Nietzsche. To seek the theoretical affinity in the high esteem of function of the imagination, one can find a possibility in Heidegger's interpretation of the *Critique of pure reason*, and another in Schelling's specific view of Imagination (*Ein-bildung, Hineinbildung or In-eins-bildung*)⁸. The concept of *In-eins-bildung* has a neo-platonic source and a romantic alley in Coleridge who adapted the Greek idea into an English term "esemplastic" (Coleridge 1951: 191). In comparison to the philosophy of Nietzsche, this idealistic romanticism as a conceptual source and the poetic experience as a common ground would seem more familiar to Bachelard.

2 - TOPOLOGICAL SENSE OF IMAGE

Further more, in order to approach the conceptual justification of the ethical image in Bachelard, it may be useful to refer to some Nietzsche's ideas of flying, of ascension, of

⁸ (Schelling 1856-1861/4: 422).



height. The key term is the verticality, joining a contrast between the height and the profundity, between the sky and the abyss. This verticality is rendered valuable in correspondence to the religious and moral order. By no accident does Bachelard treat the spatial image after his work on the images of earth. But from a topological point of view, the spatiality such as verticality was already implied before the publication of *La poétique de l'espace*. In fact, there is a structural verticality of consciousness, taken from the verbal image of *Tiefenpsychologie* (psychology of depth) as synonym of psychoanalysis, in so far as the consciousness supposes the unconscious. Bachelard modifies the terminology to describe a deeper relation between material elements and the form, corresponding subsequently to the material imagination and formal imagination. Still earlier than *L'air et les songes*, in 1942, Bachelard, commenting the contemplation of deep water in Edgar Poe, inscribed his own verbal or conceptual imagination:

One apprehends that the materializing reverie – this reverie dreams the matter – is beyond the reverie of forms. More briefly, one understands that the matter is the unconscious of the form. (Bachelard 1942: 70).

The depth of consciousness becomes the orientation of the aquatic image, the deep water. Before the lake water, one obtains a reflection of oneself, and a certain depth is contemplated; this depth penetrates the surface of the water and then the surface of consciousness:

In this contemplation in depth, the subject is conscious of his intimacy. [...] [This contemplation] is rather a perspective of deepening for the world and for ourselves. (Bachelard 1942: 71).

In this perspective, what Bachelard speculates in the material imagination and the dynamical imagination is not just the elements as they are, but also the structure of consciousness animated by them. In short, far from being neutral, the image is directive and therefore topological.

An ethical image seen from a topological perspective may indicate a double sense: on the one hand, it guides the psychic life and more energetically it provides orientation; on the other hand, it is attached to the "inner" side of the psychic life itself, that is, animating the unconscious, the deep bottom of the soul. The use of ethical image is also topological, because the image situates the being or precisely the human in its center, restores one to a proper place, to one's own place. Where one finds one's center is one's intimacy in and with the world. Still it is not sufficient to describe Bachelard's idea as anthropomorphic,



because it is also cosmo-morphic. The intimate and the cosmic are interchangeable. As Bachelard expresses himself, the distinction between the interior and the exterior is not geometrically definitive; there is not fixed frontier between them. One would rather pay attention to a dialectics of the interior and the exterior. The play of inside out is itself topological.

To our interest, the topological perspective admits the valorization of the place, but not of all places, not of whatever place. To meet the dynamic function of the place, it is necessary to emphasize the usage of a topo-analysis (Bachelard 1994: XXVIII)⁹. In contrast to the importance of memory given by the psychoanalyst, the topoanalysis “would be the systematic psychological study of the sites of our intimate lives” (Bachelard 1994: 8). These places are where the living memories are condensed. The intimacy comes from the lived experiences. The resurgent images of places re-present those lived experiences:

Space that has been seized upon by the imagination cannot remain indifferent space subject to measures and estimates of the surveyor (*livré à la mesure et à la réflexion du géomètre*). It is lived. It has been lived in, not in its positivity, but with all the partiality of the imagination. (Bachelard 1994: XXXVI).¹⁰

Taking the citations into considerations, one will still ask: Is not the intimacy itself related to a topology of the soul? How can one express oneself without a minimum attachment to a certain place? As the term “intimacy” suggests, this kind of topological image – revealing some space, place, and site of lives – is indicative of the life and tightly in relation to an ethical life¹¹.

