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«EQUIVOCATIONS OF NATURE: NAESS, LATOUR, NĀGĀRJUNA»

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ABSTRACT

This work brings together quite heterogeneous sources for reasons, which at first glance seem marginal. For example, without delving too deeply into Naess' problems Latour uses his constructs to sweep them aside. Another example is how Naess makes multiple references to Nāgārjuna's emptiness of own-nature in order to illustrate his relationism. Nevertheless, there are more important structural and philosophical reasons for bringing these three together. These are collected around two primary research points.

Firstly, we want to offer an articulation of relationism for ecology, its scope and the difficulties it faces. These span between the problem of the concept of nature and the problem of representation.

Beginning with Naess' *ecosophy*, we can secure a better grasp of the problems environmentalism faces when it makes use of an organicistic and interrelated image of nature. Relationism attempts to posit the overcoming of the subject/object dichotomy as it is structured in the representation of nature, but eventually finds itself trapped in the same premises.

Naess's problems are, nevertheless, more radical. Overcoming the subject/object and human/nature dualisms is not just a matter of integrating the two poles into a greater whole. The problems opened in relationism are intrinsic to the concept of nature as otherness to humanity, which underlies both managerial environmentalist approaches and ecological attempts to bridge the dualistic gap. Issues of continuity and difference, belonging and otherness emerge when the nature/humanity axis is articulated. The humanity/nature fracture is most tragic in the political tension between ecological naturalism and culturalist critique. The difficulties of environmentalism emerge as equivocations caused by the *a priori* framework of nature as otherness to humanity.

Latour's idea of the end of nature is a political-ecological solution to the problem of representation. The nature/culture framework is only one way to represent the common world of humans and nonhumans. It is possible to reopen the political work of composition of the common world, bringing the sciences (both humanities and hard sciences) to give scientific and political representation to phenomena such as climate change or species extinction.

A second research focus shifts from the political dimension and looks at subjectivity as the main difficulty in the problem of representation. Nāgārjuna's concept of emptiness [śūnyatā] proves to be a powerful insight into the tension between a radically relative reality and the attachment of the subject's view to a "nature of things."

ABSTRACT

Questo lavoro raccoglie fonti piuttosto eterogenee, che apparentemente dialogano in modo marginale. Latour rigetta bruscamente la posizione di Naess come prova della coerenza della propria ecologia politica; Naess scivola spesso in veloci riferimenti a Nāgārjuna e alla "vacuità di natura propria di tutti gli enti" per rinforzare il proprio relazionismo come visione alternativa della natura.

Tuttavia ci sono ragioni filosofiche e strutturali più profonde che giustificano questo inusuale accostamento. Queste ragioni ruotano intorno a due principali obiettivi di ricerca.

In primo luogo, tentiamo di offrire un'articolazione della portata e dei problemi che interessano un pensiero ecologico della relazione con la natura. I quesiti aperti dal relazionismo e le sue difficoltà si muovono nello spazio che si apre tra il concetto di natura come altro dall'uomo e il problema della rappresentazione. Una filosofia della relazione con la natura in un tutto organico tenta di riprendersi dalla rottura modernista della rottura tra soggetto e oggetto. In fondo, però, auspicare un cambio di visione del mondo in direzione ecosofica lascia il pensiero intrappolato nelle stesse strutture che caratterizzano la dicotomia uomo/natura.

I problemi dell'ecosofia di Naess sono strutturali, non solo del suo pensiero, ma di molto ambientalismo. Il superamento della frattura tra oggetto e soggetto non si consegue semplicemente integrando i due poli in un tutto più grande. I problemi aperti dal relazionismo di Naess sono intrinseci al concetto di natura come altro dell'uomo, anche in senso ambientale. Tale concetto è alla base di buona parte della produzione eco-filosofica, sia che si tratti di approcci manageriali, sia quando il tentativo va in direzione di un superamento della frattura dualistica. L'articolazione dell'asse uomo-natura nell'ambientalismo apre problemi di continuità e differenza, di appartenenza e alterità. La frattura uomo/natura si mostra in tutta la sua tragicità nella tensione politica tra un naturalismo ecologista e la critica culturale di una natura sempre "natura," sempre rappresentata. Le difficoltà in cui incorrono la maggior parte dei movimenti ambientalisti sono quindi provocate dagli equivoci strutturali di una natura ogni volta pensata come altro dell'uomo.

La “fine della natura” per Latour si presenta come una soluzione politico-ecologica al problema della rappresentazione. Lo schema natura/cultura è solo uno dei modi, per Latour, per rappresentare il mondo comune di umani e nonumani. È possibile riaprire il lavoro politico di composizione del mondo comune, portando le scienze (sia “dure,” che dello spirito) a dare rappresentazione scientifica e politica a fenomeni quali i cambiamenti climatici o l’estinzione delle specie.

Il secondo obiettivo di ricerca slitta invece dalla dimensione politica e passa a guardare la soggettività come il maggiore ostacolo nel problema della rappresentazione. Il concetto di vacuità [śūnyatā] in Nāgārjuna si dimostra uno strumento potente per lavorare sulla tensione tra una realtà radicalmente relativa e l’attaccamento del soggetto alla visione di una “natura delle cose.”

ABSTRACT

Diese Arbeit verknüpft recht heterogene Argumentationsansätze, die auf den ersten Blick nur geringfügig miteinander verbunden zu sein scheinen. Beispielsweise nutzt Latour seinen Ansatz, um Naess' Probleme beiseite zu drängen, ohne sich genauer auf sie einzulassen. Ein anderes Beispiel ist, wie Naess vielfach auf Nāgārjunas Leerheit der wahren Natur verweist, um seinen Relationismus zu illustrieren.

Dennoch gibt es wichtigere strukturelle und philosophische Gründe, diese drei zusammenzubringen. Sie drehen sich um zwei wesentliche Forschungsinteressen.

Zunächst wollen wir den Relationismus in der Ökologie rekonstruieren, seine Reichweite und die Schwierigkeiten, mit denen er zu kämpfen hat. Diese reichen vom Problem des Naturbegriffs bis zum Problem der Repräsentation (und Vorstellung).

Ausgehend von Naess' *ecosophy*, können wir die Probleme, vor die sich der Umweltphilosophiegedanke gestellt sieht, wenn er sich auf ein organizistisches oder interrelationales Naturbild stützt, besser verstehen. Der Relationismus versucht die Subjekt-Objekt-Dichotomie, wie sie in der Repräsentation der Natur eingearbeitet ist, zu überwinden, aber läuft möglicherweise in die Falle derselben Prämissen.

Naess' Probleme sind gleichwohl radikaler. Den Subjekt/Objekt- wie den Mensch/Natur-Dualismus überwindet man nicht einfach dadurch, dass man die beiden Pole in ein größeres Ganzes integriert. Die Probleme, die sich aus dem Relationismus ergeben, sind wesentlich mit dem Begriff der Natur als das gegenüber dem Menschen Andere verknüpft; mit diesem Naturbegriff arbeiten sowohl der betriebswirtschaftliche Umweltschützer wie die ökologischen Ansätze, um den Graben des Dualismus zu überwinden. Themen wie Kontinuität und Differenz, Zugehörigkeit und Andersheit tauchen auf, wenn die Natur/Mensch-Achse artikuliert wird. Der Bruch zwischen Mensch und Natur ist im politischen Spannungsfeld zwischen ökologischem Naturalismus und kulturalistischer Kritik besonders tragisch. Die Schwierigkeiten der Umweltphilosophiebewegung entwickeln sich aus Mehrdeutigkeiten, die *a priori* durch das Grundverständnis der Natur als Andersheit gegenüber dem Menschen bedingt sind.

Latour's Idee eines Endzwecks der Natur löst das Problem der Repräsentation auf politisch-ökologischem Weg. Der Natur-Kultur-Rahmen ist nur eine Möglichkeit, die

gemeinsame Welt von Menschen und Nichtmenschen zu repräsentieren. Es ist möglich, die politische Arbeit des Aufbaus der gemeinsamen Welt neu anzugehen, wobei die Wissenschaften (sowohl Geisteswissenschaften als auch „harte“ Wissenschaften) eingebracht werden, um Phänomene wie den Klimawandel oder das Artensterben wissenschaftlich und politisch zu repräsentieren.

Ein zweiter Focus der Untersuchungen wendet sich von der politischen Dimension hin zur Subjektivität, der Hauptschwierigkeit innerhalb des Problems der Repräsentation. Nāgārjuna’s Konzept der Leerheit [śūnyatā] gewährleistet einen tiefen Einblick in die Spannung zwischen einer radikal relativen Realität und der Bindung der Sicht des Subjekts an eine „Natur der Dinge“.

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1.1 - WE ARE NOT THE SAME IN THE ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

> «There are these two young fish swimming along and they happen to meet an older fish swimming the other way, who nods at them and says 'Morning, boys. How's the water?' And the two young fish swim on for a bit, and then eventually one of them looks over at the other and goes 'What the hell is water?'»[1]

Radical or critical ecologies generally advance two kinds of bedrock tenets. In the first, the ecological crisis raises serious doubts about the adequacy of some fundamental social and political structures (such as: technology, industry, growth, globalization, lifestyle, economy and consumerism, relations of production, subjectivity and democratic institutions, issues of distributive justice).[2] In the other, the ecological crisis is a crisis of the meaning of nature, of subjectivity and of the human-nature relationship: if we dig into the root causes of the ecological issues, we discover not just a lack of prudent resource

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[1] David F. Wallace, "2005 Kenyon Commencement Address" (speech at Kenyon College, Gambier, Ohio, USA, May 21, 2005) http://web.ics.purdue.edu/~drkelly/DFWKenyonAddress2005.pdf.

[2] There is no such thing as a clearly defined "field" of "radical ecology". Several movements of thought have been broadly brought together by common debates and general goals of inquiry, despite great differences in accent and approach. See Andrew Biro, ed., *Critical Ecologies: The Frankfurt School and Contemporary Environmental Crises* (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press Inc., 2011), 6. Biro lists some movements that can be considered as "radical" or "critical" ecologies: deep ecology, biocentrism, bioregionalism, eco-feminism, eco-socialism, ecological economics, environmental justice, social ecology. These are opposed to "reform-minded" discourses: ecological modernization, environmental economics, green liberalism, market environmentalism, sustainable development. For a characterization of "radical ecologies" see for example: Charles S. Brown, "The Real and the Good: Phenomenology and the Possibility of an Axiological Rationality," in *Eco-Phenomenology: Back to the Earth Itself*, ed. Charles S. Brown and Ted Toadvine (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 4; *Cf.* David R. Keller, *Environmental Ethics: The Big Questions* (Malden, Oxford, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 221-336 for examples of alternatives to axiological environmental ethics. *Cf.* Murray Bookchin, "Social Ecology *vs* Deep Ecology," in *Environmental Ethics: What Really Matters, What Really Works*, ed. David Schmidtz and Elizabeth Willott (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 126-136; Robyn Eckersley, *Environmentalism and Political Theory: Toward an Ecocentric Approach* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992); Michael E. Zimmerman, *Contesting Earth's Future: Radical Ecology and Postmodernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

management, but a certain understanding of human identity and of natural objectivity that proves to be unsuitable and unsustainable both for humans and for nature.

From a critical point of view, then, strategies like sustainable development, green liberalism and the faith in technological modernization to fix current and future environmental issues appear to polish the "business as usual" on a cosmetic level, ultimately expressing fear and political conservatism.

In 1973 Arne Naess introduces the depth theme in the ecological reflection.[3] In this formulation, deep ecology articulates a very simple idea: at a deeper level of inquiry, the ecological crises uncovers elements and connections that cannot just be left at face value and taken for granted anymore. For example, a subject who perceives herself as independent and detached from the natural world is an illusion now put into crisis. Moreover, by avoiding deeper formulations of the problem, such as issues involving the political, social, and individual identity of subjects, who face environmental challenges (both culturally and in relation to the non-human world), environmental policies can only preserve the economic and political structures in which the crisis emerged. This train of thought is exemplified through the perpetuating of justice disparities, universalizing the western models of development and in the end only caring for the "health and affluence of people in the developed countries."[4]

The deep/shallow distinction becomes a sort of landmark in the variety of ecophilosophical reflections, which still roughly position themselves inside a general alternative: on one part, some affirm that the ecological crisis opens a new cultural paradigm where given, modern, and western concepts of humanity and nature and their modes and range of connections need to be reexamined; on the other part, others endorse a simple redirection of our present conceptual, ethical, theoretical and political tools in order to deal with new sensibilities and new problems.[5]

The so called "radical environmentalism" or "critical ecologies", including deep ecology, then, share an initial prescription in which issues of ontology, ethics and politics fade into each other.

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[3] Arne Naess, "The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement. A Summary," *Inquiry* 16 (1973): 95-100.

[4] Naess, "The Shallow and the Deep," 95.

[5] Cf. Mario Sirimarco, *Percorsi di filosofia della crisi ecologica* (Rome: Edizioni Nuova Cultura, 2012), 8.

The "depth" theme in Naess is framed initially in terms of a problem of *relation*. The choice is between a concept of *environment* serving the human historical quest as inert background, and the concept of nature as a wider *whole* to which we constitutively belong. What Naess calls "intrinsic relation" is not very different than what is to be found in other philosophies of relation, such as Whitehead's process philosophy (one of Naess' references), as well as in other philosophical ecologies, such as Bateson's: in a nutshell, any creature that destroy its environment destroys itself.[6]

Naess' formulation of the ecological problem in terms of a philosophy of ecological relation is also critical of *environmental ethics*. When ecological concerns spilled into academic philosophy, the mainstream approach was one of ethics.[7] Following the development of a worldwide ecological consciousness started in the 1960s and 70s in the United States, the philosophical question about ecology asked what is man's responsibility towards nature or whether there is a need to formulate a specifically environmental ethic that includes nature in the moral community, historically intra-humanity.[8] This axiological approach can still be considered mainstream, at least in the English speaking world.[9]

In terms of relation, however, we have to ask ourselves, before we look into the logical passages of our ethical systems, whether the moral subject is left untouched by the ecological crisis. In other words, the crisis disrupts both our understanding of natural objects, and our posture as rational agents, shaking the comfort of a neutral position from which we release the judgements of value we attribute to nature (or to parts of it).

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[6] *Cf.* Alfred N. Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (London: Penguin Books, 1938), 132-133: "any physical object which by its influence deteriorates its environment, commits suicide;" Gregory Bateson, *Steps to and Ecology of Mind* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 501.

[7] See a history of the topic in Holmes Rolston III and Andrew Light, eds., *Environmental Ethics: An Anthology* (Malden, Oxford and Carlton: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 15-37.

[8] Some eminent examples are: The 1973 conference by: Richard (Routley) Sylvan, "Is there a need for a New, an Environmental, Ethic?" in *Environmental Ethics*, ed. Keller, 98-103; John Passmore, *Man's Responsibility for Nature: Ecological Problems and Western Traditions* (London: Duckworth, 1974); The biocentric ethics of respect for nature in: Paul Taylor, *Respect for Nature: A Theory of Environmental Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986).

[9] *Cf.* Brown, "The Real and the Good," 9. See also the voice of Val Plumwood, one of the thinkers who tries to offer an alternative approach to the tradition of environmental "liberal/ rationalist moral theories." Val Plumwood, *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002, Kindle edition), loc. 2863. It is important to note that Plumwood includes deep ecology in this model of ethics, while Naess declares to distance himself from it.

In a fairly recent study commissioned by the United Nations Organization, the German philosopher Angelika Krebs drafted a useful "map" of the main environmental ethical approaches.[10] At some point in the book she admits we need to keep in mind how "moral arguments change the world only with great difficulty."[11] In her reading, this is due to "immoral group egoist orientations [that] shape the controlling systems of our societies."[12] It is not in question that many strong political interests and powers are blind to a moral interrogation on nature. Nevertheless, some approaches, e.g. Naess' detachment from the western ethical tradition or ecofeminist critique, read a weakness exactly in the binding strength of rational foundational ethical theories. Viewing the task of ethics through the definition of a normativity based on the universalization of a moral principle that does not question the abstract moral subject and his interests, situatedness and historicity would establish moral duties which overlook social, emotional, ideological, power interest conditions in which they are supposed to be working. The weakness would not be represented by egoist, irrational tendencies as opposed to rational well founded arguments, but by the abstractedness and forced universality of rationalistic moral arguments.

The model of a rational foundation of universal ethical principles, in contrast to power relations and other "lower" dimensions of bodies and souls maintains a transcendental idea of a universal, a-historical, a-linguistic subject. Moreover, it does not feel the need to discuss modern subjectivity as a part of the speculative elements of the ecological crisis.[13] In the attempt to pinpoint a universalizing ethical principle it ultimately risks perpetuating rationalism or imposing the standard of special ideas from privileged classes and groups. We need to keep in mind how the cult of Reason as the "authentic human" character as opposed to the feminine and bodily aspects of human nature is one of the criticisms of ecological domination exposed by ecofeminism, another main current of critical ecology.[14]

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[10] Angelika Krebs, *Ethics of Nature: A Map* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1999).

[11] Krebs, *Ethics of Nature*, 32.

[12] Krebs, *Ethics of Nature*, 32.

[13] Max Oelschlaeger points out how most environmental ethics have ignored contemporary forms of critique of representation, language and power structures. Max Oelschlaeger, introduction to *Postmodern Environmental Ethics*, by Max Oelschlaeger, ed. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 1-20.

[14] Val Plumwood, "Nature, Self, and Gender: Feminism, Environmental Philosophy, and the Critique of Rationalism," *Hypatia* 6, no.1 (1991): 3-27.

Naess offers a similar remark to Krebs', but in quite an opposite tone. Moral arguments face difficulties in the attempt to achieve efficacy. Nevertheless, in Naess' view, philosophy is accountable for this failure. Ethical arguments fail to account for something fundamental in our experience of nature, its meaning, emotional charge, sense of place, our situatedness, what we experience as valuable. The normativity of an ethical prescription has no power if we fail to inquire into the way different parties in environmental conflicts *see* nature.[15] Complementary to the thread of constitutive relation, Naess advances the necessity to reopen the ontological question about nature. This is why he speaks about the primacy of *environmental ontology* over environmental ethics.[16]

Naess is primarily concerned with our ontological frameworks, our sense of reality, what is nature and with how we see the natural world. Indeed, opponents in environmental conflicts may share the same ethical prescriptions (e.g.: preserve the forest), but eventually disagree on what they experience to be real (the forest as a collection of trees, or the forest as a complex interrelated ecosystem).[17]

Although Naess does not express himself in these terms, he is raising the issue of a hidden normative power in ontology. What is stronger, more powerful, more unavoidable than what is there, than how things *objectively* are? The Czech phenomenologist Erazim Kohák expresses this through a powerful comparison: we exploit and use violent treatment on animals because they are "just animals." Likewise, African-American slaves were "just salves" before 1865 in the Southern United States of America (and they were actually treated like cattle, e.g. separating children from mothers for purchasing purposes). Comparably were the European Jewish "just Jewish" during the Third Reich.[18]

We are not the same in the ecological crisis because the crisis calls us to revisit our understanding of the subject-object dichotomy. We cannot hold onto a cartesian subject

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[15] See: Arne Naess, "The World of Concrete Contents," *Inquiry* 28, no. 4 (1985): 423: "Confrontations between developers and conservers reveal differences in experiencing what is *real*. What a conservationist *sees* and experiences as *reality*, the developer typically does not *see* - and vice versa. [...] *The difference between the antagonists is rather one of ontology than of ethics*." Emphasis in the original. See also Andrew Light, "Deep Socialism? An Interview with Arne Naess," *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism* 8 (1997): 84: "I am for what I call a focus on environmental ontology, how you see the world, how you *see* it, how you can bring people to *see* things differently." Emphasis in the original.