In the following paragraphs, I would like to present some topological motifs implied in the poetics of Bachelard. Some of them are already mentioned in the above discussion. I will just repeat the essential traits.

3 – TOWARD AN ETHICAL TOPO-ANALYSIS

Already in Aristotelian theory of categories, the “place” is dominant in the apophantic experience. For a sentence to state an event, it is inevitable to use some prepositions to indicate “where” something happens. In this way, a topological metaphor is naturally in

⁹ Cf. also *Ibidem*: XXXVI-8.

¹⁰ I add a missing sentence in the English translation – « *Il est vécu* ».

¹¹ Durand evokes the priority of the ethical function in symbols, with an equivalence of images to symbols: “le symbole donc nous dévoile un monde et le symbolisme phénoménologique explicite ce monde, qui – aux antipodes du monde de la science – est cependant éthiquement primordial” (Durand 1968 : 74).



use. But the importance of a topo-analysis is not to analyze a semantic function of these topological prepositions or the adverbs of place. However, as Bachelard suggests it, the method of exaggeration suits better to be attentive to some certain words endorsed with topological weights.

1) the “there (*là*)” in the being-there

A good example is the *là* in French language, an almost equivalent to *Da* in German. The *Dasein* emphasized by Heidegger is well known. Nonetheless Bachelard speculates himself on the verbal power of *là* in a French way. A fundamental difference consists in the ethical meaning of the being: Bachelard often lays emphasis on the existential happiness (*bonheur*), on the well-being (*bien-être*) as ontologically primordial, while taking the being-there of Heidegger to be surrounded by the anxiety. Even aiming at the revelation of the ethical happiness, his idea of the well-being is deviated from the Aristotelian eudaimonism.

In reading the *Roman d'un enfance* of Pierre Loti, Bachelard underlines the literary image of the grotto and takes it as “a prototype of the antra of repose”; he adds: “by a strange condensation of memories, Loti unifies the grotto and the house of birth, as if the grotto where one dreams were the true archetype of the house where one has lived” (Bachelard 1948: 190).¹²

This image of the grotto or the cave resurgent from the childhood is associated with the well-being of dwelling, with a being-there. To be explicit about the being-there, he recurs to the metaphysics of will and refers to the protection in the image of cave as an image of repose, “the cave protects repose and love” (Bachelard 1994: 193). This protection comes also from a force and a will, therefore the image of repose is far from being a static immobility, but a condensation of the will of dwelling (*volonté d'habiter*). There is no arbitrary “being-there”: “Being elsewhere, being there, these can not only be expressed by the geometrical views. A will is necessary to them. The will of dwelling seems to be condensed in a underground residence (*une demeure souterraine*)” (Bachelard 1994: 191).

The will is active, so that the condensation in an image is “a kind of condensation of intimate forces”. The same requisite of intimacy constitutes a basic tone of Bachelard. There is a fundamental intimacy for a moral agent to prove his will of dwelling in a place. But this moral intimacy also describes his being-well in that situation. We can call it “ontological intimacy”. In the dialectics of outside and inside in *La poétique de l'espace*, we can read a more emphatic discussion of the being-there.

¹² The translation is mine.



The word *being-there* (*l'être-là*) is a combination of two parts – being (*l'être*) and there (*là*) –, after a general speculation on the dissolution of words “prefixes and suffixes become unwelded: they want to think for themselves” (Bachelard 1994: 213), Bachelard weighs the force of *there* (*là*):

Often the *there* is spoken so forcefully that the ontological aspects of the problems under consideration are sharply summarized in a geometrical fixation. The result is dogmatization of philosophemes as soon as they are expressed. In the tonal quality of the French language, the *là* (*there*) is so forceful, that to designate *being* (*l'être*) by *être-là* is to point an energetic forefinger that might easily relegate intimate being to an exteriorized place. (Bachelard 1994: 213).

The taste of words leads Bachelard to notify the intranslatable sense between German *da* and French *là*. He catches a singular resonance of the sound pronounced in his own language. Nonetheless will Bachelard be naïve in stressing the force of *là* (*there*), he does not contend himself of the partial emphasis of a prefix or a suffix. He reminds the imaginer of words that –

In French, one should think twice before speaking of *l'être-là*. Entrapped in being, we shall always have to come out of it. And when we are hardly outside of being, we always have to go back into it. Thus, in being, everything is circuitous, roundabout, recurrent, so much talk; a chaplet of sojournings, a refrain with endless verses. (Bachelard 1994: 213-214).