[16] Naess, "Concrete Contents," 423-425.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Erazim Kohák, *The Green Halo: A Bird's-Eye View of Ecological Ethics*, (Chicago and La Salle: Open Courts, 2000, Kindle edition), locs. 528-1252.

that frontally gazes upon a world out there. We are related, entangled with nonhumans, situated, and our values lie in this relation complex. If we leave intact the moral subject, the rational human individual, we eventually leave the question of the value of the nonhuman world to a mere subjective attribution, because we leave the subject's counterpart intact out there: nature, made of mere brute, inert facts in search of a supplement to the soul.

Other ecocritical formulations point their finger towards more problems that environmental ethical approaches present, when the latter are detached from an inquiry into subjectivity and agency (who are the subjects and what do they do). Val Plumwood, for example, criticizes ethical approaches that frame ethics as a matter of finding a universal ethical principle. Moral extensionism is a typical case of this. By locating a universal principle it locates a feature moral patients must have in order to be included in the moral community, or, what is the same, have that moral community *extended*. Beings bear on themselves the burden of proof of being sufficiently similar to those we already consider worthy. It is a universalization of morally relevant characters. Not very dissimilar from rationalism, it maintains a master's attitude. The same logic of exclusion based on pre-established moral features occurs. This attitude fails to concern itself with our relationship with the nonhuman world, or what the nonhuman world is in this relation.[19]

Against the idea of moral considerability itself, others have recently brought within environmental philosophy the contemporary philosophical idea that epistemology is a gesture, already framing its ethical possibilities.[20] An epistemology that sees knowledge as the relation of a subject observing the object already allows for a certain epistemological attitude, for example a frontal, manipulative one. It implicitly makes use of a certain concept of the object and of the subject (what they do, what they can do, what range of relations does what they do imply). American ecophilosopher Jim Cheney opposes a

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[19] Plumwood, *Environmental Culture*; Christian Diehm, "Minding Nature: Val Plumwood's Critique of Moral Extensionism," *Environmental Ethics* 32 (2010): 3-16. One example is the still very influential work, *Animal Liberation*, from the Australian philosopher Peter Singer written in 1975. His hedonistic utilitarianism would correct minimally the heavy exclusion mechanism generated by rationalism through the extension of rationality to a sensation principle. What is lacking within this approach is a discussion about what the agency of nonhuman beings can be independently of a humanistic model, no matter how much softened.

[20] Thomas H. Birch, "Moral Considerability and Universal Consideration," *Environmental Ethics* 15 (1993): 313-332; Jim Cheney, "Universal Consideration. An Epistemological Map of the Terrain," *Environmental Ethics* 20, no. 3 (1998): 265-277; Anthony Weston, "Universal Consideration as an Originary Practice", *Environmental Ethics* 20, no. 3 (1998): 279-289.

different gesture, that of universal consideration. As an answer to the ecological crisis, it finds a way to allow beings to emerge, based on a doubt about an *a priori* understanding of what they are.[21]

Giving up our human mastery and supremacy and reopening the terms of our relatedness with nature has to do with an act of humbleness and democracy: "not letting "the human word be all there is, be Being."[22] A concept of relation that is philosophically meaningful tackles the very concept of identity. It is necessary of a reflection that takes into consideration the nonhuman world and gives it a chance, even if this means dealing with the vulnerability into which nonhumans in crisis throw us.

This work initially retrieves Naess' ecosophy, although it has been overanalysed and overcriticized over the forty years that separate us from his first ecological paper. We can consider Naess' work paradigmatic of the importance of a philosophy of relation in environmentalism. Naess' recourse to relation is also paradigmatic of central tenets of many ecophilosophical movements, such as, the stress on the continuity of nature and humanity in lieu of a man/nature dualism, and the counterpart issue of humanity's peculiar place in nature.

Through a close critique of Naess' ecosophy we will clear the necessity and the difficulties of relationism in a critical ecology. Just as Latour notes, Naess does feel the limitations of modern metaphysics in the understanding of the ecological crisis, even though his proposal has fundamental impasses.[23] These impasses are worth exploring because they are rooted in deeper philosophical issues, issues sometimes Naess himself points out. For example, the ecological crisis and our relation to nature are entangled with the status of objectivity, subjectivity and with a hidden "metaphysics of nature."

Following Bruno Latour, we will explore how the ecological crisis arrives calling us to reopen the problem of our identity and relation to nature. It shows we have connections we have failed to take into account, or that have by now become vital to humans as individuals, species, as civilizations, as well as to the survival of human and nonhuman citizens of our common world. We are not the same, we are not who we thought we were.

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[21] Cheney, "Universal Consideration."

[22] See Enzo Paci, *Tempo e relazione* (Turin: Taylor, 1954), 103. My translation.

[23] Bruno Latour, *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2004), 256-257 n29.

A critical and political ecology needs to reopen the *status quo*, instead of having a fixed a-historical natural order out there invade human-only politics, hostile to human will.

The next question will then ask: what is the ecological crisis? In which sense does it shake the *status quo ante bellum*?

1.2 - WHAT IS THE ECOLOGICAL CRISIS?

In which sense does the ecological crisis put in crisis our identity and our relations? Bruno Latour pointed out that both of these two dimensions cannot stay intact, while we read in the newspapers about humanity's responsibility in the mass extinction of several species, or that human activities and population are now a major geological force that threatens life on earth as we know it.[24] As humans, as individuals, as civilizations: we discover we are connected to and responsible for the natural world more than we thought. The *crisis* character stems from the fact that it does not only take place "out there" in nature. Which *anthropos* is responsible in the expression "anthropic origin" of the ecological crisis? The ecological crisis shows the impossibility of regarding humanity as a static, a-historical idea, for example arbitrarily resolving on which technology to use or on which connections to entertain with the natural world. At the same time it casts doubts on the status of nature, and the idea that the crisis of ecological processes can be a mere biological or ecosystemic description. In other words, there are problems related to the concept of "nature" emerging directly as a result of the preoccupation about the ecological crisis.

1.2.1 - Naess' Interpretation of the Ecological Crisis

Naess' reference to the crisis is paradigmatic of much ecocriticism. In fact, what appear as two separate accounts or domains are in fact central to his interpretation.

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[24] Bruno Latour, "A Plea for Earthly Sciences," in *New Social Connections: Sociology's Subjects and Objects*, ed. Judith Burnett, et al. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 74.

On the one hand it is a crisis in the biological conditions that support life on earth. The gravity of the situation is framed in terms of environmental deterioration.[25] The human abuse of the natural world in terms of ecosystem processes is to be held responsible: the growth of human population, pollution, resource depletion.

On the other hand, the crisis character denotes a loss in value, in terms of beauty, integrity,[26] and meaning. The crisis in meaning occurs through the man/nature split that allows an instrumental view of the natural world and the general triumph of instrumental rationality. Therefore, the devastation of the natural world is treated as a consequence or epiphenomenon of a "wrong" paradigm. The environment becomes the mere surroundings of the human world of subjectivity. Nature is regarded as a valueless objectified humanity's other. Naess' crisis is a crisis of the modern subject, who cannot keep representing himself as the Cartesian spectator or the rational moral subject, ignoring all his determinations in relation to nonhuman aspects of the world.

1.2.2 - Modernity

Modernism's charge of being the cause and horizon of the ecological crisis is an established prescription in critical ecological thinking.[27] Modernity is criticized as the age of technology and of dominion of nature. Epistemological and theoretical attitudes are attributed as root causes that spread to all other institutions of human civilizations and eventually impairing physical and geochemical phenomena.

Gregory Bateson puts it bluntly. The ecological crisis is primarily a threat to man's survival and amounts to three main root causes: technology, human population growth and "certain errors in the thinking and attitudes of Occidental culture. Our 'values' are wrong."[28] Vittorio Hösle's "philosophy of the ecological crisis" also amounts to three

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[25] Arne Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 23-24.

[26] Ibid., 23-24.

[27] *Cf*. Nicola Russo, *Filosofia ed ecologia* (Naples: Guida, 2001), 252.

[28] Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, 498.

intertwined areas of interest which render the range of the crisis: capitalist economy, modern technology and modern science.[29]

Critical theory ecological interpretations point to instrumental rationality and the following instrumental conceptualization of the nonhuman world as the root of the abuse of man on his worldly and material conditions.[30] Referencing Heidegger's technological concept of nature has become commonplace among ecocritics, and has by now been established as one of the most lucid and useful accounts. In his account nature is disclosed in modern technology as a standing reserve (*Gestell*), as inert matter that serves merely as a resource to a differentiated human that poses itself as the sole subject. In order to disclose nature in terms of stored energy and as a mere resource, the technological challenge for humans becomes the epochal culmination of a long age of western metaphysics of presence, where being is disclosed as constant availability and the world is conquered in a picture, a view or representation (*Vorstellung*) of an object clearly standing in front of a spectator subject.[31]

Other critiques of modernity have been recalled by ecocritics, bringing to light more shades of meaning and different springboards for discussion. Whitehead's process philosophy is one of Naess' references. It presents itself as a project of rewriting the modern understanding of reality in terms of a process and as an organism. Whitehead's "provisional and conditioned realism" contrasts the naive realism of the "fallacy of misplaced concreteness" embodied in the simple location of matter and the substance-quality pattern that begins with the advent of modernity and the scientific thinking characteristic thereof since Renaissance times.[32] Another ecocritic who offers a new perspective of modernity is Gregory Bateson when he places within the Industrial Revolution the landmark of the modern treatment of nature and the "wrong ideas" of the western civilization about the nature of man and its relation to the

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[29] Vittorio Hösle, *Filosofia della crisi ecologica* (Turin: Einaudi, 1992), 42.

[30] *Cf.* Biro, ed., *Critical Ecologies.*

[31] *Cf.* Simon Hailwood, "Alienations and Natures," *Environmental Politics* 21, no 6 (2012): 883. Biro, ed., *Critical Ecologies*, 12. Martin Heidegger, "La questione della tecnica," in *Saggi e discorsi*, trans. Gianni Vattimo (Milan: Mursia, 1976), 5-27; Martin Heidegger, "L'epoca dell'immagine del mondo," in *Sentieri interrotti*, trans. Pietro Chiodi (Firenze: La nuova Italia, 1997), 71-101. Martin Heidegger, *L'abbandono* (Translated by Adriano Fabris, Genova: Il melangolo, 1989), 33-34. Bruce V. Foltz, *Inhabiting the Earth: Heidegger, Environmental Ethics and the Metaphysics of Nature* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1995, Kindle edition), loc 102.

[32] Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*.

environment.[33] Correspondingly, Latour pinpoints the enlightenment project and its fundamental task of liberating humanity from the monsters of superstition, fetishes and belief. "The unfortunate solution inherited from the philosophy of Immanuel Kant"[34] turned the bifurcation between humans and nature into an uncritical belief of the same tenor.

By now, several classic accounts of modernism share fundamental characteristics that are also recognized within the roots of our ongoing ecological problems. The split theme between humanity and nature is accounted for in terms of epistemology of dominion, that sees nature reified as knowable in terms of prediction, control and exploitation.[35]

The so-called epistemology of dominion is based on a designative theory of knowledge where the spectator subject is split from the world out there and mirrors reality through the means of vision. The frontal outlook on the world is translated into representation, veridical accounts that mirror reality. Language, especially when scientific, is not regarded as constitutive of nature, but as neutrally and objectively representative.[36] This epistemological aspect of modernism is a consequence and function of a deeper metaphysical alienation between humanity and nature: spirit, meaning, value, history, rationality, interpretation, feelings, opinions on one side, and the material world on the other. The unequal distribution of qualities allows the other-than-human to become less-than-human, a mechanism that has been criticized both by social liberation movements and in the treatment of nonhumans. At the same time, the subjective character of the qualities attributed to humans in contrast to the objectivity of the "real" world, allows for the material representations of nature to mortify feelings and values other than instrumental for

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[33] Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, 500-501: "[...] the ideas which dominate our civilization at the present time date in their most virulent form from the Industrial Revolution. They may be summarized as: (*a*) It's us *against* the environment. (*b*) It's us *against* other men. (*c*) It's the individual (or the individual company, or the individual nation) that matters. (*d*) We *can* have unilateral control over the environment and must strive for that control. (*e*) We live within an infinitely expanding "frontier." (*f*) Economic determinism is common sense. (*g*) Technology will do it for us. We submit that these ideas are simply proved false by the great but ultimately destructive achievements of our technology in the last 150 years. Likewise they appear to be false under modern ecological theory. *The creature that wins against its environment destroys itself.*" Emphasis in the original.

[34] Bruno Latour, "Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern," *Critical Inquiry* 30 (2004): 231-232.

[35] Mariachiara Tallacchini, *Etiche della terra: Antologia di filosofia dell'ambiente* (Milano: Vita e pensiero, 1998), 8.

[36] *Cf.* for example the critique to representationalism applied to the time of ecological crisis in Oelschlaeger, *Postmodern Environmental Ethics*, 3.

the natural world. The split is indeed reinforced through an authoritarian usage of scientific objectivity and rationality and its privileged access to "what is real."[37] The crisis of the modern subject and his split from nature is, then, sometimes denounced in terms of a cult of reason: not reason itself, but a modern, historical and reductive concept of reason within phenomenological and feminist accounts of ecology.[38] These are some of the elements brought up by radical ecologists in the attempt to explain the still mainstream instrumental view of nature and anthropocentric exploitation in connection to modernist naturalism.[39]

1.2.3 - Dualism

Besides the critical horizon of modernism, Naess' interpretation of the ecological crisis is also paradigmatic because it appears to struggle with the same dualism it denounces. The critique of the human/nature fracture which comes to evidence in the crisis is described always in binary terms. It is a crisis of the biological conditions of life *and, at the same time,* a crisis of culture and subjectivity. Ecophilosophical texts usually bring up the union of two analyses, of two intermingled spaces.[40]

These spaces also overlap the two scientific and humanistic cultures, that is to say, the fields of inquiry that offer the framework for the analysis. The crisis of natural systems as they are studied by ecology, biology or atmospheric physics is mentioned alongside more classical philosophical tools that address a crisis of man. The ecological crisis appears to be something going on *both* there "by them" in nature, and here "by us" in society and culture.

Different accents and analyses can be patently found in a wide panorama of radical ecologies. Nonetheless, dualism as both an object of critique and as an *a priori* presupposition seems to recur. It still resonates as a hard to eradicate alternative even

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[37] Arne Naess, "The New Historiography Applied to Itself: General Possibilism," in *The Selected Works of Arne Naess*, edited by Harold Glasser and Alan Drengson (Dordrecht: Springer, 2005), vol. 4, 125-133. Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 575-599.

[38] *Cf.* Erazim Kohák, "An Understanding Heart: Reason, Value, and Transcendental Phenomenology" in *Eco-Phenomenology*, ed. Brown and Toadvine, 19-35.

[39] Cf. Brown, "The Real and the Good," 4.

[40] *Cf.* for example Russo, *Filosofia ed ecologia.*

within active attempts to overcome it. One attempt is made in phenomenological terms, when Brown, for example, reminds us that nature is always the lived, inhabited world. His ecological crisis, then, appears as a crisis of meaning of nature combining *ecological* [nature], *social*, and *psychological* aspects [human beings].[41] A similar endeavour is made by *Integral Ecology*, a *sui generis* work that genuinely seeks to combine disparate kinds of ecological narrations and inquiries.[42] The authors frame ecological crises through a mixture of a fourfold quadrant of "broken consciousness, unsustainable behaviors, dysfunctional cultures, and broken systems."[43] By doing so, they mean to offer a richer and more complex image of reality, with the intent to avoid "a nature-versus-culture stance, by recognizing that every occasion has a *cultural* dimension [...] *and* a *natural* dimension."[44]

Willing or not, the solutions to the human/nature split and ecological crisis appears, then, to sit within a framework that recognizes a double contamination: humanity is dependent on natural processes *and* nature always has a cultural inflection.

1.2.4 - Scientific Frameworks

Among recent research on the ecological crisis, two ideas can be considered of particular significance for philosophical reflection in framing the contemporary ecological crisis.

One is represented by the notion of limit or boundary. The second idea is related to the creation of global frameworks.

The idea of limit has been around since the famous 1972 *Limits to Growth* report and is now reinforced by the *Planetary Boundaries* framework suggested in 2009.[45]

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[41] Brown, "The Real and the Good."

[42] Michael E. Zimmerman and Sean Esbjörn-Hargens, *Integral Ecology. Uniting Multiple Perspectives on the Natural World* (Boston: Shambala, 2009).

[43] Ibid., 300.

[44] Ibid., 276. My emphasis.

[45] Donella H. Meadows et al., *The Limits to Growth* (New York: Universe Books, 1972); United Nations Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Global Sustainability, *Resilient People, Resilient Planet: A Future Worth Choosing* (New York: United Nations, 2012), https://en.unesco.org/system/files/GSP_Report_web_final.pdf; Will Steffen et al., "The Anthropocene: conceptual and historical perspectives," *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society A (Mathematical, Physical and Engineering Sciences)* 369 (2011): 842-867; for the *Planet Boundaries* project: "Stockholm Resilience Centre," http://www.stockholmresilience.org/.

The *Limits to growth* introduced the idea that the planet is finite and has exceeded its carrying capacity. The project consisted in the creation of a software by a team of system scientists that combines data of growth in five variables (world population, industrialization, pollution, food production, and resource depletion) and creates long-term scenarios. The software "World 3" is still used and continuously reassessed in time. It clearly shows that the planet is in "overshoot," which means that some limits have been exceeded by a rapid and exaggerated growth in some processes. As a consequence, stress is induced that slows down aspects of the growth. The overshoot is due to three aspects: a rapid growth of some variable, the presence of a limit or barrier beyond which bringing the system is not safe, and a "delay or mistake in the perceptions and the responses that try to keep the system within its limits."[46]

The *Planetary Boundaries*, instead, is a recent framework that pinpoints nine global processes in the biosphere and defines their thresholds. Most of these boundaries have gained a watchword in the mass media: climate change, biodiversity loss, stratospheric ozone depletion, land use, freshwater use, chemical pollution, while others can be more obscure to non specialists (ocean acidification, biogeochemical flows of nitrogen and phosphorus, atmospheric aerosol loading).[47] These limits are meant to design "a safe operating space for humanity."[48] The framework is constantly being reworked and criticized within the community of researchers who work on the concept, but it received its political *imprimatur* through the United Nations endorsement in 2012. Three of the nine boundaries proposed by the authors have already been transgressed: climate change, the rate of biodiversity loss and changes to the global nitrogen cycle. Others are critical.

The concept of limit as a tool "to monitor humanity's impact on the environment" has been long read as a limit of nature onto human activities.[49] It is easy to read the boundaries as the description of timeless natural cycles which have been disturbed by selfish and

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[46] Donella H. Meadows, "A Synopsis: Limits to Growth: The 30-Year Update," Donella Meadows Institute, http://www.donellameadows.org/archives/a-synopsis-limits-to-growth-the-30-year-update/

[47] Steffen, "The Anthropocene."

[48] United Nations, *Resilient People, Resilient Planet*, 22.

[49] See the outrage reactions to the first *The Limits to Growth* report: Meadows, "Limits to Growth: the 30-Year Update," 3.

greedy "human aliens."[50] Nevertheless, if we look closer to these frameworks, the limits do not impose nature balances onto human decisions, but call into question our very idea of humanity. The uncertain and dynamic nature of the threshold[51] is due not only to the complexity of the system of processes they take into consideration, but also to the fact that human activities and knowledge participate in the processes themselves.

The boundaries are indeed planetary, they define a system in which humanity is situated, to which it belongs. They describe processes where human agency, nonhuman agency, and our knowledge of both interact and define each other. The limits, then, are imposed on an idea of separated human agency and its technocratic "prometheanism," as opposed to a natural inert and passive background. Both humans and the natural world assume a historical and relational character in which the sphere of humans and that of nature are not easily distinguished.