This comment leads to a speech of “the spiraled being”, while in repeating the dialectical movement of going outside and returning inside. The sense of *being* is not a truncation but an infinite nuance following the guiding line of the expressive mobility in the logics of the *l'être-là*. Bachelard elaborates the poetical value in these terms. The word *l'être-là* gives a poetical orientation, which results in a certain “nuance of being” (Bachelard 1994: 216). Assuming the understanding of *l'être-là* carrying this “nuance of being”, a reply to the project of the fundamental ontology would deploy the ontic and topological nuance in a multiplication of the sense of being. The repetition of *being* and *there*, or the mutual implication of these two in the word *l'être-là* demarcates an infinite dialectics of here and there, of inside and outside. But the motive is ethical and cosmic, so that a pure and formal determination of Being (if possible) will not be sufficient to fully develop the



onto-poetic value of the well-being implied in *l'être-là*.

We find another reference of *l'être-là* in the *La poétique de la rêverie*. Bachelard emphasizes more on the ethical aspect that the *l'être-là* may fail to engage itself. The cosmic side coincides with the ethical side. The key point in this metaphysics of imagination is the well-being. An image can suffice to ascertain the existence, the example is the fire:

Out of time, out of space, before the fire, our being is no longer chained to a *being-there (l'être-là)*, our I, to convince itself of its existence, of an existence which lasts, is no longer obliged to make strong affirmations, decisions which give us the future of energetic projects. (...) Ah! The gentle fluency of the reverie which helps us pour ourselves into the world, into the well-being of a world (*dans le bien-être d'un monde*). Once more, reverie teaches us that the essence of being is well-being, a well-being rooted in the archaic being. (Bachelard 1971: 193).¹³

This long citation pounds on the dynamics of the term 'dans' (in, into) in responding to Heideggerian being-in (*In-sein*). This voice can be taken as a further reply to the project of fundamental ontology rooted in an existential anxiety. Is Bachelard naively optimistic? Maybe not. To respond to a miserable century full of despairs and wars, Bachelard has his own choice, an ethical choice. He chooses the well-being, the happiness. The ontology should reveal to the humanity the positive side of Being. Though very often being set in danger, mankind can keep its hope for being in this miserable world, because it is ontologically positive. Even sometimes the terms of Bachelard are floating, his writings present a style of inscribing philosophical concepts into poetical metaphors; but the guiding line conducts to a constant center of interest.

The speculation here touches on the fire of Malicroix written by Henri Bosco. The hearth is not just an equipment to meet human interest, it is rather cosmic and introduces another topological item "before the fire" that we will talk later. Bachelard inscribes his typical insights in saying:

The cosmos of the dreamer puts us in an immobile time; it helps us melt into the world. Warmth is within us, and we are in warmth, in a warmth equal to ourselves. Warmth (*chaleur*, f.) comes to bring the support of its feminine softness to the fire (*feu*, m.). Will a brutal metaphysics come to tell us that we are being thrown into the warmth, into the world of fire? Oppositional metaphysics can do nothing in the face of the evidence

¹³ I render the italics to give a emphatic tone.



of reverie. In reading the passage by Bosco, the well-being of the word invades us from all directions. (Bachelard 1971: 192-193).

Without mentioning the name of Heidegger, the phrase “thrown into the warmth, into the world of fire” implies a philosophical background of the “being-thrown (*Geworfenheit*)” (Heidegger 1927: 179) which reveals a threat of falling in everyday life with the Being-in-the-world. With Bachelard, the image is totally different from the alienating whirl which endangers the authenticity of the Dasein. He takes the unifying fire as a central image. Being thrown into the world of fire does not mean alienation, but rather a self-appropriation (“in a warmth equal to ourselves”). The archetype of Empedocles’ running into the volcano draws a quite philosophical and poetic picture – to appropriate the volcanic fire and to join in a warmth equal to himself. Following this different orientation, we meet another ontological question: Why “a well-being rooted in the archaic being”? It is because “the archaic being teaches me to be the same as myself”. As Bachelard answers it, the archaic being is immanent in the fire, in the elemental image of fire, which restores the original and peaceful self-identity: “the fire of *Malicroix* is a fire at peace with itself” (Bachelard 1971: 193). The topological effect is in function, especially in an ethical function. The *là* in *l’être-là* is no more an alienating compulsion that forces the being to be thrown in a strange place, to be out of place. The sense of being-in-the-world can be blissful, introducing the welfare, a well-being (*bonheur*).

According to the same line of thinking, the following paragraph should be deemed an ontological power: “in front of this fire which teaches the dreamer the archaic and intemporal, the soul is no longer stuck in a corner of the world. It is at the center of the world, at the center of its world” (Bachelard 1971: 194).

This worldview is far from being ecstatic, it grants “a metaphysics of adherence to the world” (*Ibidem*). This “adherence” couples the warm welcoming. A cosmic hospitality potent in the hearth reverses the dubious and unhappy being-thrown in the world. The *là* will not just be a description of the sentiment of being driven into a corner. It lets the being to be not just a being, but a well-being, “a more-being, a more-than-being (*un plus-être, un plus qu’être*)” (Bachelard 1990: 14)¹⁴. What is more fundamental? The being itself or the well-being beyond the being?

In the Opus Posthumous edited by Suzanne Bachelard, *Fragments d’une poétique du feu*, the old Bachelard continues his poetic imagination with the fire in regard to the Dasein. With the same Hölderlin dreamed by Heidegger, with the same (death of) Empedocles dreamed by Hölderlin, there is a manifest transformation of the Dasein by the flame of fire: *Dasein* becomes *Feuersein*, the *Da (là)* being replaced by the fire (*Feuer, feu*).

¹⁴ The English translator renders these terms as “some existence beyond, something beyond existence”.



The death of Empedocles's casting himself into the Etna is poetic. This poetic action of casting completes the state of being thrown in an ontological sense. In Bachelard's words, we have the sentences of fire:

The death of Empedocles marks the extremity beyond which sheds all of its experience, real or imagined. Here lies Fire. The tiny speck of existence that is a human's being yearns to become the immensity of fire. The Dasein too sure of its roots shall be a Feuersein in the tree of flame's immensity. (Bachelard 1990: 100).

I have a different reading for "*Le feu est là*" (the citation here is rendered "Here lies Fire"). I would like to read this sentence as "Here is Fire" to keep the original ambiguity that allows a possible substitution of *Da* (in *Dasein*) by *Feuer* (Fire, *feu*) in *Feuersein* (*l'être-feu*). My reason is that for Bachelard the death of Empedocles in the poems is not a death in person, but a death in the Cosmos, a death in the world. To die in the fire is a kind of the "elemental death (*la mort élémentaire*)", "death both by and for the Cosmos" (Bachelard 1990: 105). More precisely, the death in the fire is to join the fire, to become the fire, to be in the flame. "It is necessary to be flame if one is to abide in hell or throw oneself to Etna" (*Ibidem*). In this sentence, a becoming fire is not sufficient, the cosmological sense is also ontological. Being thrown in the fire (Etna) refers to a being-fire, conversely, the *being-there* (*Dasein*, *l'être-là*) shall enter into the cosmic play. A topological *là* returns to a poetics of cosmos in flame.

Along with these discussions on the topological function of the *there* (*là*), a series of other topological items are also encountered: world, cosmos, before the fire, the "in-ness", the beyond etc.; the directional expression, such as the verticality, the "over against" (*le contre*), is abundant too. Aside the above mentioned being-there, among those topological images, the place that catches Bachelard in total is the cosmos, the world. It would be possible to designate the cosmos as the milieu of the places. A final chapter in the *La poétique de la rêverie*, "Reverie and Cosmos" states the main ideas in a comprehensive way. Without presenting the sum of these ideas, I will only underline the synthetic function of this chapter and move to some other issues that may be left unnoticed.

2) cosmos, cosmicity

The cosmos serves as a synthetic concept in reference to the psychosynthesis evoked by Bachelard. It summarizes some principles of the material imagination and dynamic



imagination. To meet the terrestrial image, the cosmos is evocative of the will of dwelling: "cosmic reverie causes us to inhabit a world", "It gives the dreamer the impression of a *home* (*chez soi*) in the imagined universe" (Bachelard 1971: 177). One thing to note here, the word "cause" is not a favorite term of Bachelard, for the French text uses "*faire* (to make)", it seems more literal to say "cosmic reverie makes us to inhabit a world". However the meaning is strong: there is an initiation of dwelling in cosmic images: "The imagined world gives us an expanding *home* (*donne un chez soi en expansion*)."¹⁵ This *home* is not a void place. It is a home of one's own, letting one feel comfortable. More over, the home as *chez soi* suits the process of appropriation, a process that calls into play the self, the proper, the authentic (*das Eigene*) in echo to the search for authenticity in Heidegger. But Bachelard does not take the cosmos as neutral or as anthropological in a pejorative sense. He sees in it a place of comfort which pacifies the soul, wherein a comfort lets the being-there be properly in his own place.