For instance, the indicators Donella Meadows provides as signs of the planet overshoot are mixed in character and impossible to fit into a nature/humanity pattern. Better said, trying to fit them into a man/nature abstract pattern does not grant a better explanatory function. "The signs are everywhere around us," she writes: the *sea* level rising and the *arctic ice* decreasing, the increasing *gap between rich and poor*, the depletion of *fisheries'* capacity, the degradation of *agricultural land*, the fall of *per capita GDP.*[52] Humanity with all its dimensions, economy, institutions, biology, food, basic needs and rights, markets, agriculture, is taken and thrown into the biosphere, and from there it has to reframe its place and actions once again, as well as its representation and meaning of the nonhumans.

This is even clearer if we consider some global frameworks that have been offered for the comprehension of our current ecological crisis. One is Gaia and the other is the recent concept of Anthropocene.

The global dimension of the contemporary frameworks which offer a picture of the ongoing ecological crisis processes can be considered powerful feedback of necessity, now more than ever, to reformulate the universal collectors of humanity and nature. The "Gaia hypothesis" frames the biosphere as a self-regulated global collection of interacting

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[50] Neil Evernden, *The Natural Alien: Humankind and the Environment* (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press Inc., 1985).

[51] Steffen, "The Anthropocene," 859.

[52] Meadows, "Limits to Growth: the 30-Year Update," 1.

processes.[53] As Bruno Latour points out, philosophically speaking, Lovelock's Gaia is not the same as "nature." Gaia does not appear as a natural order transcendent of humanity, nor as a passive a-historical mechanist materiality. Gaia is not an external-but-human-affected domain of reality. Gaia has history, it is changing. Gaia takes "revenge."[54] "Her" heterogeneous phenomena need to be explored through mixed, heterogeneous sciences. In Latour's understanding, Gaia is conceived as agent, while nature is not, without being ontologically unified, while nature is. "She is no more unified an agency than is the human race that is supposed to occupy the other side of the bridge."[55] Gaia is far from being an ontologically unified superorganism opposed to humanity, showing, instead, a redistribution of agency in different processes that involve a reconsideration of the interactions both on the side of nature and of humans.

Anthropocene is maybe the most powerful image advanced in the contemporary ecological consciousness. The term was suggested by the Dutch Nobel prize atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen in the year 2000. The basic idea is that, since the industrial revolution, humanity has gradually become the driving geological and ecological force. Consequently, the term Anthropocene asserts two points: that the Earth is moving out of its current geological age Holocene; and that human activity is largely responsible for this exit.[56]

It is a crucial point that the Anthropocene is not a mere symbolic narration. In 2009 a group of researchers assembled the "Anthropocene Working Group" as part of the "Subcommission on Quaternary Stratigraphy Commission" of the Geological Society of London. The group is collecting scientific evidence and making a case for the formalization of the term as an officially distinct geological era. The case is expected to be formally presented for discussion in 2016. If it is accepted, the Anthropocene will be *real*, and humanity will deserve its "golden spike," the bronze disc that is, very literally and

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[53] James E. Lovelock, *La rivolta di Gaia*, trans. Massimo Scaglione (Milano: Rizzoli, 2006); Peter Bunyard, *Gaia in Action* (Edinburgh: Floris Books, 1996); James E. Lovelock, "Gaia as Seen Through the Atmosphere," in Keller, ed., *Environmental Ethics*, 211-212; Steffen, "Anthropocene;" Russo, *Filosofa ed Ecologia*, 120-127.

[54] James E. Lovelock, *La rivolta di Gaia*.

[55] Bruno Latour,"Waiting for Gaia: Composing the Common World Through Arts and Politics," Lecture given at the French Institute, London, November 2011 for the Launching of SPEAP (the Sciences Po Program in Arts & Politics), 10. http://www.bruno-latour.fr/sites/default/files/124-GAIA-LONDON-SPEAP_0.pdf.

[56] Steffen, "The Anthropocene," 843.

materially, driven through rock layers to conventionally define the beginning of a geological era in rock stratigraphy.[57]

The authors of the case suggest that the geological era of Anthropocene can be divided in three phases: 1) its logical beginning in the conventionally pinpointed year 1800, with the beginning of the industrial revolution; 2) the so called "Great Acceleration" with post-World War II industrialization, techno-scientific development, nuclear arms, population explosion, and economic growth; and finally 3) the 21st century development of a global ecological consciousness and the consequent creation of institutions and countermeasures. Not only material processes of production and consumption, then, but also a more complex range of interactions, that include human rationality, consciousness and paradigms, work together with the natural world.

The planetary boundaries in this context appear, then, not so much as fixed limits of nature, but as an assumption of responsibility on the side of humanity in order to monitor our impact and the evolution of the situation in our common world.

The Anthropocene directly challenges the place of humanity in the natural world. This is how the authors explain it: "In fact, the belief systems and assumptions that underpin neo-classical economic thinking, which in turn has been a major driver of the Great Acceleration, are directly challenged by the concept of the Anthropocene."[58] Therefore, the meaning of humanity in nature needs to be reviewed based on the fact that its agency now includes the capacity to "adversely affect the broad range of ecosystem services that support human (and other) life and could eventually lead to a 'crisis in the biosphere.'"[59]

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[57] Andrew C. Revkin, "Does the Anthropocene, the Age of Humans, Deserve a Golden Spike?" The New York Times, 16 October, 2014. http://dotearth.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/10/16/does-the-anthropocene-the-age-of-humans-deserve-a-golden-spike/?_php=true&_type=blogs&_r=0. The Global Stratigraphic Section and Point (GSSP), colloquially known as a "golden spike," is an internationally agreed upon system, marking the lower boundary of a geological stage within rock layers. The golden spike can be due to the surfacing of fossil findings or geochemical discontinuity, revealing events that are read as the passage between one geological era and another. *Cf.* "What is the 'Anthropocene'? - current definition and status," Subcommission on Quaternary Stratigraphy, Working Group on the "Anthropocene," last modified 13th March, 2015, http://quaternary.stratigraphy.org/workinggroups/anthropocene/.

[58] Steffen, "The Anthropocene," 862.

[59] Ibid., 843.

From now on, the number of McDonald's restaurants worldwide is an indicator in the record of earth's geological history.[60]

"Scientific frameworks" of the ecological crisis should not create the expectation on "scientists" to deliver an objective account of processes "out there" in the atmosphere and in the oceans. We should not think of ourselves as waiting from inside our societies to have a certain scientific description of natural processes so that we can take the tormented decision of making sacrifices for nature if absolutely necessary. What is shown by the mentioned scientific frameworks is entirely different. They are frameworks through which to make sense of our lived world. They are narrations which push us to rethink our historical situation and world. Moreover, within these frameworks, humans and nonhumans cannot be disentangled. In cases such as climate change and the Anthropocene, it is by now evident that even humanity's delay in making any decision until experts offer incontrovertible proof is already an action *inside* the system of biospheric processes.[61]

1.2.5 - Overcoming dualism?

The man/nature dualism does not offer much support in understanding events like the ones reported in the Anthropocene studies. The philosophical couple appears, indeed, to be a current abstraction of our civilization in need of a critique, as Whitehead puts philosophy's more progressive task.[62]

As mentioned earlier, the critique to the human/nature divide is typical of the critical ecophilosophical accounts of the roots of the ecological crisis. Nevertheless, this dualism appears to remain as an horizon, an *a priori* opposition. A crisis of man (of *reason*, of

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[60] The number of McDonald's restaurants is not an emphatic rhetorical stratagem. It is indeed an indicator mentioned by the Anthropocene proposing group of scientists. Steffen, "The Anthropocene," 851: "The increasing rates of change in human activity since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. Significant increases in rates of change occur around the1950s in each case and illustrate how the past 50 years have been a period of dramatic and unprecedented change in human history." The activities taken into consideration include, beyond McDonald's restaurants worldwide, paper consumption, total real GDP, foreign investments, international tourism, water use.

[61] Latour, "Waiting for Gaia," 6: "we will never know *more* about the present global warming trend since our action modifies the baseline so much, year after year, that we will no longer have any baseline to calculate the deviation from the mean." Emphasis in the original.

[62] Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, 75.

meaning, of *culture*, according to different critical accounts) occurs in addition or together with a crisis in the biosphere. The gap between humans and nature denounced by ecocritical readings of the ecological crisis appears to be reaffirmed and presupposed in the very act of bridging it.

Naess raises the problem of relation in response to this denunciation of dualism. We shall see whether, and in which sense, and with which limitations a philosophy of human-nature relation can actually present the problem as unified. This inquiry needs to take into account the fact that ecophilosophy problems are entangled with the wider contemporary philosophical issue of modernity.

Furthermore, through the political ecology suggested by Bruno Latour, we will explore how relationism has to deal with an abstract, *philosophical* account of nature that brings together, as one greater question, both ecological issues of *green* nature and the metaphysical issue of "the nature of things."

CHAPTER 2 - ARNE NAESS' RELATIONAL THINKING

2.1 - NAESS' ECOSOPHY

Arne Naess notoriously coined the term "ecosophy," ecological wisdom, for his proposal. The term conveys a project to face the current ecological crisis not only strictly as an ethical question, but as more of a general framework reflection. Therefore, in Naess' terms, an "ecosophy" is a way of thinking philosophically where action and value spring out of the way we rework and see our "life conditions in the ecosphere." In other words, the way we see nature, the meaning we give to ecological issues and the way these issues change the human-culture-nature relationship are entangled elements of a general ecological wisdom that we are called to develop by an undeniable ecological crisis.[63]

Naess' ecosophy is important in its formulation of our relatedness with the natural world insofar as it is representative of a central issue of continuity between human beings and nature, as well as of the interrelatedness theme, also a central topic in ecological thinking. Naess' view also unearths important consequences for the criticisms related to the concept of nature and how the latter entails ambiguities and hindrances in the explication of relationism in ecology.[64]

2.1.1 - In Relation with Nature

The first notion ecology brings into question is a representation of individuals as independent within an atomistic community, be it social or biotic. "Everything is connected to everything else" is the first law of ecology according to ecologist Barry Commoner.[65] Therefore, the first thing ecology shows is that, in principle, no being is

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[63] *Cf.* Naess, "Spinoza and Ecology," *Philosophia* 7, no. 1 (1977): 45.

[64] Naess' proposal has had a number of commentators, followers and critics over the years. We will give an exposition and interpretation of the philosophical more meaningful critical knots of his ecosophy associated to the way he sees the problem of relation in the ecological context. We will limit the discourse to Naess, and not discuss deep ecology. Most commentators overlap the two, but deep ecology is a wide umbrella with heterogeneous contributions, including many lacking philosophical background.

[65] Barry Commoner, *The Closing Circle* (Toronto - New York - London: Bantam, 1971), 29.

separated from its environment, and nothing, in the "circle" it participates in, is dispensable. The ecological crisis is the result of humanity denying its network of vital connections.

Naess interprets ecological relations in terms of a "relational total-field image."[66] An interrelated field extending to the whole of reality is opposed to an idea of humanism that sees man simply placed in the environment through external relations, replaceable or dispensable in principle. The relatedness brought up by ecology is that of an intrinsic, constitutive relation. The identity of the *relata*, the beings that enter the relation, as well as the concept of identity itself are called into question.

A limpid example of this level of relation can be found in the philosophical investigation of metabolism offered by Hans Jonas in his *The Phenomenon of Life*. In the metabolic process the material identity of the organism is continuously replaced by means of its relation to its material environment. It is not just a mechanical metabolization because the organism is an active centre, a "formal identity" that acts in the effort of self preservation on a temporal horizon. The material and formal identity stand in a dialectical relation that qualifies the identity of the organism only in relation to its otherness. Self-identity isolated from this constant "challenge of selfhood"[67] is nothing more than a tautology, the "merely logical attribute of a dead being."[68]

The meaning of relation with nature is obviously not limited to a biological or ecosystemic position. According to Naess, the concept of environment invests too much emphasis on the human difference and endorses an ontological unification of nature under the category of the object. This unification abstracts itself from the setting of our concrete relations. "Environment," indeed, can convey the image of a background to the unfolding of human history. Therefore, the "environment" as something humans are placed in is, for Naess, laden with both an ontological and an ethical relevance that need to be made explicit.

Naess deploys elements from various critiques of modernism and its subject/object dichotomy in order to read the fundamental structures of the man/nature separation. In

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[66] Naess, "The Shallow and the Deep," 95.

[67] Hans Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life. Toward a Philosophical Biology* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2001), 83.

[68] Hans Jonas, *Organismo e libertà: verso una biologia filosofica*, trans. Paolo Becchi (Turin: Einaudi, 1999), 113. My translation.

Naess' writing, the concept of environment symbolizes a surrounding dimension transcended by the *anthropos* on behalf of his spirit, freedom, reason, consciousness, mind or subjectivity, depending on the accent of the critique. A reified nature, automatic and objectified, deprived of every element ascribed to subjects, is left out as inert matter with its mathematical qualities. Such an ontological crystallization cannot but entail a practical relation of boundless, legitimate domination and manipulation.

The historical invention of an objectified nature whose concept emerges as a counterpart of human subjectivity is, then, the criticized character of the modern worldview relevant for rethinking ecology. This general view often overlaps the common idea of "scientific worldview." The reference is to modern science, that has made the most from this material understanding of the world. Nevertheless, Naess brings up how, even in the way we experience nature and in the way value conflicts are settled regarding the natural environment, the "scientific" and "objective" constantly occur as authoritarian arguments to shut down discussions in favor a materialistic perspective (in terms of economic goods, this time). The objectivity of nature in terms of material structures and measurable quantities becomes simply a social bogeyman (that hardly has anything to do with what science really does or the way it perceives itself), utilized to purify attached subjective "feelings" of place, belonging, value, identification, or care from nonhuman dimensions. What presents itself as a neutral and objective worldview is instead a powerful ethical tool.[69]

2.1.2 - Biospheric Equality vs *Anthropocentrism*

The environment taken in these terms is the ecological equivalent of objectified nature. It connects the ecological critique of the man/nature separation with the kin philosophical critique of the subject/object dualism. A dualism which attributes the qualities associated with freedom, feeling, intentionality or agency only to the human/subject side is the basis of anthropocentrism. Only humans possess the features that grant them the right to defend their interests as superior. The ethical aspect of the dualistic setting becomes obvious in the

[69] *Cf.* Naess, "Concrete Contents;" A. Naess, "The New Historiography."

exploitation and ecological degradation of the natural world that follow the view of it as the inferior and passive side of the setting.

Bearing in mind the anthropocentric defense of exclusive human interests, Naess, instead, suggests an idea of "biospheric egalitarianism in principle." This states that all beings are to be regarded as in principle having the same "right to live and blossom."[70] The restriction of this right to humans is unjustified.[71] This kind of egalitarianism includes a review of humanism and the centrality, indeed, of man in nature. The principle of biospheric egalitarianism has allowed commentators to pigeonhole Naess as a figure of "ecocentrism" or "biocentrism." Much ecophilosophical scholarship has, in fact, interpreted the problem of the ethical position of humans in nature through an axis that goes from anthropocentrism to ecocentrism.[72] To be fair, Naess does not consider this terminology important and we will see how the position of the problem in these terms is problematic and reveals once again some fundamental ambiguities in the concept of nature.

What the ecological crisis does, then, is to reveal the crisis of the modern subject and reopen the understanding of the place of humans in nature that also need to be brought into political discussion and decision making structures. The image of the environment for Naess corresponds to a background onto which human actors alone are placed. It reproduces the human/nature dualism and automatically puts nature in an inferior position. His aim is to catalyze a worldview shift, offering an image of humans as intrinsically related to nature, speaking of nature instead of environment as a greater whole to which we belong.[73]

2.1.3 - A Gestalt Shift of our Worldviews

Nature as a worldly other, external to humanity, represented through the detached knowledge of a spectator subject is at the root of our too far gone exploitation of the world we live in. Fundamentally, what Naess criticizes is the ideological utilization of an image

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[70] Naess, "The Shallow and the Deep," 95.

[71] Naess avoids to make use of right theories for nature. His use of the concept of "right" is not technical. See, A. Naess, "Self-Realization in Mixed Communities of Humans, Bears, Sheep, and Wolves," *Inquiry* 22 (1979): 231-41.

[72] See for example Giovanni Salio, "Ecologia profonda ed ecosofia," introduction to Arne Naess, *Ecosofia*, trans. Elena Recchia, (Como: red, 1994), 10; Krebs, *Ethics of Nature*.

[73] Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, 36

of nature in terms of material substratum in the shaping of our sense of reality. Such an image corresponds to the abstract structures of primary qualities of natural bodies singled out by modern science,[74] which became the fundamental abstraction of our civilization. In opposition to this "Galileian ontology,"[75] Naess attempts to bring up alternative images through "phenomenological descriptions" of nature.[76]

Environmental conflicts and decision making processes in regard to the natural world are, in Naess' view, driven by fundamental beliefs in the state of the world. He sees a continuous contraposition between "objective descriptions" of nature (in terms of physical science, for example) and "subjective descriptions" brought up by people who want their legitimate feelings of care and attachment to be taken into consideration. In this way, the setting of the problem is fundamentally flawed by the subject/object dualism and both positions end up reinforcing each other, each highlighting a selection of relations we encounter in experience of nature, and leaving others out to the other counter-dimension.

Contrarily, Naess argues that our experience accounts for subjects' feelings and power interests as already included in experience itself, which is important for an ecological understanding of nature.[77] He makes use of the phenomenological notion of *Lebenswelt* for which the world is always our lived world, the world we inhabit. Our lived world includes for Naess our natural world and our natural dimensions. Our experience of it has a holistic character of belonging. Its primary material and physical qualities are just one possible description of its abstract structures, while our concrete experience includes a far richer account of relations.

With a critique adopted from Whitehead, Naess traces back the problem of our image of nature to a problem of knowledge and retrieves Whitehead's attack on the modern substance-qualities pattern.[78] Naess suggests that we should look to the concrete contents of our experience of the world as demonstrative of an entanglement of the different characters we ascribe to primary, secondary and even more complex qualities that Naess calls "tertiary" (value, emotional tone, meaning). Even further than naturalizing the

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[74] See Chapter 1.

[75] Christian Diehm, "Arne Naess and the Task of Gestalt Ontology," *Environmental Ethics* 28, no. 1 (2006): 21-35; Arne Naess, "Concrete Contents."

[76] Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, 50.

[77] Zimmerman, *Contesting Earth's Future*, loc 1931.

[78] Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World.*

qualities that are traditionally attributed to the structure of the subject's mind, Naess understands the object in terms of *Gestalt*.[79] Just as in the homonymous psychological theory of perception, the object cannot be conceived along a separate outline but its concrete status is defined by the relations it entertains with its surroundings. The image of the *Gestalt* describes for Naess the ontological status of the object. Every object is, then, a gestalt totality that can never be value-neutral or meaning-neutral but is always meaningfully contextualized.

The consequence of Naess' approach to perception, experience and the ontology of our natural world is the impossibility of tracing a clean and definitive cut between what is human or subjective and what is nonhuman and objective. Again similarly to Whitehead, it is not just about perception and phenomena, but about adopting an attitude of "provisional realism."[80] If the world is conceived in terms of "gestalts," it is possible to go back to our experience of nature over and over again, in order to suspend our hidden ontologies and dualistic view, and find richer, more concrete accounts of nature. More varied accounts of nature cannot be silenced by the authoritarian use of "objectivity" and need to be brought into democratic decision making processes.

2.1.4 - The Ethics of Relation

According to Naess' view, the value we attribute to nature is included to our formulation of reality. Nature has value and meaning in our experienced world. There is no distinction between facts and values. There is no assessment of neutral objective facts followed by a subsequent projection of subjective values. A primacy of "environmental ontology" over ethics means exactly this, that ontology has a normative weight. Recognizing this significance by making our hidden ontologies explicit and suspending our worldview is a process of recognition of a wider range of constitutive relations we are in. In the ecological crisis this connotes an ethical gesture.

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[79] Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, 57-63. Diehm, "Arne Naess and the Task of Gestalt Ontology."