Thus an ethical principle is axiomatic – the comfort at home convokes an ontological happiness: "to designate a dreamed world well, it is necessary to mark it with a happiness" (Bachelard 1971: 177).

Or similarly: "we must affirm in general and in detail that reverie is a consciousness of well-being. In a cosmic image as well as in an image of our dwelling, we are in the well-being of a repose" (Bachelard 1971: 177-178).

One can also follow the imaginary discourse of Bachelard in saying that this cosmic appropriation is a fusion. The poetic identification involves con-fusion. The con-fusional logic goes on in equalizing a being with the cosmos. Several derived theorems appear as the consequence of cosmicity: "the world is my appetite" (Bachelard 1971: 178), if I eat; "the world comes to breathe within me; I participate in the good breathing of the world" (*Ibidem*: 179), if I breathe. In a "pride of seeing, of seeing clearly, of seeing well, of seeing far" (*Ibidem*: 183), an archetype "the Cosmos is an Argus" infuses its breath, so that if one wants to see, to see well, there is a predominance of vision – i.e. "The world wishes to see itself; the world lives in an active curiosity with ever open eyes"¹⁵ (Bachelard 1971: 185). And if one wants to speak: "The dreamer speaks to the world, and now the world is speaking to him" (Bachelard 1971: 187), or "The poet listens and repeats. The voice of the poet is a voice of the world" (Bachelard 1971: 178). All in all, the cosmomorphism and the anthropomorphism interpenetrate one another. The osmosis of the images holds an universal confusion: "in cosmic images, it often seems that man's words infuse human energy into the being of things" (Bachelard 1971: 189-190).

¹⁵ The image of Argus serves as a constant reference in the imagination of the water, such as the eye of the lake, cf. Bachelard 1942: 43.



All the breaths, all the words, all the bodies are cosmic in this infusion, in this confusion, in this fusion¹⁶. Within the world, there are other nuances of being to be recognized in the poetic images of place – to be before the fire, in front of a lake, thrown into fire, immersion in the water, up into the sky. The four elements are well suited in the world.

3) “before” and “in”

As we have seen in the foregoing discussions, there is a fire that gives a special unification and fusion for the being-there. But it happens when a poetic dreamer is in front of the fire (*devant le feu*). The discourse of Bachelard links remarkably the “fire of roots” (Bachelard 1971: 191) to a “well-being rooted in the archaic being”, contributing to an observation of “the existence of the ante-existence” (Bachelard 1971: 192). The archaic fire meets the immemorial and immobile time. Released from a chained being-there or from being-in-the-world, a human being attests, “in front of the fire”, “before the fire”, “out of time, out of space”, “an unsettled being (*un être défixé*)” (Bachelard 1994: 214) incorporating the freedom of words and the rooted well-being. The fusion of space and time in an archaic state drives the being, under a paradoxical appearance, into an infinite movement in the play of the world. There are in fact two movements of reverie “before the fire” – “the movement which makes us flow into a happy world and the movement which makes our body a sphere of well-being” (Bachelard 1971: 194), two movements that warm up both soul and body.

The same topological effect of “before (*devant*)” happens in the image of the water: “before still water, the dreamer adheres to the repose of the world” (Bachelard 1971: 196). The being-before is under the influence of a hypnotic tranquility. In the still water, two topological issues join together. There is a topological confusion of the water images: “In tranquil water how close the surface and the depths are! Depth and surface are reconciled. The deeper the water, the clearer the mirror” (Bachelard 1971: 197). Bachelard gives another tonality to the reverie “before the water”, from the depth to the clarity. The reconciliation of depth and surface creates an experience of “mutual adoration between the beauty of the sky and the beauty of the waters”. Here appears a pancalism. The cosmic osmosis reveals the world of purity: “whoever dreams before a limpid water dreams of the

¹⁶ The fusion as a theme will not be discussed in this paper, we refer to Bachelard; cf. Bachelard 1971: 197 e Bachelard 1943: 188).



original purities.

From the world to the dreamer, the water reverie experiences a communication of purity"¹⁷.

Before the water, around the image of the lake as Argus, to see and to be seen, to see well and to look beautiful, are two actions in one, or to put inversely, there is one action in double meaning. There is a fold of vision. The bent and the bending of the grass (Bachelard 1971: 190) join together in this original duplicity. The word "reflection" is significant in double meaning – an optic phenomenon which reveals purity and beauty, and also a returning to oneself for the one who is before the water.

With the water, there is another character of place, the "in", so that "the poetics of the perceptible, the poetics of tactility" (Bachelard 1971: 202) can open a dynamic experience full of muscular tonality. More concretely, this image is about swimming in the water. Bachelard refers to Jacques Audiberti's description of a village girl. The principle of this topological "in" is that "The dreamer dreams of living in the thickness of the water" (Bachelard 1971: 201). The force comes from "the intimacy of the liquid world", since the village girl "enters the green water, a morally green water, sister of the intimate substance of a Mélusine" (Bachelard 1971: 202). Here the expressions, "in the water", "into the water", signify the play of the forces from the water, but it "surpasses the world", "beyond all that is perceptible". The joy is "far beyond the power of swimming" (Audiberti's words cited by Bachelard) (Bachelard 1971: 203). It has nothing to do with the bodily movement. The human body is connected to the cosmic body. The effect of the "being in the water" leads to a beyond, to a cosmic scale. This is the process of cosmicizing; to get into the aquatic element is for Bachelard an act of experiencing "the emergence into a new cosmos" (Bachelard 1971: 203), for "water is the whole world". To be in the lake is thus an act to awake the cosmic energy in the water. The "in" as a topological image reminds us of this cosmic dimension full of energy.

Tightly related to the dynamism of the cosmic emergence, being in the water will be being deeply in the water. Bachelard calls it a verticality in the movement. We then will consider the verticality as a topological meaning.

4) verticality

The verticality is dimensional and directional. Not only does it appear in the imagination of the water, but also in the image of other elements, fire, air, and earth. In the

¹⁷ Bachelard, PR, 172.



La flame d'une chandelle (1961), a whole chapter intitled "The verticality of Flames" exposes the issue. But in the early work *L'eau et les rêves* (1942), Bachelard had already encountered the vertical dimension in the image of deep water seized by Edgar Poe. Haunted by the death, the image of the deep water absorbs the clarity of the surface into its deep bottom. There is a "destiny of the water" which is "a destiny that deepens the matter, augments the substance it with human pain" (Bachelard 1942: 75). The shadow, the night, the heavy charge, the pain, the death, and the depth are joined together. The vertical dimension for a consciousness may admit that the water invites the complex of death¹⁸. There is a "synthesis of beauty, of death, and of water" – synthesis of form, event, and substance, or synthesis of form, becoming, and matter – so that, according to Bachelard, "a dreamer in depth, such as Edgar Poe, unifies them into a symbolic force" (Bachelard 1942: 92). The psychosynthetic method assumes here a major function. But why is there a death with it? Because there is neither an arbitrary event nor an everyday happening. Viewed in an eye of cosmos, the death of an even more trivial being is endowed with a specific weight. To die in the image of still water could be to lie synthetically in a beautiful memory, to avoid a death in dispersion. To die in this way will be to get together oneself into an unity, to return to one's own depth. Life and death can again be unified in an ontological ambivalence.

The image of the air, in an opposite direction, provides an evidence of the verticality. The flight and the falling move along the vertical dimension. The imagination of movement with the image of the air could not be limited to the horizontal direction. The imagination in the case of the air is rather animated to amount to the high or to fall to the low. It is natural to follow the movement of the air to attain a higher place where a being feels itself (himself, herself) surpassing its own being. Bachelard comments on Shelley's poems and designates the instinct of spiritual life: "it instinctively tends toward height" and "for Shelley, poetic images are all agents of elevation" (Bachelard 1988: 41) . At the same time, one has to notify that the height is significant in both ontological and ethical realm. The height gives "all the metaphors of human greatness" and a higher being, "above one's being (au-dessus de son être)" (Bachelard 1988: 42). The case of Nietzsche that we have talked about in the above section gives the evidence of verticality too. The superhuman (*surhumain*) seen as a vertical personality (Bachelard 1988: 145) in Bachelard's remarks is typically ethical, where the term moral imagination is used as core concept to interpret Nietzsche. There is also a synthesis of cold, silence, and height (Bachelard 1988: 140) in the wind, such that "air acquires offensive qualities" (Bachelard 1988: 139) in intruding the sky. One place revealing the distribution of the four elements: from the below, water, earth, fire,

¹⁸ "L'eau est une invitation à mourir" (Bachelard 1942 : 77) ; " pour Héraclite ; la mort, c'est l'eau même" (*Ibidem* : 79) ; "l'eau est le véritable support matériel de la mort" (Bachelard 1942 : 90).



and air – this is “the totally vertical hierarchy of Nietzsche’s poetics” (Bachelard 1988: 150).