[80] Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, 79. Naess "Heidegger, Postmodern Theory and Deep Ecology," *The Trumpeter* 14, no. 4 (1997): 3. http://trumpeter.athabascau.ca/index.php/trumpet/article/view/175/217

Therefore, Naess' view of ethics that accompanies his relational account of nature is very different than the ethics of duties and obedience to imperatives. It can be described as an ethic of identification. What the ecological crisis brings up is, once again, the idea that our empirical and psychological self is not fixed. Naess refers to William James' idea of the *material self* component of our empirical self, and the multiple dimensions, objects and relations that make up its identification.[81] Naess suggests the idea of an "ecological self,"[82] which expands through a process of identification along the lines of the relations it discovers. Identification is not merely psychological, but it is also the process of the emergence of our identity through our relations. The ecological self is defined through relations with human and nonhuman others. Acknowledging these relations develops ethical attitudes of care and letting things be. Here Naess redeploys the Kantian term "beautiful action" where duty and intention overlap, and the action springs out spontaneously from the way we see things.[83] The ethical aspect of identification, then, interests both sides of the self and the other.[84] It is an expansion of our self-comprehension, since *we are our relations*. It is also the opening of possibilities for the other, without a reduction of the other to the predefined characteristics we attribute to it. Far from offering a fixed set of norms, the ethical dimension of the relation is a practical attitude, a gesture of openness towards human and nonhuman others.

Identification in Naess is counterposed to alienation. Alienation in this context is regarded as a view of the other that occurs with anthropocentrism: the other is a great Other, an ontological other. The natural other is defined in opposition to our humanity. By being the nonhuman deprived of any continuity with the human world, and being stripped of all the qualities that define the human norm, the other is also placed in a state of inferiority. While alienation is an estrangement that comes from reification of the other,

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[81] Naess, "Identification as a Source of Deep Ecological Attitudes," in *Deep ecology*, ed. Michael Tobias (San Marcos: Avant Books, 1988), 260. William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1981), vol. 1, 279-379.

[82] Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, 85.

[83] A. Naess, "Beautiful Action. Its Function in the Ecological Crisis," *Environmental Values* 2, no. 1 (1993): 67-71. In the article, Naess retrieves the pre-critical Kantian distinction between moral and beautiful actions. The keynote of the article is the statement that "acting from inclination is superior to acting from duty." The remark supports the idea of identification following by a deepening of awareness and a change of outlook on the relational dimensions of reality.

[84] Diehm, "Arne Naess and the Task of Gestalt Ontology."

identification refuses this objectification and instead instills a sense of kinship, reopening a range of existential possibilities for nonhumans.

From this view of relation, Naess extracts one norm: self-realization. An expansion of our self as more connected, more related and more aware of our natural world. This is the realization of everyone's own potential, the realization of every being's *conatus in suo esse perseverare*.[85] This is where Spinoza emerges as one of the main references in Naess' philosophy. Self realization is for everyone in its own way, a realization of everyone' own *inter-esse*. The interest of each being is in its *inter-esse*, the place of relation which is realized necessarily through a continuos opening to otherness.

Self-realization makes sense of ecosophy as a form of wisdom, a question about being in the world and in some sense a spiritual task of the individual. But in reference to nature, it is the highest expression of letting all beings "live and flourish," the egalitarian attitude Naess considers the basis of our ethics. Instead of considering ethics as granting value to the human individual and community, and only afterwards interrogating the natural world in order to find beings that qualify for a moral consideration, Naess pulls apart the grounds for this discontinuity in the first place. Every being is a center of interest, has a *conatus*, its own *telos* in its own non-anthropomorphic way. This is why the way we see the natural world has an ethical and political weight.

In a "relational total-field," the realization of the potential of one cannot happen separately or at the expense of the realization of others. In this way, ecological topics such as biodiversity and complexity[86] stop being mere value-free "scientific" description and offer some material for the politics of nature. Instead of seeing human's community as society and the natural world outside of it, we always live in "mixed communities."[87] Therefore, environmentalists who see their lived world in these terms, who see value in biodiversity, for example, who feel that our world would not be the same if it were to be heavily reduced, who are not willing to accept these changes lightly because the quality of their life also depends on it, environmentalist who share this worldview should legitimately participate in the common decisions that regard the politics of nature because their view is also political. The resolution of environmental conflicts, for example the coexistence of

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[85] Naess, "Spinoza and Ecology;" A. Naess, "The Place of Joy in a World of Fact," in *Deep ecology for the 21st century*, ed. George Sessions (Boston: Shambala, 1995), 249-258.

[86] A. Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, 39-41

[87] Naess, "Self-Realization in Mixed Communities."

conflicting species in one ecosystem, is the result of a communitarian and democratic effort where not only experts, but also and especially laymen, should partake.[88]

2.2 - A Critique of Naess's Relationism

> *Per fare un tavolo ci vuole il legno / per fare il legno ci vuole l'albero / per fare l'albero ci vuole il seme / per fare il seme ci vuole il frutto / per fare il frutto ci vuole un fiore.*
> *Per fare un tavolo ci vuole un fiore.*[89]
>
> *You need wood to make a table / you need a tree to make wood / you need a seed to make a tree / you need a fruit to make a seed / you need a flower to make a fruit.*
> *You need a flower to make a table.*[90]

The concepts: human, nature, and relation are intertwined in Naess' ecosophy in an ambiguous way that is worth disentangling. Naess' goals are the reformulation of a continuity between nature and humans, and the reopening of an account of our constitutive conditions of existence in the biosphere. These are also paradigmatic tasks of most ecological thinking.[91] Naess' work denounces the limitations of the metaphysics of object and subject that underlie our modern view of reality in respect to the possibility of formulating an ecological worldview, and tries to rework their positions through a relational account of both. Nevertheless, several ambiguities emerge in his approach.

The task of disentangling the concept of human, that of nature and an account of relatedness in Naess' proposal will show what are Naess' limitations, but most importantly, which of these limitations affect Naess' work inasmuch as they are common and intrinsic difficulties related to most ecological philosophy and movement positions.

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[88] Ibid.

[89] Gianni Rodari, *Ci vuole un fiore*, lyrics for nursery rhyme. Music composed by Luis Enriquez Bacalov and Sergio Endrigo (Rome: edizioni musicali Jubal, Noah's Ark, 1974).

[90] My translation.

[91] *Cf*. Steven Vogel, "Environmental Philosophy After the End of Nature," *Environmental Ethics* 24 (2002): 23-39.

2.2.1 - Value is in the Relation

In Naess' ecosophical view we have to hold natural beings as valuable for their own sake. This is due to a reading of the ecological crisis as a call to shift to an ecological framework in the understanding of our being in the world. Wisdom in the ecological crisis means, then, to recognize the relational matrix that makes the other part of me, and me part of the other: a relational twine that potentially extends from more basic and closer relations to the whole. We cannot keep thinking of ourselves as if our collective constitution was only the social, urbanized one, overseeing its biospheric and "natural" dimensions.

In a nutshell, the value of nature emerges in our relation to the natural world, and we are interrelated with potentially everything that surrounds us in our lived world.

The traditional concept of intrinsic value, as opposed to instrumental is used by Naess as a synonym of objective value. Value that is not subjectively, arbitrarily and *relativistically* projected onto a valueless object, but it is part, instead, of our *relation to reality*, within the way we experience "objectivity." Intrinsic value is simply the recognition of the ethical meaning of our relations to the other. Naess also resorts to the second formulation of the Kantian categorial imperative, according to which humans should never be treated merely as a means to an end, but always at the same time as an end. The difference from Kant lies in the critique Naess offers to the unjustifiable restriction of the norm only to human beings.[92]

There is a problem in considering intrinsic value as the basis of a positive ethical norm in regard to some (or all!) categories of living beings. This notion would recall the traditional (medieval) usage of value accorded to beings inasmuch as they are God's creatures.[93] Even though some kinship can be found to the idea of reverence and sacredness in Naess, as much as in other ecological voices such as American pioneers of

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[92] Naess, "Intrinsic Value. Will the Defenders of Nature Please Rise." in *Wisdom in the Open Air. The Norwegian Roots of Deep Ecology*, ed. Peter Reed and David Rothenberg (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 70-71. The renowned Kantian formulation is to be found in the *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*.

[93] Erazim Kohák, *The Green Halo*, loc. 945.

ecological thinking Aldo Leopold or David Thoreau,[94] this is to be understood in terms of acceptance and openness to the other. Intrinsic value in this usage is equal to saying a statement of humbleness and responsibility for the place we occupy in a world greater than us: a weakening of our own restricted interests and overwhelming point of view in a world of difference and interest conflicts. In other words, we cannot, in principle, take our relation to the world lightly, but always consider the ethical weight our position in reality bears.[95]

This reading is close to the norm-free egalitarian attitude Cheney and others call "universal consideration," an ethical-epistemological gesture as opposed to moral theories that list characters of qualification for moral considerability.[96] Such a gesture is fundamental to relinquish anthropocentric *hybris* and authoritarian attitudes of domination in our treatment of nature, even when these present themselves as an "ethical" form of care for our natural "moral patients," exemplified by managerial or stewardship images of man as the benevolent guardian of nature.

The reading of intrinsic value as an ethics of epistemology is a fundamental aspect of reopening the ontological question Naess called "environmental ontology." Indeed, problems with intrinsic value occur when it is coupled with substantialist ideas of nature: something has intrinsic value because it is God's creature, or *just because* it is "natural," beyond humans, as opposed to artificial. This is the authoritarian risk that has been criticized against deep ecology renderings of intrinsic value: a natural order to which we belong that dictates political and ethical forms of obligation, for example using scientific ecology to justify policies that demand individual rights to conform to the organic community.[97]

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[94] See for example Naess' reverence for mountains: Arne Naess, "Mountains," *The Trumpeter* 21, no. 2 (2005): 51-54. See also Naess' reference to religious feelings or the sense of sacred as a possible basis for a deep ecological sensitivity: Arne Naess, "The Primacy of the Whole," In *Holism and Ecology*. Kyoto: The United Nations University, 1981. Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1989; Thoreau, *Se tremi sull'orlo. Lettere a un cercatore di sé*, Walden, Walking le tre edizioni a casa. See also Cheney, "Universal Consideration."

[95] Erazim Kohák, *The Green Halo*, loc. 965.

[96] Birch, "Moral Considerability;" Cheney, "Universal Consideration;" Weston, "Universal Consideration."

[97] Timothy Morton, *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2007), 17. Michael E. Zimmermann, "The Threat of Ecofascism." *Social Theory and Practice* 21, no. 2 (1995): 207-238.

It would appear this is not a risk in Naess' philosophy, since the starting point in his task of reworking our image of the natural world lies precisely in the critique of naturalism in terms of a substantialist idea of natural objects as things in themselves, out there in the external world of the laws of nature. Even so, this is a major locus of ambiguity for Naess' understanding of nature and its value. We can, in fact, derive from Naess' work a constant reference to natural objects, as if Naess knew *a priori* that a forest or a single plant organism deserved to be assigned intrinsic value, while a nuclear plant does not. The kind of relationism he advocates is eventually established between human subjects and "natural" objects. According to Naess, the latter need to be seen not only in terms of primary qualities, but as something more (secondary and tertiary qualities). However, Naess' ecosophy seems to already know what nature is, in terms of wilderness or "free nature." The "green nature" to which we belong has already a natural clear outline.

But did not nature emerge in experience? Did it not benefit of a relational status, emerging always already within cultural, historical, emotional, meaningful determinations?

This ambiguity in Naess' relation and understanding of value in it afflicts both the "human" and the "natural" poles of the human-nature relation.

On the "human side," value conceived of as the quality for a positive moral norm residing in the greater order of nature has produced monsters we cannot risk again.[98] Forgetting that language and culture to some extent "construe" nature that is never given as a universal transcendent order risks to turn ecology into "eco-fascist" positions.[99]

Moreover, there are further "internal" difficulties that should be addressed. It is quite easy to imagine how to confer intrinsic value to our loved ones, to endangered great mammal species, or to the more general ideal of protection of nonhuman life. Naess refers to a kind of identification that inspires resemblance of human agency in other species, an emotional anthropomorphism that Naess calls "felt nearness".[100] Even though it is a

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[98] Soper, *What is Nature? Culture, Politics and the non-Human* (Oxford and Malden: Blackwell, 1995), 32: "Romantic conceptions of 'nature' as wholesome salvation from cultural decadence and racial degeneration where crucial to the construction of Nazi ideology, and an aesthetic of 'nature' as source of purity and authentic self-identification has been a component of all forms of racism, tribalism and nationalism. Equally, of course, the appeal to the health, morality and immutability of what 'nature' proposes has been systematically used to condemn the 'deviants' and 'perverts' who fail to conform to the sexual or social norms of their culture."

[99] Zimmermann, "Ecofascism."

[100] For example: Naess, "Equality, Sameness and Rights," in *Deep Ecology for the 21st Century,* ed. George Sessions, 223; Naess, "Identification as a Source," 266.

common experience of identification, it leaves space for ambiguity. It would be, for example, completely meaningless for our ecological concerns to bring us to conclude that we hold a moral obligation to the Variola virus, which the World Health Organization has worked hard to eradicate completely (and successfully).[101] Regardless if it was an ancient natural being, it happened to reap human victims for three thousand years.

If we want to take a relational-ecological account of our being in the world seriously, we have to revisit the way we understand value in connection to the reopening of the ontological question about the natural world. This emergence of value cannot be put in terms of positive immediate normative rules that qualify moral behavior. "Universal consideration," for instance, is an ethical gesture within an epistemological practice. It is a way of saying that, without a certain openness towards a possible unexpected other, we will never let this other emerge, we will never know it, it will never reopen our previous ontological convictions.[102] Another way of making sense of the way Naess' intrinsic value can be more consistently and fruitfully understood by tracing the correspondence between his way of addressing value as a concrete content of experience and Whitehead's value of "actual occasions," things as concrete events apprehended in experience.[103] "Value is the intrinsic reality of an event,"[104] writes Whitehead. The reality of an event is relational and processual,[105] so its value is apprehended in the "real togetherness" of entities by means of their intrinsic relatedness.[106]

The relational constitution of real events is not just in what makes them events in nature. The place of each event in relation to others is not just its material (or ecological) relations, which would still make up a naturalistic abstraction of the actual occasion. A

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[101] The last "natural" occurrence of the virus was apprehended in 1977. World Health Organization, http://www.who.int/biologicals/vaccines/smallpox/en/

[102] Cheney, "Universal Consideration."

[103] "For Whitehead, an actual occasion (or actual entity) is not an enduring substance, but a process of becoming. As Whitehead puts it, actual occasions are the 'final real things of which the world is made up,' they are 'drops of *experience*, complex and interdependent.'" Andrew David Irvine, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, s.v. "Alfred North Whitehead" (Stanford: Stanford University, 2014). http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/whitehead/. *Cf.* Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*; Alfred N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (New York: The Free Press, 1978).

[104] Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, 114.

[105] Ibid., 147: "the event is what it is, by reason of the unification in itself of a multiplicity of relationships."

[106] Ibid., 126: "grasping of diverse entities into a value, by reason of their real togetherness in that pattern."

"natural event" is "only an abstraction from a complete actual occasion."[107] The complete actual occasion, in experience and the world, is a complex of things that includes our acts of perception, "memory, anticipation, imagination and thought."[108]

Indeed, events, the emergence of something into reality, include in their unity the experience of value: "the element of value, of being valuable, of having value, of being an end in itself, of being something which is for its own sake, must not be omitted in any account of an event as the most concrete actual something. "Value" is the word I use for the intrinsic reality of an event."[109]

What exists within our world has its own weight, its own opacity, its own resistance, its own collective impact we have to take into account since no entity is self-sufficient, but finds its place within a larger whole. Value in ethical terms is, then, to be negotiated within this relational weight: something emerges and weighs on the world, it threads its way into the world, it requires acknowledgement, it needs to be taken into account, to be evaluated in order to understand what it is, what are its interactions, how are we to treat it. There is a collective dimension to it, that in Whitehead emerges not directly as political, but still, for example, in the effort of reworking the outcomes of the entire collective history of western modern science through the lenses of an alternative "provisional realism"[110] freed from the fallacy of misplaced concreteness.[111]

If we now look back at the Variola virus, it had a great value indeed: its emergence as the entity that carries the ability to be extremely deadly to humans. It follows that value in a relational reality, where *everything* is interconnected at some level, cannot be understood as a positive normativity, but as the relational weight an entity takes on when it emerges in relation to us.[112] The value and meaning of nature are experienced through political, material and labour determinations, as well as within technological conditions and cultural

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[107] Ibid., 212.

[108] Ibid., 212.

[109] Ibid., 114.

[110] Ibid., 81. See also Ibid., 108: "I am giving the outline of what I consider to be the essentials of an objectivist philosophy adapted to the requirement of science and to the concrete experience of mankind."

[111] Ibid., 72.

[112] We will develop this acceptance of the concept of value in Chapter 4 of this work concerning Latour's relationism and political ecology.

traditions. Within these dimensions they are renegotiated when others (in our case nonhumans) emerge, or when our values become dysfunctional, such as the modernist values that aided in bringing us straight into the ecological crisis. The dominant modernist ideal of nature as a material and mechanical resource for humans is historically determined. Once this historical element is secured, it becomes possible for Naess, as well as for much of philosophical environmentalism, to answer the ecological crisis through a different consideration of nature itself. The reduction of the natural world to its measurable quantities, as well as the seclusion of humanity within the exclusive world of culture, can be reviewed within Naess' plea by reconsidering our experience of nature and the wider richness of relations emerging in it.

Nevertheless, there are two possibly insurmountable difficulties in Naess' account. On the one hand, the collective-political dimension of value and meaning is only important to Naess as a second order of relation, a negotiation that happens *after* the individual's experience of value, instead of also contributing to its very constitution. On the other hand, nature emerging through experience appears to be, for Naess, a means to rehabilitate *ulterior* meaning and value, without the risk of losing an *a priori* grasp on nature's reality as a sector of the world. In other words, there is no risk, in Naess, of admitting the inadmissibility of sharp and universal boundaries of "green" nature out there.

The "nature side" of the relation is, indeed, the real elephant in the room. Are we not interrelated with everything that surrounds us in our world, including concrete sidewalks and electric plants? Are we not related to our non-wild environments? How does this value and meaning laden nature look? How is it "natural"? Isn't the urban environment, no matter how despoiled, still our environment? Are we not in relation with our cultivated products? What about forests? Sure, they are "green," but most of them are not virgin: they grew back after they were exploited for warfare and industrial purposes. And what about places that lack wilderness, wide spaces with low anthropic density? What about Italy, where it is hard to conceive of any wilderness outside, maybe, mountain tops?

Even though Naess makes a serious effort to stress the humanity-nature ecological continuity, his concept of nature appears to always rely on the same man/nature or artificial/natural dualism he is resolved to overcome, while the only clear dimension of continuity appears to be a cosmological wholeness. Maybe the relation Naess tries to delineate is still too abstract, too "horizontal." Subject and object still appear juxtaposed in

it, exchanging properties without concretely taking in the transformative dimensions that constitute the human beings relation to nature.

2.2.2 - Difference, Society and Authoritarianism: "Historical" Critiques

Deep ecology has been caught for thirty years in what is by now an historical debate within radical political ecology, in particular in contention with aspects of social ecology and ecofeminist theories.[113] As many have repeated,[114] "deep ecology" is a general umbrella term collecting several movements of differing types in Europe and in the English speaking world. These movements are both academic and social, and not always philosophical. They sometimes include spiritual and religious accents, and, most importantly, are not formally institutionalized (for example, the degrowth movement can be considered a deep ecological one, although it was never labelled this way).[115] A general collection of principles that describe the deep ecological view on the ecological crisis, on the humans-nature relationship, and on the kind of action and change that should be advocated has been proposed as a reference "platform" by Arne Naess and George Sessions since 1984.[116] Therefore, the criticisms raised in the political ecology debate are not always pertinent to Naess' philosophical proposal. Nevertheless, some historical criticisms of deep ecology are worth mentioning because they identify crucial dimensions

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[113] Some contributions and comments on the historical debate can be found in: Bookchin, "Social Ecology *vs* Deep Ecology;" Naess, "A European Looks at North American Branches of the Deep Ecology Movement," *The Trumpeter* 5, no. 2 (1988): 75-79. Devall "Deep Ecology and Its Critics," *The Trumpeter*, 5, no. 2 (1988): 55-60; Eckersley, *Environmentalism and Political Theory*; Cheney, Jim, "Eco-Feminism and Deep Ecology," *Environmental Ethics* 9 (1987): 115-145; Diehm, Christian, "Arne Naess, Val Plumwood, and Deep Ecological Subjectivity: A Contribution to the 'Deep Ecology-Ecofeminism Debate,'" *Ethics & the Environment* 7, no. 1 (2002): 24-38; Sessions, Robert, "Deep Ecology versus Ecofeminism: Healthy Differences or Incompatible Philosophies?" *Hypatia* 6, no. 1 (1991): 90-107. Zimmerman, *Contesting Earth's Future.*

[114] See, for example, Max Oelschlaeger, *The Idea of Wilderness: From Prehistory to the Age of Ecology* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991), 301.

[115] See the study connecting deep ecology and the degrowth movement in Irene Borgna, *Profondo verde*, Milano: Mimesis, 2010.

[116] The first formulation of the deep ecology common principles: A. Naess, G. Sessions, "The Basic Principles of Deep Ecology", *The Trumpeter*, vol. 3, n. 4, 1986, p. 14. These are the beliefs deep ecologists share.

that are not only overlooked by Naess, but that should be taken into account as cardinal knots for a political ecology based on a relational understanding of reality.[117]

The American anarchist Murray Bookchin (and his social ecology) notoriously attacked the scarcity of critical inquiry deep ecology has shown in regard to the social, hierarchical and labour conditions at the root of the ecological crisis. In his reading, both humanity and nature are taken by Naess as vague, abstract counter-entities. Subjectivity in its historical configuration within western capitalist societies would also be overlooked in favor of the search for a spiritualistic dimension of selfhood.[118] Social ecology points out that nature emerges through the mediation of human labour and modes of production, consequently, mistreatments of nature are entrenched in capitalistic hierarchical structures and authoritarian social relations. The deep ecological spiritual widening of individual selves and their identification with a worshipped nature are not only useless in the task of fighting against ecological destruction, but, even more importantly, they ignore and reproduce authoritarian risks typical of "churches" and "dictatorships"[119] by imposing the requisite of an ecological shift of consciousness for everyone.

Bookchin naturalizes humans and their social organizations as the result of natural history so that humans, society, and their products are fully natural. The ecological crisis is, then, a crisis of society and labour relations, and it needs to be addressed within these spheres.

In response deep ecologists stressed similarities between the two approaches, in particular the common effort of retrieving a holistic integration of humans in nature.[120] Nevertheless, social ecology strikes at a vulnerable point within deep ecology, and one that is quite evident in Naess' construct: subjectivity and objectivity are addressed only through an abstract ontological and metaphysical problematization. They maintain only a loose and extrinsic connection to difference, injustice and social authoritarian structures, even though Naess constantly expresses preoccupations in regard to classism, and fascist and

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[117] The debate is lengthy and has a wide scope of topics. The task of this survey is not to contribute internally to it, but to mention some critical areas that help understanding Naess' difficulties in those areas crucial to relationism.

[118] Bookchin "Social Ecology *vs* Deep Ecology."

[119] Ibid.

[120] See Zimmerman, *Contesting Earth's Future*; Clark, "What is social ecology," *The Trumpeter* 5, no. 2 (1988): 72-75.

authoritarian risks related to the worsening of the ecological conditions and the possibility of resource wars.[121]

Social ecology has the merit of bringing Naess' abstract selfhood and nature concepts back to its unavoidable historical and social genealogical connections. Notwithstanding, the problem of ontological character hidden and pre-assumed in our view of nature, as it is denounced by Naess, is not opposed to the integration of social and historical constitutive relations in the analysis of how nature and humans determine each other in the ecological crisis context. If anything, social ecology resolves nature in society.[122] In this way, we risk a reiteration of the problem of nature, seen as a mere material substratum to human activities, and assist in the reexamination of its otherness in terms of its limitations in arbitrary human use, as well as the reassessment of the place of nonhumans in our world.

Further worries about covert authoritarian sides of Naess' concept of ecological self come from ecofeminist reflection.

Jim Cheney accuses deep ecology of adopting an abstract idea of interconnectedness. Instead of creating the conditions for a concrete relatedness between humans and nonhumans, the kind of cosmological interrelation deep ecology advocates simply reaffirms the alienation or separation of humanity from nature and humans' yearning for wholeness.[123] The risk implied in this critique, and it can be considered pertinent to Naess' relational thinking, is embedded in the cosmological-metaphysical dimension of relation in the form of an internalized *vision* of reality, a cosmological totality that can endow us with meaning and guidance based on our place in it. The relationship between individuals and wholeness risks finding its primary solution in the wholeness dimension. Moreover, the

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[121] Arne Naess, "Accelerating Population Pressure or Overpopulation?" *The Trumpeter* 21, no. 1 (2005): 90-91. Arne Naess, "Deep Ecology for the 22nd Century," The Trumpeter 9 no. 2 (1992). http://trumpeter.athabascau.ca/index.php/trumpet/article/view/432/709; Arne Naess, "Politics and the Ecological Crisis. An Introductory Note," in *Deep Ecology for the 21st Century*, ed. George Sessions, 447. See also Arne Naess, "The Three Great Movements," *The Trumpeter* 9, n. 2 (1992). http://trumpeter.athabascau.ca/index.php/trumpet/article/view/431/707. See also Zimmerman, "Ecofascism."

[122] Latour criticizes Bookchin, for example, for not reworking the traditional concept of politics. By being embedded in the politics/nature separation, his concept of politics remains co-responsible for the ecological degradation of our world. The only thing Bookchin can do is to let the politics/culture pole absorb nature and replace the problem of the politics of nature with that of the class struggle. See Latour, *Politics of Nature*, 257n33.

[123] Jim Cheney, "The Neo-Stoicism of Radical Environmentalism." *Environmental ethics* 11, no. 4 (1989): 293-325.

discontinuity between subject and object is not recomposed in a new collective dimension, but inside the subject and his own vision instead.

Some have suggested a disturbing echo between the idea of identification with totality and totalitarian forms of thinking in which individuals are homologated to a greater order forcing on them unified meaning, value and action guidance.[124]

To be fair, Naess always strongly contested the idea that deep ecology requires the acceptance of a particular metaphysics.[125] On the contrary, ontology, for Naess, is a necessary fundamental area of inquiry for becoming aware of the chances we open to the consideration of the natural world. Moreover, the issue of equality in the biosphere is always related, in Naess's thinking, with the issues of anti-classism, peace movements, and environmental justice. With his appeal to "environmental ontology", he aims to highlight the ontological limitations of the dichotomy between a subject-human and an object-nature, a discontinuity which creates the unrelated premises for instrumental treatments of others, and which makes it *de facto* impossible to ascribe dignity and objective legitimacy to different modes of relation outside those of utilization or arbitrary projection of value.

Nevertheless, there is an important point of tension between denouncing the dominion implied in an ontological theory of Being, its normative weight that tells us "this is what there is, this is how things are in nature," and offering a positive relational ontological theory, opposite and equal to the dualistic one.

Naess is pointing his finger at the historical and non-universal character of the fundamental modernist ontology, hoping to free different dimensions of the constitutive relations between humans and nature. Despite everything, he offers an alternative worldview drawing from process philosophy and Spinoza's idea of substance. His

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[124] Zimmerman, "Ecofascism."

[125] *Cf*. Arne Naess,"The Encouraging Richness and Diversity of Ultimate Premisses in Environmental Philosophy." *The Trumpeter* 9, no. 2 (1992): 53-67. Arne Naess, "Is It a Plus to Have a Definite Metaphysics in Common?" *The Trumpeter* 22, no. 1 (2006): 75-77. The authoritarian accusations to Naess' thinking need to be completely ruled out as out of place when we look at his personal and professional life history. As a young philosophy professor at the University of Oslo, Naess was in the frontline of resistance during the Nazi occupation of Norway between 1940 and 1945. He also spent his lifetime work on Gandhi and nonviolent conflict management, contributing to the emerging field of Peace studies. Some biographical notes: Warwick Fox, "Arne Naess. A Biographical Sketch," *The Trumpeter* 9, no. 2 (1992). http://trumpeter.athabascau.ca/index.php/trumpet/article/view/426/697. David Rothenberg, *Is It Painful to Think? Conversations with Arne Naess* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993). Alan Drengson, "The Life and Work of Arne Naess. An Appreciative Overview," *The Trumpeter* 21, no. 1 (2005): 5-47; Kit Fai Naess, "Arne Naess. Some Non- Philosophical Aspects," *The Trumpeter* 26, n. 2 (2010): 8-15.

"environmental ontology" reopens the previously mentioned point of tension with his insistence on experience as the place where we discover more attributes of nature.

Keeping all of this in mind, the "biospheric egalitarianism" Naess suggests certainly risks to remain an abstract equality that does not articulate itself through a concrete politics of difference. Otherness, both cultural and "natural" appears to be articulated *within* the philosopher's vision, within the philosopher's intuition and language. Even though a vision of equality is presented, the emergence of otherness is *colonized* by a totalizing vision outside of negotiation. As Cheney writes, "vision is substituted for voice:"[126] the vision is superimposed on different voices, it prevents listening to a non-predictable, non-absorbable otherness.

Similarly, Val Plumwood denounces Naess' idea of an "ecological self" as a structure of ultimate universalization of individual interests and egoism.[127] The same universalizing structure can be read in the idea of ethics that Naess tries to reject: the universalization of a duty towards morally considerable individuals as a substitute for reworking ethics in the concrete relations that make up self-experience and identity.[128]

We can agree on the fact that some dimensions of relation are not articulated in Naess' proposal, leaving open some risks. This is the result of an idea of politics, which is a sort of epiphenomenon, a second order dimension compared to the development of a personal sense of reality. Political negotiation, cultural and linguistic facets are, instead, also constitutive relations, at the same level as biological and experiential dimensions of the self. Ultimately, the problem with Naess' relationism is linked to his idea of relation, but more importantly, to the idea of the human self and of nature, which he partially maintains despite aspiring to a relational reframing of both.

2.2.3 - What Nature?

The concept of nature is, in Naess, the focal point of a severe ambiguity in his proposal. This ambiguity does not necessarily represent a hindrance. Actually, the ambiguity in

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[126] Andrea Nye in Cheney, "Neo-Stoicism" p. 311.

[127] Plumwood, "Nature, Self, and Gender."

[128] Ibid.

Naess' idea of nature is a sign that most critiques of deep ecology, as presenting a solid natural-metaphysical order, do not properly apply to Naess. Moreover, precisely these ambiguities, which reveal difficulties in the concept of nature, are not just Naess', but are shared by most environmentalist writers. Relationism is called on in order to rework these difficulties.

Naess draws upon a variety of differing concepts in order to frame the problem of nature. On the one hand, nature is our lived world, laden with meaning and values, and our relation to it runs through the characters of our experience and consciousness. Nature, in this sense, formally emerges as a meaningful wholeness through human ways of being in the world.[129] The first element in Naess' concept of nature is directed against a naturalism associated with the idea of nature as a mechanistic and material substratum: primary qualities as what is real and non-artificial.

On the other hand, nature is an external interrelated whole in which human biological continuity, or animality, seems to solve the problem of human difference within the ecological relations of the ecosystem. Nature is an organic complex whose teleology is independent from the human world.

At other times, Nature recurs as a holistic, cosmological dimension to which humans belong, something similar to Spinoza's *deus sive natura*.[130]

To make matters more complicated, sometimes Naess uses the term "nature" in lieu of "reality", or as a solution to the ontological problem of being: "Rather than talking about reality or the world, ecophilosophical thinking proceeds in terms of nature, and humanity's relation to nature."[131] Other parts of Naess's work present nature in terms of living beings, although not strictly in a biological sense:

> Instead of 'biosphere' we might use the term 'ecosphere' in order to stress that we of course do not limit our concern for the life forms in a biologically narrow sense. The term 'life' is used here in a comprehensive non-technical way to refer also to things biologists may classify as non-living: rivers (watersheds), landscapes, cultures,

[129] *Cf*. Erazim Kohák, "Varieties of Ecological Experience," *Environmental Ethics* 19, no. 2 (1997): 153-171. Kohák recounts three fundamental experiences of nature: 1) the hunters'/ gatherers;' 2) the farmer's and 3) the producers'/consumers'.

[130] Naess, "Spinoza and Ecology," 46: "the nature conceived by field ecologists is not the passive, dead, value-neutral nature of mechanistic science, but akin to the *Deus sive Natura* of Spinoza. All-inclusive, creative, [...] alive in the broad sense of panpsychism, but also manifesting a structure, the so-called laws of nature."

[131] Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, 35.

ecosystems, 'the living earth'. Slogans such as 'let the river live' illustrate this broader usage so common in many cultures.[132]

Difficulties appear to multiply in Naess's attempt to use "nature" in order to get rid of the "environment." In fact, the sense of externality conveyed by the word "environment," conceived as the habitat or the surrounding conditions of human life, is not openly shared by the term "nature." Nonetheless, this does not mean we know what we are talking about when we use the term "nature:" something in which we belong and, at the same time, humanity's other. But what does it mean when discussing the concept, 'environment'? Naess questions the concept of environment because it entails a human-nature discontinuity, as well as a hierarchic character: environment as an inferior dimension, defined around man. Therefore, the polemic Naess raises against the concept of environment rather than a problem of nature, poses a problem of otherness, of non-reducibility of nonhumans, as well as a problem of continuity and belonging.

Indeed, the contrast in tone and style of philosophical address is striking when Naess' attention turns from the great "nature collectors," such as mountains, forests, and landscapes to singular nonhumans, such as wolves, bears, and sheep with whom we should negotiate a cohabitation in "mixed communities."[133]

In regard to the different sources of "nature" Naess brings up, the ambiguities point to some central philosophical knots.

Firstly, Naess' idea of nature appears to swing between *continuity* and *difference*, between belonging and identification on one side, and the intrinsic value of nonhumans, that should be left alone as much as possible, on the other. The picture appears to re-compose itself only within a greater whole of cosmological or "divine" flavor.

Secondly, if we take relation seriously, clean boundaries between humans and nature fade. Even though, as Whitehead notes, events persist as unities in process. From the ontological point of view, the *relata* are never substantial entities. Nonetheless, Naess

[132] Ibid., 29.

[133] Naess, "Self-Realization in Mixed Communities."

appears inclined towards a "naturalization of the spirit,"[134] a naturalization of the secondary and tertiary qualities that are traditionally secluded within the subject, but he does not face the risk of losing nature only to find out that within different experience structures "nature" might have no defined reality outside its cultural and historical representations.

Finally, one of the most serious critiques of Naess' "nature" is that it does not depart from a foundationalist naturalism, even though it is not the naturalism of mathematical-physical qualities. This is to say that within Naess' work, nature's organism transcends and is ontologically prior to the human world, language, cultures, society, traditions and thought structures.[135]

While these critiques highlight the main problems for several deep ecologists, Naess points his finger at representationalism as the origin of our misunderstanding of nature. And even though he might be pointing in the right direction, the ambiguity remains because a change of worldview is advocated as the solution to negligent environmental attitudes. As Morton noted, both the concept of *Weltanschauung* and the idea that "an idea can change the world" are residues of a particular Romantic idea of nature,[136] which is characterized precisely by the concept of "nature as origin."[137] For this reason, Vogel retrieves the concept of environment replacing that of nature. Environment is conceived of as the setting where practical relations between humans and nature occur, instead of resorting to a transcendent alienated nature.[138] If Naess' critique of the environment is directed against the transcendence of humanism to the detriment of nature, the

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[134] Similar to Hans Jonas' operation in Hans Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life: Toward a Philosophical Biology* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2001), 283: "Ontology as the ground of ethics was the original tenet of philosophy. Their divorce, which is the divorce of the «objective» and the «subjective» realms, is the modern destiny. Their reunion can be effected, if at all, only from the «objective» end, that is to say, through a revision of the idea of nature. *And it is becoming, rather than abiding nature* which would hold out any such promise. From the immanent direction of its total evolution there may be elicited a destination of man by whose terms the person, in the act of fulfilling himself, would at the same time realise a concern of universal substance. Hence would result a principle of ethics which is ultimately grounded neither in the autonomy of the self nor in the needs of the community, but in an objective assignment by the nature of things." My emphasis.

[135] *Cf.* Steven Vogel, "Nature as Origin and Difference: On Environmental Philosophy and Continental Thought," *Philosophy Today* 42, supplement (1998): 169-181.

[136] Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*, 2.

[137] Vogel, "Nature as Origin and Difference."

[138] *Cf.* Steven Vogel, "Environmental Philosophy After the End of Nature."

transcendence of "nature as origin" risks to be even stronger: a natural order that does not leave any space for freedom and difference.

Considering the contrasting manifestations of "nature" in Naess' idea of the human-nature relationship, we can state that the ecocentric-anthropocentric terminology does not clarify much. Whereas, the mere centrality of the concept of *Lebenswelt* for the definition of ecological relations and the stress on the structures of experience are themselves sufficient to shake the definition of "ecocentric" for Naess' thinking.[139]

The anthropocentric-ecocentric distinction is based on the natural/artificial axis, that is to say, of an idea of nature as other than human. This idea is in itself problematic.[140] Moreover, the terms "anthropocentrism" and "ecocentrism" only make sense within the kind of ethical theory with which Naess dialogues and from which he takes his distance at the same time. The terms do not inquire much into what these *anthropos* and *oikos* are, but take them as a unified and essentialist idea of humanity and nature, as if the interests of the two categories could be unified and defended as one.

2.2.4 - What Anthropos?

Naess's preoccupation with anthropocentrism can certainly be clarified as the second large ambiguity in his ecosophy. First of all, anthropocentrism appears as criticized in its strong form, as opposed to "biospherical egalitarianism." The latter homages "the equal right to live and blossom" both to human and nonhuman life. "Its restriction to humans is an anthropocentrism with detrimental effects upon the life quality of humans themselves."[141] Egalitarianism is also the foundation of intrinsic value of nature as opposed to instrumental value, where nature is treated as means for humans' ends. Based on this, Naess's ecosophy has been pinned on the far ecocentric end of the anthropocentrism-ecocentrism axis of environmental philosophy.

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[139] Even Naess uses the term in a loose way. See for example Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, 29: "Instead of 'biosphere' we might use the term 'ecosphere' in order to stress that we of course *do not limit our concern for the life forms in a biologically narrow sense*. The term 'life' is used here in a comprehensive non-technical way to refer also to things biologists may classify as non-living: rivers (watersheds), landscapes, cultures, ecosystems, 'the living earth.' Slogans such as 'let the river live' illustrate this broader usage so common in many cultures."

[140] As we began to see. We will examine the problem more in Chapter 3 of this work.

[141] Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, 28.

Things are way more complicated than that, however, and Naess is often too cheaply and easily thrown into the anti-anthropocentric polemic. Within the very same formulation the first ambiguity emerges, "[the] quality [of human life] depends in part upon the deep pleasure and satisfaction we receive from close partnership with other forms of life."[142] First of all, fighting anthropocentrism does not mean acknowledging nature's interests while denying human interests. Furthermore, Naess remarks on the impossibility of escaping the anthropic situatedness of the whole environmental discourse: "'Homocentrism' and 'anthropocentrism' which so often have been used in a derogatory way, should be qualified by an adjective, 'narrow homocentrism' etc. Gradually the prospect of protecting the planet as a whole and for its own sake is seen as one of the greatest challenges ever. And it certainly is a specifically human task."[143] Additionally, Naess's reliance on phenomenology and on the concept of nature in terms of value- and meaning-laden *Lebenswelt*[144] moves ecosophy closer to a certain type of "anthropomorphism" or "perspectival anthropocentrism" in environmental philosophy.[145]

Naess holds onto Protagoras's *homo mensura*, proclaiming that man holds a measuring rod, but this does not offer any final verdict about what humankind measures, which can be discovered "to be greater than himself and his survival."[146] The obvious is stated here, that anthropocentrism is in some sense inescapable, as a concrete human situatedness.[147] If this states the inevitable presence of human interests, it does not entail their exclusivity.