For Nietzsche, the bird attests the desire of flying high. The bird, especially the eagle, carries the sign of the air. The flight is aggressive, so that the bird of prey symbolizes “an offensive against the heavens” (Bachelard 1988: 154). This kind of moral imagination is a “pure aggressive imagination”, dependent on the will for ontological and ethical superiority. But this superiority is based on the will of power. According to Bachelard, the demand “to throw myself into your height, that is my depth” urged by Zarathoustra is not just “a gentle take-off (*une douce envolée*)”, but rather “the gushing forth of being (*un jet de l’être*)” (Bachelard 1988: 155). Since the height for a superhuman being, for an overman (*Übermensch, surhomme*) is his depth, it is legitimate to say: “before the rising sun, the first Nietzschean sensation is the inner sensation of will, the feeling of decision” (Bachelard 1988: 155).

The ethical meaning in these citations is that a willing for the height renders possible the *jet de l’être* – we take the French term, because it can call into attention on the affinity of *jet* and *projet*.

One formula of Bachelard expresses a significant inversion of the being-thrown; it interprets the eternal recurrence as the consciousness of “an awareness of a projected will” but “our Being is what projects the world anew” (Bachelard 1988: 156). The recurrence of the cosmos comes from the decision of the will to power. In this sense, the good and the evil, the high and the low, these expressions are understood along the vertical axis. Superiority and inferiority are both valorization. In response to the speech of dynamic evaluation, the ethical life indicates a vertical life.

The tree and the mountain serve also as images of verticality, touching both on the imagination of the air and the earth. Moreover, the verticality consists of the height and the uprightness (*droiture*) (Bachelard 1988: 205). Before the tall and upright tree, an ethical imagination is energetic in active moral heroism. Similarly, in this poetics, the mountain concretizes the ethics of verticality. Under the title of gravity, the mountain combines a duality of vertical valorization. Bachelard takes it as a dialectics between the will to stand erect and the matter being crushed, wherein will be animated “the rhythmanalysis of contrary images of being crushed and of standing upright” (Bachelard 2002: 274)¹⁹. When one stands before the mountain, one can instantly feel the “induced verticality” and experience the “vertical sensibility” (Bachelard 2002: 275-276).

A further image is called *Atlas Complex*. The hero of the myth of heavy responsibility raises the mountain. Bachelard considers the myth of Atlas as a mountain myth. “When he

¹⁹ The translation is modified, for the English translator reads : “it will be possible to see this opposition of images of being crushed and of standing upright take on a therapeutic rhythm”.



shoulders the heavens, his shoulders are mountains, the shoulders of the earth", – this

reading not only defines an cosmic equivalence of the hero and the mountain, but also an ethical equivalence in a cosmic scale. Atlas assumes an active engagement of a vertical will. What this will supposes to fulfill is a support of weight. Due to its incorporation with the image of the earth, this will makes sense of a responsibility of the "against", similar to the "will to work (*volonté de travail*)" (Bachelard 2002: 23) that attacks the matter and enjoys the resistance of the matter. In the Atlas Complex, the shoulder is symbolic of the heavy burden and the neck a symbol for the uprightness. The "psychological uplift" is fundamentally a coefficient of metaphysics of moral – "to stand tall in an upstanding world (*se tenir droit dans un univers redressé*) is to project one's ego onward onto the unknown (*le non-moi*) in a metaphysical gesture of manifest will" (Bachelard 2002: 280).

In the French text, the word *droit* gives the same tonality as the word *redressé*. A reader may catch an ethical implication in both words. Shoulders and necks work together to express the dynamic situation along the vertical axis, which induces an ethical spell of responsibility. There is an imaginary isomorphism of the upright body and the righteous personality. Two movements in opposite directions, downward in the crushing weight and upward in the power of lift (Bachelard 2002: 283), constitute a dialectics of the "will to work". This ethical image is characteristic of moral heroism: the heavier the duty is, the more courageous the will of responsibility is aroused. The heavy burden will not damage the upright figure of the hero, it only contributes to his righteousness.