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[142] Ibid.

[143] Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, 141. See also ibid., 23.

[144] Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, 51: "Phenomenological viewpoints are valuable for the development of consciousness of a non-instrumental, non-utilitarian content of the immediate experience of nature." See also ibid., 32: "Is not the value-laden, spontaneous and emotional realm of experience as genuine a source of knowledge of reality as mathematical physics? If we answer 'yes!', what are the consequences for our description of nature?"

[145] *Cf.* Plumwood, *Environmental Culture*, locs. 1292-1408; Diehm, "Minding Nature." Diehm offers one formulation: "every entity's point-of-view is shaped by its way of being-in-the-world, the views that we humans have—including our views on matters of environmental ethics—will of necessity be "human-centered." Ibid., 15. *Cf.* Anthony Weston, "Before Environmental Ethics," *Environmental Ethics*, 14, No. 4 (1992): 321 - 338. Environmental ethics are necessarily "anthropocentrized."

[146] Arne Naess, "A Defence of the Deep Ecology Movement," *Environmental Ethics* 6 (1984): 270.

[147] *Cf.* Tallacchini, *Etiche della terra*, 52.

Another element, which if left alone could be taken as obfuscated, but with proper clarification could be a springboard pregnant with insightful possibility, is Naess' resort to a form of anthropomorphism, which is implied in the idea of identification. In order to settle value and interest conflicts in relation to natural entities, Naess suggests two possible guiding principles. The first is *vital needs*, and the second is *felt nearness*.[148] According to these, our psychological identification with others is not based on a speciesism, on the needs of humans as a species, but, instead, we identify with the suffering and needs of those we feel to be close, for example, the desperate struggle of an insect against death.

Here again, when we introduce the concept of intrinsic relatedness, an ambiguity in the status of the *relata* is brought up. This occurs within the theme of anthropocentrism in reference to both this human moral subject and the natural moral object. There are two things at work here; nature is otherness that deserves to be respected in its difference, evident, for example, in Naess' insistence on the maximization of biodiversity without imposing anthropocentric interests. While at the same time, the *alter* is absorbed and harmonized by identifying it within the relatedness of the "ecological self".

If Naess is a symbol of "ecocentrism," how can we possibly imagine eliminating the *anthropos* from an idea such as the "ecological self"? By naturalizing humans? But are not the qualities of subjectivity (emotions, value, meaning, self-consciousness, not to mention Naess' ideal of wisdom and spiritual realization and maturity) precisely the qualities, traditionally, at the basis of human discontinuity with nature? Are they not the qualities that allow for identification? Moreover, a naturalization of the *anthropos* maintains the problem of our treatment of nature plainly intact. If humans are part of nature without residue, then so too are their actions and products, making them innocent in regard to any mistreatment. Naess, just like most ecologists stress the immanence of humans in their natural connections,[149] but gets stuck on the problem of transcendence and immanence of the *anthropos*. This is expressed through the tension in ecological philosophy between showing continuity and maintaining a human difference that allows the possibility of the ethical question itself.

Several elements in Naess's writing help to unpack the problem of anthropocentrism both in terms of anthropocentrism of value and of the anthropocentric perspective of

[148] Naess, "Identification as a Source," p. 266.

[149] See for example Rolston's idea of nature not just as *resource* but as *source*. In Cheney, "Universal Consideration," 267.

representation. When keeping the importance of relations in mind, anthropocentrism does not make much sense. Anthropocentrism is a problem if the moral subject is not called into question and the setting of the problem remains separately ethical, while maintaining an essentialist and *a priori* vision on the *anthropos*, as an abstract humanity collector. In connection to this, does Naess' refusal of a distinction between facts and values make sense? Through a constitutive relational perspective on humans and nonhumans, the individual does not remain identical to himself. Therefore, any discussion about the normative priority of human or natural interests is in no way fruitful, philosophically or otherwise.

In their presentation of the Anthropocene, the researchers supporting the case for its formalization emphasize that climate change was the main factor, which brought the idea of the Anthropocene into focus, and into the scientific community, because it shows the undeniable impact of humans on the support systems to "human (and other) life."[150] The distinction between human and nonhuman vital (and not merely survival) interests is simultaneously affirmed and denied. From the point of view of the article, it is an unimportant point whether climate change is worrisome for humans' sake or for nature's sake. The alternative never existed in the first place since we depend on each other. Nonhuman life depends on human activities and ways of thinking, while human life depends on nonhuman processes. The so-called "strong anthropocentrism," the position of privilege assigned to human individuals' and societies' interests as stubbornly independent form the natural world, is easily self-defeating. Nevertheless, with the exclusion of it, putting the argument in terms of anti-anthropocentrism is misleading, unless we take it as the sign of the necessity to reopen the problem of *what anthropos* is put in the center (or taken away from it).

The solution to the ecological crises does not lie in ecocentrism, in the defense of nature for its own sake against the interest of humans, but in trying to think about the issue in different, mixed, non-binary terms. Climate change interests humans and nonhumans for a variety of mixed "moral" reasons because it interests everything it is in relation to: humans, nonhumans, organic and nonorganic beings, Earth in its complex, humans and their civilizations, etc. The dimensions of the relation define the areas in which a decision

[150] Steffen, "The Anthropocene," 842-843.

needs to be made independently of a pre-appointed, universal, and moral status to obscure and abstract unrelated and substantialist categories of humans and nature.

Once again, by looking at Naess' ambiguity of the role of humans in his "ecocentric" thinking, it is clear the human side of the relation needs to be re-examined, together with the unfolding of unexpected acceptations of nature. While addressing how Naess' proposal as "ecocentric" is misleading, we can look, once again, to the ecofeminist critique of anthropocentrism. Val Plumwood's analysis of the structures of anthropocentrism makes clear in which sense anthropocentrism needs to be criticized, inasmuch as it presents an a-critical and false universal idea of humanity based on which otherness is defined as inferior.

Similarly to Naess, Plumwood criticizes anthropocentric attitudes as a form of "ecological denial" she defines as "a weakened sense of the reality of our embeddedness in nature."[151] The moral human superiority and mastery that is associated to it is a function of the man-nature split. While Naess addresses the general subject-object dichotomy as responsible, Plumwood takes a further step and delves into the historical setting of values associated to a rationalist definition of humanity. By taking rationality as the exclusive feature of human identity, reason-centredness and human-centredness have established several forms of exclusion, while making others inferior. For this reason, not only feminism and ecology fight similar structures of "ethical and epistemic exclusion," associated, for example, by a historical link between "nature" and women as reproductive bodies and supposedly greater (instinctual) emotionality. The problem of the treatment of nature can be analyzed through recurring anatomies of "centrisms" carried out by liberation movements against hegemonic structures such as androcentrism, ethnocentrism and eurocentrism (racism). The centric structure presents, in Plumwood's study, the following characteristics:

- a primary-secondary pattern in which marginalized others are defined as secondary around the primary One
- an ontological break or radical discontinuity that incorporates local power relations

[151] Plumwood, *Environmental Culture*, loc. 2157.

- both the exclusion and the simultaneous incorporation of the representations outlined by dominating frameworks
- a radical exclusion: anthropocentrism treats nature as radically other
- homogenization and stereotyping play a role in disowning difference and a wide range of qualities: nature and animals are unified *vs* humans in their lack of consciousness or cultural manifestations
- denial and "backgrounding:" the other is considered inessential and peripheral
- incorporation: assimilation in a dominant representation without negotiation
- instrumentalism: downgraded value and agency possibilities for those excluded[152]

Within the *a priori* unification and exclusion described by Plumwood concerning the human-nature split, ultimately derived from the universalization of local, historical, and partial perspectives (and their specific will to power), any attempt to represent nature through a different epistemology is charged with being anthropomorphic.[153] When we refute the idea of nature as material facts that have no value, and instead bring up that nonhumans are not mere objects, it appears that we speak of nature in humanistic or mentalistic terms (agency, communication, intentionality, *telos*, etc.).

A first objection to this charge is, once again, related to a constitutive human situatedness that expresses itself, for example, in the anthropomorphic character of language. Therefore, when we speak of nonhumans, be them "superior" animals, organic or inorganic beings, their representation is translated into human language terms. But most importantly, the charge of anthropomorphism assumes that any attribution of subjectivity to nonhumans needs to be anthropomorphic, such as some softened version of established human characteristics such as consciousness, sentience and so on. This way of re-valuing nature presupposes the same radical discontinuity that it tries to criticize. Moreover, it presupposes that human subjectivity is something universal and unequivocally defined (and definable).

Even though many ecofeminists criticize deep ecology for not developing an adequate analysis of the historical and political power structures of anthropocentrism, their critique

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[152] Ibid., locs. 2153-2690.

[153] Ibid., loc. 1292.

confirms Naess' denunciation: the problem of anthropocentric treatments of nature stands in the crossroads where facts and values, representation and ethical possibilities emerge.

2.2.5 - What Relation?

Based on the critique so far unfolded, we need to admit that Naess' concept of relation leaves several dimensions of relatedness incomplete and underdeveloped.

Naess addresses the "horizontal"[154] dimensions of the relations that show the interconnectedness of entities in the world well. He is, indeed, interested in overcoming the ontological gap between subject and object, refuting an anthropocentric privilege in favor of an egalitarian opening, and integrating biological-ecosystemic constitutive dimensions into human identity. Despite all of that, Naess' account leaves out crucial "vertical" dimensions of the relations that make up both humans and nature, in particular the dimensions of human mediation and transformation in the emergence of nature. Even though Naess makes use of the concept *Lebenswelt*, he does not take the risk of exploring the possibility that a universal definition of nature circumscribing an obvious sector of reality slips in its historical and local forms of emergence.

The mediation of human labour in the way nature emerges is one of Naess' shortcomings.[155] Technology is another one. In Naess' account, indeed, technology appears as a neutral tool at humanity's disposal that can, therefore, be downgraded to a "soft" version as preferred.[156] In opposition to the myth of a "neutral tool," we should, at least, take into consideration Heidegger's warning that the essence of technology is to be understood the other way around, not as an arbitrary view of the world, but as a "destiny." Technology provokes man into making nature emerge as a "standing reserve" subtracting a

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[154] We are borrowing the idea of "horizontality" and "verticality" in relation to environmentalism from the study by Alan Sponberg, "Green Buddhism and the Hierarchy of Compassion," in *Buddhism and Ecology: the Interconnection of Dharma and Deeds*, ed. Mary E. Tucker and Duncan R. Williams (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 351-376. In the article, Sponberg points out how often Buddhist environmentalism highlights the "horizontal" dimension of the relation between humans and nature, while forgetting the dimension of human practice, being in the world and, possibly, the transformative role required by environmentalism itself.

[155] Vogel, "Nature as Origin and Difference."

[156] Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle,* 97.

foundational centrality from humans, who are substantially impotent in front of the ways Being discloses itself.[157]

What Plumwood calls the "enabling" conditions of subjectivity[158] such as *embodiment* are also not explored by Naess, even though he directs a strong focus onto the ecological situatedness of humans as a condition of their existence. This is further evidence of how difficult thinking outside the human-nature dichotomy is.

Language is another omission from Naess' philosophy. The idea that an object is always a concentration of relations established within a discourse is, actually, addressed in Naess. Exemplar of this is his idea of the object as a *Gestalt*, that designates "objects" themselves as totalities, as fields of relations. The topic is a central one for Naess' understanding of natural objects, in particular in how the designation of descriptive elements already implies evaluation within its complexity, as opposed to the abstract, material, unrelated, and neutral structures that are selected and isolated from their network. This is exemplified by Naess in passages similar to the one below:

> The tertiary qualities of things have an ontological status which is best expressed by complex relations. [...] In symbolic logic, a tree's sombreness S is represented by a relational symbol S(A,B,C,D,...), where A could be a location on a map, B location of observer, C emotional status of person, D linguistic competence of the describer. There are formidable number of variables compared to technical height, H(P,Q), where P gives the number of units of height, and Q the type of unit. Subjectivism need not to arise in either S or H, if you are able to specify the exact context in which the quality occurs.[159]

Even though Naess attempts to articulate our pre-reflective experience of nature, and offer a richer description of it[160] in comparison to the reductionist, materialistic objectivity of natural facts and bodies, his designations still appear as external relations between preexisting elements. Some of these elements, such as emotion and value, find their place in the subject; others, such as the geographical position, find their place in the world.

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[157] Heidegger, "La questione della tecnica." Foltz, *Inhabiting the Earth*. Russo, *Filosofia ed ecologia*, 264-266.

[158] Plumwood, *Environmental Culture*, 449.

[159] Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, 65. See also ibid., 67: "the importance of abstract structural considerations cannot be overestimated, but, like maps, their function is not to add to the territory, the contents, but to make it more visible."

[160] Similarly to the task of eco-phenomenologists.

Naess correctly calls into question the language dimension, but he does not find a way out of the dualism of subject/object (or human/nature) that he struggles to overcome.

This is the reason why Cheney can accuse deep ecology of offering a vision of the world that "*has left the realm of language altogether*."[161] Naess does not miss posing the right questions, but, he attempts to offer an answer by reworking combinations of the two usual pieces, the subject and the object. We will see later in this work how Bruno Latour's political ecology goes through the effort of bringing in collective political, scientific and linguistic practices in order to render the constitutive and intrinsic dimension of language into our knowledge of the natural world.

Latour, actually, adopts a strategy not dissimilar to Naess' and borrowed from Whitehead: one of the ways he does this is by avoiding the term "object" altogether, and refers, instead, to "propositions." This predication of entities establishes constitutive relations (instead of A=A, it predicates A=B,C,D). It can be a well (or poorly) articulated proposition according to the quality and richness of the list of connections it draws together. Propositions, for Latour, define objectivity in a very different way than statements, sentences that needs to be epistemologically true or false in the struggle to establish an impossible correspondence between "words" and "things." What is more, articulation of propositions happens in the sciences, within their collective protocols and scholarship, in the way they make worlds emerge, and it can be in no way limited within the subject's perception.[162]

2.2.6 - The Pitfall of Representation

It appears that Naess' account of relation is not as concrete as he advocates. This difficulty can certainly be pinned on omissions in his account of relatedness, but there are also more internal reasons for it.

The relation between humans and nature that concerns ecology movements presents internal paradoxes caught between continuity and difference, transcendence and immanence: nature emerges *conditioned* by cultural, experiential, historical, linguistic,

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[161] Cheney, "Neo-Stoicism," 306.

[162] Bruno Latour, *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 309.

theoretical and practical dimensions of humanity;[163] at the same time the ecological crisis reminds us of nature as a *conditioning* limitation to humanities space and humans' worldly condition of existence. On the one hand, nature is humanity's other. On the other hand, humanity belongs to nature and the denial of this belonging is ecologically catastrophic. In this sense, it is important to note that these difficulties are intrinsic to the different acceptations nature can take, and, in this sense, they are common ambiguities in most environmentalist writings.

Furthermore, Naess' peculiar difficulties are due to the lenses through which he looks at relation: precisely those of a relational *worldview*. A shift in paradigm or representation in relational terms is advocated, without recognizing that the *structure* of representation itself is responsible for the objectification he criticizes in the first place. In fact, Naess' idea of environmental ontology swings along another ambiguous oscillation: sometimes ontology is a question of reopening a necessary field of exploration in the face of ecological conditions of existence. At other times, Naess actively looks for a plurality of ontological systems, classical theories of Being, that can provide a positive relational support to his ecosophical thinking. The most dramatic point of tension emerges here: Naess resorts to a relational representation of the world (*worldview*) as an attempt to put into question the structure of a frontal subject-object dualism. However, this is the essence of representation itself.[164]

Naess raises the right question by criticizing the modern representation of nature, but fails to articulate a critique of representation itself, or recognize that representation, as Heidegger acknowledged, is the effect of modernity. A critique of representation needs to be an integral part of a philosophy of relation. This must include a way of weakening the pretensions of representation to mirror reality and create a suspension, a withdrawal, a perplexity, an "environmental etiquette," as Cheney puts it, that includes ethical gestures in the epistemological apprehension of the other and allows nonhumans to emerge.[165]

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[163] See for example Slavoj Žižek, "Lacan With Quantum Physics," in *Futurenatural: Nature, Science, Culture*, edited by George Robertson et al. (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 271-289.

[164] Heidegger, "L'epoca dell'immagine del mondo." Russo, *Filosofia ed ecologia*, 259-260.

[165] Jim Cheney, "Environmental Ethics as Environmental Etiquette: Toward an Ethics-Based Epistemology," *Environmental Ethics* 21 (1999): 115-134.

The question concerning how relationism can create the space for overcoming the objectifying dimension of representation and its domination of the subject onto the natural object remains open.

CHAPTER 3 - EQUIVOCAL NATURE

3.1 - AMBIGUITIES OF NATURE IN ENVIRONMENTALISM

Cerco un gesto un gesto naturale
per essere sicuro che questo corpo è mio.
Cerco un gesto un gesto naturale
intero come il nostro io.

I am looking for a natural gesture
to make sure that this body is mine
I am looking for a natural gesture
Whole, just like our I[166]

The ambiguities, and even the paradoxes affecting Naess' references to nature are not simply Naess' problem, but are recurring themes in environmentalism. As Kate Soper noted, nature is, maybe, the term carrying the greatest variety of ideologies and acceptations. Its fundamental conceptualization in the West has always been framed as an *a priori* otherness to humanity:

> "the opposition between the natural and the human has been axiomatic to western thought. [...] Whether we are asked to view nature as an external realm, or ourselves as belonging within its order; as vitalist or mechanistic; as the mere object or instrument of human purposes, or as dialectically shaping us as much as we shape it; all such thinking is tacitly reliant on the appreciation of our difference from nature or 'the rest of nature' [...]."[167]

Environmentalism, despite its vast variety of approaches, attempts the strenuous quest of recombining or bridging the two poles of humanity and nature. It is no accident Kohák defines environmental ethics as a "tar baby" with which he wrestles. The struggle is congenital to the task of finding the place for anthropocentric categories within an ecocentric evolutionary reality:[168] a reality in which the ecological crisis is merely the most recent set of events dislocating humanity from its comfortable throne at the center of the

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[166] Giorgio Gaber, "Cerco un gesto naturale," from the album *Far finta di essere sani* (Milan: Carosello, 1973).

[167] Soper, *What is Nature?*, 38.

[168] Kohák, "Varieties of Ecological Experience," 153.

world. Quite plainly, ecology stresses the continuity between humanity and nature and still needs human discontinuity to even imagine the possibility of an "ecological" limit to humanity's voracity.

Hence, in Naess' case relation exposes this ambiguity in the open, in all its extent and tragic weight for environmentalism. In particular, the dissolution of fixed identities and separate positions of human beings *vs* natural beings (a dissolution that is sacrosanct in the front of current ecological issues), and its related affairs of continuity and difference, otherness and belonging, all point to environmentalism's endless swinging back and forth on the humanity/nature axis in search for a more satisfactory and less dysfunctional positioning.

3.1.1 - The Nature/Artifact Axis

In her work mapping different ethics of nature, Angelika Krebs offers an outline of the mainstream account of nature regarded as the objective region for environmental ethical reflection. This account does not differ substantially from the traditional Aristotelian idea of nature, as she writes:

> Following the etymology of "nature" from the Latin "*nasci*" = to be born, to arise, to develop, "nature" may be defined as *that part of our world which has not been made by human beings*, but comes into existence and vanishes, changes and remains constant in virtue of itself. The *opposite of "nature"* in this sense "*artifact*," is something that is made by human beings: tables, computers, statues, and so on.[169]

Several issues immediately arise from this dualistic setting, and Krebs accounts for them. First of all, both dimension are hard to find in a pure form. On the one hand, she affirms we can *think* of something like "pure nature," or wilderness, even though it is harder and harder to find in our world. On the other hand, there is no such thing as a pure artifact, since no *poiesis* occurs *ex nihilo*, but always needs a material substratum. Moreover, she points out that limiting our concern for nature to wilderness is not meaningful for nature conservation concerns, and that environmental ethics deal with both "pure" and "cultivated" nature. In addition, she admits there are ambiguous cases such as

[169] Krebs, *Ethics of Nature*, 6.

biotechnology products. Finally, in light of the precedent caveats, she discusses the opportunity of understanding nature in terms of environment, or natural surroundings.

In the face of these observations, she offers the diagram of an axis running from the one pole "nature" to the opposite pole "artifact," positioning in the middle all kinds of material mixtures of the two dimensions.

The logic of this axis is interesting, inasmuch as it establishes the same ambiguities of otherness and continuity we have already addressed. The axis, indeed, establishes not only two poles, but also a continuous line joining them.

Within the line continuity, we do not know anymore where (and if) we can place a barrier between what is nature, what is "manipulated" or "influenced" by humans and what is "artifact." For example, we might have difficulties in distinguishing a clear nature/ artifact *caesura* between the dimension of farmed food (which is not merely farmed, but for the most part has been displaced from "original" ecosystems and bred for thousands of years), and an oral contraceptive pill. A difficulty that is already comprised in the simple admission that no artifact is ever free from a natural material basis. There is, for sure, a *difference*, but not the dualistic ontological kind that would guide us in our environmental decision making concerns.

It appears the nature/artifact distinction should become clear through an articulation of difference, but it remains, instead, presupposed within the articulation itself. In fact, we are supposed to know where to place this regional barrier, since, as Krebs writes, environmental movements are not concerned with the conservation of cars or nuclear plants. If we distinguish artifacts from both "pure" and "cultivated" nature, we presuppose that we already know what the character of "nature" that runs under both is. What is assumed is deeply connected with the "naturalness" of nature that makes "green" nature a family member of other senses of nature, such as substance or essence, that Krebs excludes, maybe, too hastily, from the range of interests of environmentalism.

Naess' critique points precisely in this direction, when he writes that our ecological relation to nature is biased too much on the characteristics of nature as material substance of primary qualities.[170]

We are supposed to distinguish in advance what this nature is, even if we replace it with the environment concept, since our surroundings have all kinds of human and nonhuman

[170] See also Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*, 12-17. See Soper, *What is Nature?*

elements all entangled. We are surrounded by furniture, cell phones, and all kinds of technical objects which are fabricated with natural resources, energy, and water to run the factories, whose production and disposal produces pollution. People who produce them have certain material lifestyles, with certain ecological footprints. It is really hard to say that artifacts are not of ecological interest.

The nature-artifact dualism is actually a circular movement that poses both the necessity of distinguishing the human/nature dimensions in terms of *origin*, and of considering their continuity since *mediation* between the two is not removable.

We can leave out for the moment important observations about the impossibility of a "pure nature," since even wilderness is not a fixed sector of reality, but always a fluctuating, historical concept built around (or outside) man, and, therefore, dependent on human activities, knowledge, mundane practices, and modes of being in the world. The very possibility of the existence of "wilderness" is tied to social practices like the institutionalization of boundaries and the material creation of reserves.[171] Several hot topics for environmentalism create severe problems for the nature/artifact divide. We can think of the topic of human overpopulation: is it a natural or a human issue? It has biological and ecological dimensions, but we can probably find no topic that is more political, cultural, technological,[172] and has to do with all the dimensions of both human civilization and ecology. Moreover, if we go back to the Variola virus example, we realize how the definition of the nature/artifact axis already presupposes the realm of "nature" that interests environmental conservation decisions. The virus was certainly an issue of nature and, again, of human civilization, but in a very different way than the determination of a tree as natural and, therefore, automatically as object of concern for environmental preservation.

We can also stick, for the moment, to the domain and purpose of a *managerial* approach to environmental issues and values. In this sense, we can avoid asking questions about the human side of the axis, whether it should be called into question. The double dimension of

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[171] Oelschlaeger has shown a history of the wilderness idea and how it has acquired different shapes and meanings in regard to human activities and cosmologies. Oelschlaeger, *The Idea of Wilderness*; Birch highlights that while nature reserves are a fundamental element of civilization, wilderness is still boxed in a *prison* within the western mastery paradigm: Thomas H. Birch, "The Incarceration of Wildness: Wilderness Areas as Prisons," *Environmental Ethics* 12, No. 1 (1990): 3-26.

[172] Think for example of medicine, life expectation, reproduction techniques and so on.

the question would inquire into both what it means to be human in the ecological crisis, once the biospheric conditions of our existence that we took for granted emerge as necessary and threatened by our own activity; and into what it means for nature to be singled out from human mediations: what are the dimensions of human influence, manipulation, and practice? Are we so sure the only relevant ones can be assembled under the category of pure material fabrication? Is the otherness of nature left untouched, if the ecological crisis entails a revision of its human counter-category?

What is presupposed in the nature/artifact axis is the temptation to rely on a kind of commonsense naturalism, so that environmentalists' nature is something that can be agreed upon or mutually understood: roughly, green and biological. But Naess' indications we saw earlier regard precisely this: that our sense of reality is called into question when we face environmental conflicts; not merely different opinions on value attached to the same object, but what these objects are and do, and in what relation they are to us. Maybe Latour is right when he writes that, from the point of view of his field, science and technology studies, philosophers' examples of objects are never complicated or equivocal enough.[173] Environmental philosophers usually pick trees and rives as opposed to cars and power plants, so every reader in our contemporary environmental consciousness knows from the beginning that some objects have an ecological value to be experienced while others do not.

In materialist terms of manipulation and origin the axis translates into a separation between the human dimension, activities and practices on the one side, and nature on the other. The nature/artifact axis is, therefore, a function of the more general separation between the order of human culture and that of nature.[174]

The logic of the nature/artifact axis opens, then, *aporias*, unsolvable contradictions, of continuity and otherness. On the one hand, humans ended up in a global ecological crisis because they denied their belonging to nature. Environmentalism stresses continuity and accuses human western civilization of alienation from nature. Mastery over nature is, consequently, possible because nature is seen as an object dispossessed of any subjective quality.

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[173] Latour, "Why Has Critique?," 234

[174] *Cf.* Soper, *What is Nature?*, 37-42 to see the close connections between the nature-artifact opposition and the nature-culture one.

On the other hand, nature is by definition otherness to humans. We ended up in a global ecological disaster because we did not respect its otherness. Mastery over nature is due to humans ignoring nature's character of limit to possession and exploitation.

There is continuity even though continuity does not exclude human specific difference. We are continuous to nature because humans are embedded in nature, nature is not a resource but also a *source*, it sustains us and our activities. Nevertheless, continuity risks naturalizing humans and all their products and actions so that there is no room for an ecological choice.

As Vogel expressed, the nature/artifact and the nature/humanity axes are not viable discourses of nature on which to base environmentalism. Indeed, they bring up an insurmountable contradiction in the fundamental prescription of environmentalism itself that paralyzes the efficacy and influence of environmental discourse altogether: "humans are (a) part of nature and (b) ought not interfere with it."[175]

3.1.2 - Some Articulations of the Humanity/Nature Axis in Environmental Literature

In light of this impasse of environmentalism, most ecocriticism has attempted to offer acceptations of nature that articulate the tension in the human/nature separation or attempt to bridge it.

The "Integral ecology" approach offers three definitions of nature in response to the main denunciation of ecologism about the externalization of the natural world in the modern culture. The authors call them: "NATURE," "Nature," and "nature." With the term "NATURE" they frame discourses that refer to the cosmos, and to Being, including "exterior" and "interior" elements, "the Great Nest of Being." The label "Nature" frames the acceptation that appears in the natural sciences object, or "the Great Web of Life." Finally, the lower case "nature" is the "empirical-sensory world" or "the Great Biosphere," the world of experience *both* in terms of "exterior world" disclosed by senses, *and* "interior world" of feelings, emotional-sexual impulses and somatic experience, as opposed to rational mind and to culture. Each acceptation is the ecological redeployment of philosophical traditional views of nature: "NATURE" is worshipped by romantics,

[175] Steven Vogel, "Environmental Philosophy After the End of Nature," 26. See also Steven Vogel, "The Nature of Artifacts," *Environmental Ethics* 25 (2003): 149-168.

"Nature" is studied by rationalist materialists, and "nature" is raised by environmentalists who bring forth a prereflective experience of the world and an idea of alternative rationality based on life activity instead of separate theoretical consciousness.[176]

Also in reference to different philosophical traditions, Vogel, instead, accounts for four fundamental acceptations of nature relevant to contemporary ecocriticism.[177] "Nature as origin" is the account that traces back to Romanticism, vitalism and neo-Kantianism. In this sense, nature as a complex organic whole is contrasted by the category of "artificial." Poststructuralist "critique of nature" forms can be considered its opposite acceptations, associated with an anxiety for foundational and immediate natural dimensions. In this second concept, the axis is solved on the side of social and historical construction, where nature does not exist. Nature is always already a product of humanity and there is not much space left for environmental theorizing, inasmuch as it risks imposing an ideological "natural" order on humanity. A third fundamental account, also within poststructural topics, is the idea of "nature as difference." In this sense nature is not "origin," nor is it the rejection of origin. Nature is the irreducible moment of otherness of the world which cannot be entirely captured in a finite worldview. The natural world is both revealed and, at the same time, concealed. Finally, a Marxist materialist analysis ties "nature and practice" together. The natural world is materialistically constituted by practical labour, and any dualistic distinction between the physical world of nature and the social world of artifacts is pointless: "there is no deep ontological difference between cities and natural parks."[178] This fourth acceptation of the natural dimension focuses on material practice as ontologically prior to both poles of nature and humans, so that both the subject and the world come to be what they are always *in media res*, through practical action.[179]

Linked to nature as it is met in a philosophy of practice are recent environmental employments of the concept of *alienation*, again in debt to Hegel and Marx. Vogel reminds us that, in this context, "nature" is exactly what is alienated. Alienation occurs when we

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[176] Zimmerman and Esbjörn-Hargens, *Integral Ecology*, 25-26. *Cf*. also Kohák, "An Understanding Heart."

[177] Vogel,"Nature as Origin and Difference."

[178] Ibid., 176.

[179] Ibid.

consider as perfectly natural what is actually social.[180] This is problematic when we consider that popular environmentalism commonly turns to the idea that humans are alienated from nature. Biro suggests, then, that alienation in environmental discourse can be defined as "human beings' self-conscious transformation of their natural environment,"[181] that is to say, the process of having culture and history, breaking free from the dictates of nature.[182] While nature is alienated, the environment is always lived and transformed in practice. Nevertheless, the risk of subordinating nature's otherness to the practice of environmental manipulation replicates the problem of nonhumans' representation outside a mere material substratum: the appeal of ecology to an egalitarian awareness of nature and the limits it poses on humans' *hubris* fades in the opposition between an alienated natural transcendence and a manipulated material humanized environment. As suggested by Vogel, the problem of the treatment of nature is situated within "the ethical imperative towards self-knowledge:"[183] self-consciousness of the consequences of our actions and humility as opposed to a domineering manipulation of nature for pure human motives and recreation.

Hailwood brings up the category of alienation in environmental political theory in order to articulate the nature/artifact axis, precisely accounting for the two counter-issues it raises: that of respect for nature's otherness, and the human dimension of our environment. Hailwood distinguishes three different occurrences both of nature and of alienation. What we refer to as "nature" can be: a) "the natural world," (what he also called "overall nature" and tried to define through a deployment of Merleau-Ponty's notion of "flesh");[184] "nonhuman nature," and "humanized nature." He then specifies the experience of alienation in reference to the materialist and critical tradition in terms of "estrangement," "reification" and "alienation." Hailwood aims to highlight that alienation has different political values in relation to different acceptations of nature. For instance, "alienation"

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[180] For a better expatiation on alienation through young Marx and Adorno's writings, for example distinguishing between a "Romantic" sense of alienation from nature that can be in theory repaired, and a "tragic" sense, in which alienation is part of what it it to be human, see Steven Vogel, "On Nature and Alienation," in Biro, ed., *Critical Ecologies*, 187-203.

[181] Biro in Vogel, "On Nature and Alienation," 192.

[182] Simon Hailwood, "Alienations and Natures," *Environmental Politics* 21, no. 6 (2012): 883.

[183] Vogel, "Nature as Origin and Difference," 176.

[184] Simon Hailwood, "Estrangement, Nature and 'the Flesh,'" *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 17 (2014): 71-85.

from “nonhuman nature” can be desirable to the extent that it denotes a renunciation of ownership and letting go of purely anthropocentric conceptions of mastery of nature; “estrangement” from the “humanized nature,” instead, translates into a lack of homeliness and breaks the “practice of place.”[185] It is an important account of the complexity of the otherness/continuity issues that ecology brings up in the face of our concept of nature as humans’ otherness, but it still presupposes a fundamental naturalism, for which the different realms of nature and humanity are distinguishable *a priori*,[186] although they are recognized as problematic. Indeed, their separation is eventually entrusted to “practical needs” and common sense, even though we could see the entire effort of articulating the different occurrences of natures and alienations as a sign and an attempt to open a viable alternative to naturalism.[187]

Other ecological attempts aim to bridge the poles of the human/nature axis, refuting naturalistic premises by offering a phenomenological *constitution* of the environment. Embree speaks, for example, of “environment-as-encountered.” The encountered is constituted in the encounter, therefore, “nature” would be an abstract term, an abstract aspect of the cultural world, which would come to be the counterpart of *naturalistic thinking*, an ontological prejudice for environmentalism. In opposition to “naturalistic” nature, we find the “lifeworldly nature,” encountered in prereflective sensuous perception and in the positioning of humans within their lived worlds. Therefore, all objects, for Embree, are encountered. All objects are socio-cultural objects, which does not mean they are all constructed. Studying what is nature is, therefore, studying the different typologies of encounters: political, practical, volitional, valuational, aesthetic-recreational, cultural-scientific. The environment is a cultural world made up of objects that are not described by a mere naturalistic foundation (organic constitution), but are also pretheoretical, valued and willed.[188]

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[185] Hailwood, “Alienations and Natures.”

[186] “we must be estranged from nature by definition. As long as there is something non-human then trivially it remains non-human.” Hailwood, “Alienations and Natures,” 889.

[187] “This distinction between the uninterfered with and the interfered with will not probably recommend itself to philosophers [...] What keeps the contrast alive, however, is the daily experience of men as practical, not speculative, beings.” Hailwood, “Alienations and Natures,” 886; and “The humanized and non-humanized are intertwined and continuous in many ways within overall nature, of course.” Ibid., 889.

[188] Lester Embree, “The Possibility of a Constitutive Phenomenology of the Environment,” in *Eco-Phenomenology*, ed. Brown and Toadvine, 37-50.

The bridging of the human/nature poles is similarly stressed by Brown in a continuous reopening: the constant intersubjective reassessment of the experience of value. One issue here is to assert the experiential and objective dignity both of evaluation of nature and of the evaluated, simultaneously given in intentional consciousness. Another point is to offer dignity to the necessary intersubjective dimension of value, which cannot be simply dismissed by naturalist-materialist conceptions of what is nature.[189]

In an attempt to account for the tension between non reducible otherness, the human pole situatedness, and continuity or non-separability between the two in the sensuous encountering of nature, Cheney refers to a "more-than-human world" in terms of wider biological dimensions in which we are embedded.[190] He also recalls Rolston's "emphasis on nature as *source*, rather than merely *resource* for human appropriation,"[191] stressing that human difference and peculiarity is due to our position in evolutionary and ecosystemic history: a combination of the two tensions to immanence and to transcendence. A very different accent, instead, is to be encountered in the same paper, when Cheney refers to Plumwood's "earth others,"[192] agents who do not allow an epistemological attitude of frontal observation and objectification. In this case, the discourse shifts from the great nature-otherness to plural differences of nonhumans, and ecologism is subordinated to the problem of recognition of difference and negotiation among equals.

Difference as adopted in ecofeminism aims to shift the problem of nature from the otherness/belonging framework to a multiplication of differences of nonhumans. A similar articulation shows, indeed, how dualism is a function of a more general inclusion/ exclusion framework. The axis that goes from natural to artificial poses difficulties inasmuch as it is a line drawn between two tensions towards unity, between two poles that function as great collectors. Nature as a great otherness is not much a realm of reality, but an oscillating ally of discrimination siding with each of the poles alternatively: external world *vs* human subjectivity; rationality *vs* human nature as instinctual; mind *vs* body; western civilized men *vs* tribal cultures, to name a few.[193]

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[189] Brown, "The Real and the Good," 11.

[190] Cheney, "Universal Consideration," 267.

[191] Ibid. Emphasis in the original.

[192] Ibid., 265.

[193] Plumwood, "Nature, Self, and Gender." Plumwood, *Environmental Culture*.

Whether environmentalism accepts the axis as a given, and formulates managerial questions beginning from the acknowledgment of the humanity/nature dualism;[194] whether environmental reflection requests the problematization of the humanity/nature axis which is placed at the speculative root of environmental issues, such as in the case of radical ecology; in both cases the *aporia* between continuity and otherness, between humans and nature remains presupposed. Even attempts at bridging the gap swing between the two collectors. It is hard to imagine an articulation of the axis that does something different than extend the realm of subjectivity onto the nonhumans and the influence of objectivity onto human subjects.

A political dilemma for environmentalism is opened in the *aporia* of otherness and continuity. On the one hand, we need to save some natural reference, based on which we have the possibility to judge our environmental practices and revise them in order to answer the ecological crisis. On the other hand, a predetermined concept of nature has been used to justify social oppression. Moreover, naturalism does not account for the lived environment and the belonging, practice and mediations of humans in nature, just one more issue raised within radical ecology.

It appears that the basic *a priori* determination of nature as otherness to humanity is hard to overcome inasmuch as it constitutes our western basic metaphysical apparatus, the usual two bricks we constantly try to match, separate, and recombine in the attempt to build always new and different edifices.

3.1.3 - Nature or "Nature"

Nature is a highly ideological and fluctuating term that causes several ambiguities within ecological discourses. As Kate Soper highlighted in her report on the different occurrences of nature within western cultural, philosophical, and political traditions, the fluctuation of the concept of nature within different discourses is always a function of the otherness-to-humanity framework. Nature is, each time, the opposite of culture, history,

[194] we can include in this general approach also axiological reflections which do not problematize what is nature, but rather contemplate how to elaborate a value theory of nature without falling into the naturalistic fallacy.

convention, artifact: everything in the order of humanity.[195] It is the object for a subject, the animal for a culture, the primitive for a civilized, the body for a mind, the mother-virgin-lover for a masculine culture producer, the fatherland for other peoples, the sexual norm for homosexuals, the rustic simplicity, countryside life and artesan's *poiesis* for the urbanized and consumerist citizen.

Soper highlights that the human-otherness framework is commonly intended as the material world given prior to any human activity in the concept of nature as environment. It is also intended as the collection of, *literally*, *nonhumans*. But the framework is the same within cosmological concepts of nature, the totality of Being to which humanity both belongs and from which it differentiates.[196] Even discourses regarding "human nature," put the emphasis on our difference from other natural species, from animal and inorganic modes of beings, as well as on behaviors that are associated with them, such as instincts and emotions. Therefore, the fluctuation of the human/nature axis involves fluctuations not only on the side of nature, but also on the side of what is considered human each time, just just as eco-feminists highlight. In the case of human nature, ethical, political and aesthetic discourses can be divided around a main opposition: from culture as a corrective to a bestial nature, underlying, for example, the Enlightenment idea of subjectivity; to nature as a corrective of the deformations of culture such as in the Romantic reaction and the Frankfurt school critique of instrumental rationality;[197] to counter-Romantic reactions questioning the "naturalness" of nature in front of the violence of ethics based on natural norms in sexual condemnation of "deviants," as well as in the resort of forms of racism and nationalism to a natural dimension of salvation and authenticity.