One last but not least image moves along the vertical axis is the flame. The old Bachelard summaries the whole idea in two simple formulas: (1) "Verticalizing reverie is the most liberating of reveries", (2) "images of verticality make us enter the realm of values." The philosopher rewrites his imagination of fire in the aspect of the candle flame. The voice repeats the mental image pictured in the reverie of the earth. The vertical valorization liberates the force of an upright being (a subject, an object). The dialectical movement is analogous: the flame fights against the breath and also against its own fragility.

Thus in commenting Trakl, without blaming a Heidegger who loves the poems of Trakl, Bachelard adds his words: "The flame is an inhabited verticality" (Bachelard 1988: 40)²⁰. The verticality of the flame is seized when "a breath disturbs it, it rights itself". The incessant redress (*se redresser*) of the flame conveys the verticalizing will of a candle speculator. Not only the cosmic confusion continues, the search for an ontological superiority also recurs. The imperative for "the more being (*le plus être*)", "the more than being (*le plus qu'être*)" finds its echo here, in the summit of the flame. I think the joy of

²⁰ The verse of Trakl in one line is: "The candle burns high and its crimson rears up."



Bachelard in meditating the flame is a constant reverberation (*retentissement*)²¹ (Bachelard 1994: XVI). The meaning of freedom comes from a search for a ontological height, a higher level of being.

In regarding the fragment on fire of Novalis, an ontological dynamism is in work with the metaphysics of imagination. We have thus the romantic determinations of Bachelard on this ethical and metaphysical lesson: "there is a dynamic image through which a meditation on flames gains a sort of *super-élan vital* (*élan sur-vital*) that can heighten life, prolong it beyond itself (*prolonger la vie au-dessus de la vie*), despite all the failings of ordinary matter" (Bachelard 1988: 45).

Under the score of the vivid image in ethical actions, an agent sees no banality in life. The *élan vital* has something superior (*élan sur-vital*) to support it, just as the "more than being" (*le plus être*) make possible the being (*l'être*). One fact may be sure for Bachelard that the surviving process (*sur-vivant*)²² (Bachelard 1988: 45) is already a dynamism which is longing for a more and more real life and searches upward for a life beyond life. But it is not simple to realize such a fact.

CONCLUSION

The ethical image in Bachelard is inscribed in the metaphysics of imagination assuming at the same time a dynamic, or sometimes dialectical, view. Forces and energies that can activate the dynamism are also presupposed to be necessary for this metaphysics. Further more, Bachelard emphasizes on the creative imagination. One can guess that forces and energies are also rooted in this creative imagination. Consequently there could be certain confusion here: the creative force of the imagination is itself a creation of forces. The imagination (*Einbildung*) is not separable from the force of imagination (*Einbildungskraft*). Since the force of imagination constitutes the universe, one should affirm that the cosmology is penetrated by the metaphysics of subjectivity.

The topological effects in these ethical imaginations are evident, so that the energetic dynamism through the natural elements frames the traces of the places. We have seen some exemplary usages of these traces. The "there", "before", "in front of", "in" are not just insignificant words.

²¹ a term from E. Minkowski.

²² The original text gives the following terms "survivante", "survolante" to describe the effect of the beyond, the "*au-dessus*" in French.



These traces demarcate a topology of beings. But under the condition of dynamism, the imaginative force that works through and with the places will set the positions and indicate the directions. So this topology of beings is emphatic as far as a being is not itself self-sufficient but need the position of places. The identification in the imaginative way requires the positivity of confusion, of ambivalence, and of correspondence.

Bachelard ascertains finally a positive view of life. Life is experience. To live is to have experience (*avoir vécu*). There is however a dynamic structure of this experience, in which the imagination gives a good example. It is rather an example to live, to have good life. To live ethically, in this sense, will be to act for well-being. To be is to be more, to be better. One paradox left for us, for the survivors in the sense of Levinas: to strive for survival is already to live a life beyond life. Again, paradoxically speaking, this is a simple formula for a difficult life. To live a liberating life is itself a difficult freedom. However the hope is there. Our world is where we live, where we are, where we take actions.

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