Representations of nature vary quite emblematically for environmentalism, even though one of the elements of its popular rhetoric is precisely a return to nature, in terms of respecting the ecological and biological conditions of life flourishing, both of our selves and of our world; conditions that have been overlooked by a western capitalist and industrialist way of life based on material standards of living.

For Soper, there is a central tension beneath the disparate discourses that make use of "nature," a fracture that is in some sense a function of the otherness-to-humanity

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[195] Soper, *What is Nature?*, 15.

[196] Ibid., 21.

[197] Ibid., 25-32.

framework. It occurs between what she calls "nature-skeptical" and "nature-endorsing" discourses.[198] The fracture very loosely overlaps the core distinction between ecological concerns, which hold on to some acceptation of nature to produce better environmental policies, and the concerns expressed in constructivist, postmodern, poststructuralist questioning of what is, and whether there exists, a signified to the "nature" signifier.

The two opposed perspectives actually have a lot in common. They both start as forms of resistance to modernity, criticizing the western model of progress, the faith in scientific rationality, and the domineering attitude towards nature and other cultures. Nevertheless, they irreparably diverge. On the one side, environmentalism invokes some degree of realism of nature, both as a natural world that is being destroyed by human activity and as a set of processes and powers independent of human will that serve as limit to human activity. On the other side, culturalist critiques tend to deny any realism to nature and stress its constructed character, as well as the dangers of its normativity.[199]

The core of the tension is due to the fact that ecologists are usually not interested in issues regarding the representation of nature, as opposed to the evident instability of its cultural, historical and linguistic representations.

Soper regards the tension between realist nature and represented "nature" as irreparable, although necessary of exploration. According to her, each of the two attitudes should take into consideration the concerns of the other, since they both deal with nature and yet produce two antithetical normative tensions.

Nevertheless, if we give into an irreparable tension between the necessity of a reference to nature and the impossibility of it, environmental theorization can be doomed as impossible, or, even worse, as a mere form of reactionary, nostalgic and romantic view of a unity that does not exist. Ecology is, instead, concerned with our earthly conditions of existence and ecological problems such as: climate change, ozone holes, species' extinction, resource depletion and the overshooting of complex thresholds in the carrying capacity of global systems. These problems are *real* threats to the existence of our world, maybe not to the planet itself, or to the mere existence of *life*, but certainly to *our meaningful world*.

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[198] Ibid., 4-34.

[199] Ibid.

Bruno Latour's political ecology is able to provide us with a perspective that combines both preoccupations. *Representations of "nature"* and the *political representation of nonhumans* in our common world are, in his thinking, the *same problem*. His concern will be with relationism; not in the sense of Naess's relation *with* nature, but in terms of relation itself. That is what we need in order to think without making use of the subject-object dichotomy, or getting stuck in the struggle to bridge the gap. If *anthropos* and *physis* are the two fundamental metaphysical bricks of reality, what we need is an "experimental metaphysics" that takes into account the connections and mediations that make up both humans and nonhumans, a "radical realism" that does not resort to any naturalism, and yet treats nonhumans as equals.

CHAPTER 4 - BRUNO LATOUR'S POLITICAL ECOLOGY

The distinction between nature and humanity, in all of its various forms, is for Latour an impossible paradox. When we stick to the separation between subjects and objects, between mind and world, we are thrown into a *double bind* between two contradictory orders: "Be absolutely disconnected!" and "Find absolute proof that you are connected!"[200]

The problem is that nature and humans in their philosophical, abstract, essentialist ideas are dysfunctional, or better yet, more functional to the settlement of power conflicts[201] than to understanding who we are, and what the world is that we live in. The ecological crisis turns this warning into a concrete threat.

The fracture in the concept of nature highlighted by Soper is ultimately the one between realist and constructivist ideas of nature. The two critical moves of constructivism and realism are, also for Latour, hardly combined in one movement. *Facts* are attacked as always *made*, and all the power comes from humans; *human beliefs and constructions* are attacked by "matters of fact," in which all the power belongs to the reality of things.[202] The fracture remains open in a "critical barbarity" where the critic is always right.[203] In the case of the ecological crisis, nonhumans are the victims of this barbaric treatment, and consequently, humans are too.

In his science studies, Latour worked to offer a "more realistic realism"[204] of science, in which scientific facts are reconnected (but not absorbed) to the scientific practices through which they concretely emerge, instead of lingering in the idealistic realm of naive realism. The defining feature of science studies was never to point out a social constructivism of

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[200] Latour, *Pandora's Hope*, 12. The concept of double bind as an explanation for schizofrenia traces back to Gregory Bateson. See Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, 159-337.

[201] What power relations take place between the unified categories of nature and humanity? Latour traces them to "the fear of the mob," a problem with engaging with the collectivity of life. First, a rational human nature that understands the order of the cosmos has authority on the bestial human nature of the human mobs; second, humans have power over external nature, objects can be observed and dominated and external nature does not interfere with human affairs in the society; third, external nature works as a foundation of certainty, based on which the irrational demands of the mobs can be hushed. See Latour, *Pandora's Hope*, 10-23.

[202] Bruno Latour, *On the Modern Cult of the Factish Gods* (Durham - London: Duke University Press, 2010).

[203] Latour, "Why Has Critique?."

[204] Latour, *Pandora's Hope*, 15.

scientific facts, reducing the realism of science to the history of scientists and the social and political context of their findings. Science grasps things in themselves, for science scholars, but in order to understand *facts*, we have to multiply the mediators, the connections and the relations that make facts up. Facts are never pure matters-of-fact. The singularity of their existence includes the material, local, historical, mundane dimensions of scientific practice.

In continuity with his works on science and technology, Latour's political ecology is concerned with conferring reality with the common world through politics and the sciences. The common worlds are the places in which humans and nonhumans, symmetrically, have always been folded into each other, creating ever changing *collectives* (but never natures and societies).

4.1 - MODERNIZE VS ECOLOGIZE

As Latour argued in *We Have Never Been Modern*,[205] before developing his political ecology, the price we are paying for not reopening the question of the collective of humans and nonhumans (the collective of natures-cultures), is the overwhelming and uncontrolled proliferation of *hybrids* of nature and culture, such as, for example, climate change or ozone depletion. Are these natural or man made? Do they belong in the realm of nature or do they interest human beings and civilizations? Does climate change follow the laws of nature, or those of industry, finance and globalization? Latour writes: "If we do not change the common dwelling, we shall not absorb in it the other cultures that we can no longer dominate, and we shall be forever incapable of accommodating in it the environment that we can no longer control."[206]

Other cultures and the otherness of nature are precisely the "Great Divide" of modernism between "Us" and "Them,"[207] the elements through which western modernism constitutes the common world. The constitution of the common world is, indeed, a political constitution. The modern constitution is composed, in Latour's words, of two Houses: that

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[205] Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993).

[206] Ibid., 145.

[207] Ibid., 12.

of society and that of nature. The separation of powers in it splits nature from culture, the object for the subject, reason from belief, epistemology from psychology, Science from practice, facts from values, and human freedom from nature's necessity. Dualisms are "so well drawn up that this separation has been viewed as a double ontological distinction:"[208] on the one side, the realms pertaining to politics and society, on the other side, the natural realms. Nevertheless, all these different spheres are part of one and the same political modernist settlement.[209] It is a settlement that, just like any other constitution, is not the only possible one for our world. Plato's allegory of the cave does not merely concern itself with the essence of truth, but also with the political dimension of truth inasmuch as it establishes a world constitution where the cave is the Lower House, in which people, the realm of politics and opinions, feelings and interests are confined in the chains of ignorance and mere appearances. The sky of Ideas is the Upper House, the outside world with reality and nature, which are cold and indifferent to human quarrels and representations. A central role is given to the philosopher who frees himself, the Scientist of today, who with a very small group of people have the privileged access to both dimensions, imposing the authority of the outside world on the social world, and the demands of politics to the research on the facts of nature.[210] Therefore, "Science" (with a capital S), the subject of the popular expression "scientific worldview," so often criticized in environmentalism,[211] is merely the *philosophical* idea of what *the sciences* in practice do, with their laboratories in which our *objective* knowledge of the world is *made*.[212]

Similarly to the dualism of otherness and continuity emerging in environmental discourses, in the fracture between humans and nature that characterizes the modern constitution there is at work a simultaneous play of immanence and transcendence. This

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[208] Ibid., 13.

[209] Latour, *Pandora's Hope*, 14. See the modernist settlement diagram offered by Latour, reproduced in Appendix 1 of this work.

[210] Latour, *Politics of Nature*, 13-14.

[211] See for example Naess, "Concrete Contents" on physics. In Cheney, "Universal Consideration," universal consideration is opposed to the epistemological domineering gesture of the "scientific method."

[212] See the double epistemology at work in Pasteur's discovery of lactic acid ferments, one of Latour's favorite examples of scientific practice. The ferment has been fabricated in Pasteur's laboratory, at the same time, the ferment is autonomous and real. The two epistemologies are contradictory only if we stick to the modernist settlement, according to which facts are facts and theories are interpretations. But it is precisely thanks to the lab work, that the ferment exists as autonomous and real. The experiment is an ontological event. Latour, *Pandora's Hope*, 114-132.

double cross makes the settlement inapt in offering a clear understanding of our current world, and opens, instead, a battle field for incessant power struggles. The fracture, indeed, produces two sets of paradoxes for moderns. The first paradox sees nature as a transcendent realm external to us, while society is a freely and humanly constructed immanent realm of the world. The second paradox sees, on the contrary, nature as an immanent product of our research and laboratories, while society transcends individuals and sets all our frameworks.

On the one hand, the laws of nature elude human influence, but are invented through instruments and laboratories. Even if fabricated, nature is completely external to humans. On the other hand, humans build their societies mobilizing objects of all kinds. Society is the realm of men, even though it would not stand without its nonhumans (animals, food, houses, industries, to make a few simple examples).[213]

In order to clear these paradoxes, "modernism" is defined by Latour as two opposite groups of practices: *translation*, the practical activity that brings to emergence all kinds of nature-culture hybrids that make up our world; and *purification*, the cutting of the relational networks and the institutionalization of essences, areas of humans, and nonhumans. The different forms of critique of modernism[214] all expose the fact that modernism makes the whole work of mediation invisible through purification.[215] Modernizing means purifying the entanglements, *clarifying* confusion, selecting facts and forgetting the network of attachments, dependencies and conditions of existence that sustains them, in the name of progress and reason.

In Latour's terminology, "ecologizing" is the opposite of modernizing. This does not mean we have to go back to a pre-modern state of affairs to be "ecological," just like many strains of anti-modern popular environmentalism are tempted to preach.[216] Ecologizing is *nonmodern* because it runs from the observation that we are entangled with nonhumans,

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[213] Latour, *Never Been Modern*, 27-55.

[214] Summarized by Latour in four main critical repertoires: 1) naturalization, the existence of a world we cannot control; 2) socialization; 3) meaning and signification, narrativity; 4) deconstruction of the presence of Being. Latour, *Never Been Modern*, 55-67 and 88-90. The resources of critique appear incompatible from within the modern constitution, but they need to cooperate, acquire multidimensionality: "do we have to pretend that everything is rhetorical, or that everything is natural, or that everything is socially constructed, or that everything is stamped and stocked?" Ibid., 89.

[215] Ibid., 10-12.

[216] This is also due to real difficulties of thinking of an alternative to the modernist settlement.

"to greater entanglement."[217] We need to explore and experiment even more with what kind of associations and relations our lived world is made of, and only by doing so can we learn to distinguish "those attachments that save from those that kill."[218]

4.1.1 - The End of Nature

The re-composition of the common world is only possible through the abandonment of the "metaphysics of nature," while at the same time reopening the problem through the *political* and *scientific* task Latour calls "experimental metaphysics."[219]

The "metaphysics of nature" is used by Latour as a "deliberately paradoxical expression"[220] by highlighting the metaphysical character of *physis* (metaphysics being obviously what lies beyond the realm of *physis*, *nature*). With the expression, Latour wants to stress how our concept of nature pins down a "traditional solution" to the question, "what is our common world?" by cutting short the discussion and thus entrusting nature with an a-critical political role. The metaphysics of nature distribute *a priori* primary and secondary qualities.[221] In other words, they define the axiomatic opposition between the human and the natural that streams through all discourses on nature, whether endorsing difference or continuity.[222] The opposition runs along the line separating the realms of an independent external reality/order (physical, biological, universal and determining) and the conventions of the human cultural/social life, leaving behind all kinds of excluded entities, such as: civilizations, races, gender roles, sexual preferences, feelings, nonhuman living beings, among others.

With experimental metaphysics, then, Latour does not suggest *an alternative metaphysical* theory of nature, even if provisional or revisable in principle. On the contrary, he means to open the experimentation of the common world, and to do without

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[217] Latour, *Factish Gods*, 61.

[218] Ibid.

[219] Latour, *Politics of Nature*, 128-129.

[220] Ibid., 60.

[221] Ibid., 242.

[222] See Soper, *What is Nature?*, 38.

the principle of "a unified, unifying, universalized common world."[223] It is necessary work, which is otherwise undertaken covertly by the belief in the ontological monopoly of Science: the "scientifically" proven is real, the rest is made of belief, opinions and politics.[224]

Another element of the "metaphysics of nature," that "experimental metaphysics" avoid replicating, is the replacement of the ontological question, "what is there?" with the epistemological question "how do we know it?." According to this setting, nature would be there as external reality unified by some transcendental or external authority. Its composition would be established once and for all, enforcing its authority through what Latour calls, sarcastically, "the epistemology police."[225]

Another element experimental metaphysics do not entail is a mere pluralism of worldviews. Pluralism in this sense would show to be a cheap epistemological way out of the ethnocentric and imperialistic dualism of subjects and objects, a condescending kind tolerance "obtained at the price of relinquishing any requirement of reality."[226] The reason for this rejection lies in the refutation of "multiculturalism," the subjective byproduct of the "mononaturalism" he is trying to dismiss, which for him is the commandment of one, transcendent nature common to all, accessed exclusively by the "universal Science," as opposed to the different opinions and habits people relativistically develop about it. Once again, multiculturalism, the relativistic plurality of representations of nature, and mononaturalism the unifying world, common to all, together are the perfect yield of the modern constitution.[227] According to Latour, there is no mononaturalism/multiculturalism. There are only natures-cultures.

It is, indeed, through the renowned idea of the "end of nature" that Latour engages with the ecological movements, including Naess's ecosophy. Naess is taken by Latour as the model of reference to nature and its protection that struggles within its paradoxes and ambiguities. More tragically, by ultimately maintaing a modern form of naturalism, this

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[223] Latour, *Politics of Nature*, 128.

[224] See Patrice Maniglier, "A Metaphysical Turn? Bruno Latour's *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence*," *Radical Philosophy*, 187 (2014): 37-44.

[225] Latour, *Politics of Nature*, 241. Much debt goes here to Whitehead and his "actual occasion." Latour, "Why Has Critique?," 244-245.

[226] Isabelle Stengers in Latour, *Politics of Nature*, 283 n36.

[227] Latour, *Politics of Nature*, 48.

model fatally prevents the ecological movements from accomplishing their goals and understanding their practices.[228]

Latour, actually, combats the idea of "the 'cold and hard' nature of the primary qualities,"[229] just as Naess does. All the same, if the "grey nature" of primary qualities is of no use to political ecology, neither is the "green nature" invoked by environmentalism. Latour defines "the 'warm green' nature of the ecologists"[230] (a natural world in which we belong) as an equivalent misunderstanding that reiterates the pre-unification of nature into something both *other* and *continuous* to humanity.

For Latour, even the notion of ecosystem is not adequate to solve the problem of nature:

> The same problem arises with the notion of ecosystem. In supposing that they had surpassed the old limits of anthropomorphism because they were integrating nature and society, users of the term 'ecosystem' were retaining modernism's basic defect, its penchant for composing the whole without the explicit will of those humans and nonhumans who find themselves gathered, collected, or composed in it. They had even found a way to array all beings, humans and nonhumans alike, under the notion of "global ecosystem," in a totality constituted outside the political world, in the nature of things.[231]

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[228] Latour writes of deep ecology: "[...] a movement with vague contours that claims to be reforming the politics of humans in the name of the "higher equilibria of nature." Now, deep ecology, in my interpretation, is situated as far as possible from political ecology; moreover, the confusion between these two approaches is what constantly disrupts the strategy of the 'green' movements. The latter, persuaded that they could organize themselves along a spectrum ranging from the most radical to the most reformist, have in effect agreed to put deep ecology at the far end of the spectrum. [...] But deep ecology is not an extreme form of political ecology; *it is not a form of political ecology at all*, since the hierarchy of beings to which it lays claim is entirely composed of those modern, smooth, risk-free stratified objects in successive gradations from the cosmos to microbes by way of Mother Earth, human societies, monkeys, and so on. The producers of this disputed knowledge remain completely invisible, as do the sources of uncertainty; the distinction between these objects and the political world they bombard remains so complete that it seems as though political ecology has no goal but to humiliate politics still further by reducing its power, to the profit of the much greater and much more hidden power of nature - and to the profit of the invisible experts who have decided what nature wanted, what it could do, and what it ought to do. By claiming to free us from anthropocentrism, deep ecology thrusts us back into the Cave, since it belongs entirely to the classic definition of politics rendered powerless by nature [...]." Latour, *Politics of Nature*, 26. Emphasis in the original. "Cave" refers in Latour's rhetoric to the Platonic allegory. As we saw earlier, this is used as a symbol of the separation between the "Heaven of Ideas" accessed by privileged experts and "the prison of the social sphere" with its disputable conventions and opinions (ibid., 238), another formulation of the modern constitution.

[229] Ibid., 245.

[230] Ibid., 132.

[231] Ibid., 131.

When Bill McKibben published his book *The End of Nature* in 1989, he meant to show how human influence and exploitation is now omnipresent. Especially considering global warming, we have changed the atmosphere and we cannot find any corner of the Earth that is unspoiled by human activity, not even the highest mountain peak.[232] As Vogel notes, the kind of end of nature McKibben was talking about only reinforced the dualistic distinction between humans and nature, inasmuch as "once the human touch is on something, [nature's] ontological status shifts: no longer natural, it is now an artifact. The human world and the natural one are thus treated as separate realms."[233] Nevertheless, Vogel suggests to solve this unviable paradox by abandoning the notion of nature altogether and shifting to that of environment. Latour, instead, follows a different strategy.

The end of nature Latour talks about occurs once nature's genesis and intrinsically political quality is exposed, so that nature simply stops being the only possible unification of our world.[234] Nature is one way of constituting the common world, of accounting for reality, but the term itself obliterates the practices through which nature as a collector (and human society as its counterpart) is constituted. Through the purification of practice, the "natural order," the "natural laws," the "natural rights," the "inflexible causality"[235] and many other formulations of nature present themselves as transcendent, universal, indisputable, and accessible only to white coats or experts. Latour accuses deep ecology of maintaining the "modern, smooth, risk-free, stratified objects,"[236] and they are precisely the result of a lack of the political work experimental metaphysics of the common world is capable of.

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[232] Bill McKibben, *The End of Nature* (New York: Random House, 2006).

[233] Vogel, "Environmental Philosophy After the End of Nature," 25.

[234] Latour, *Politics of Nature*, 28.

[235] Ibid.

[236] Latour, *Politics of Nature*, 26.

4.1.2 - Nonmodern Mediation

Since object and subject are not politically neutral terms, but highly polemical (in the sense of *polemos*),[237] there is, for Latour, no room for *overcoming* dualism.[238] Subject and object need to be replaced entirely with a perplexity about what the actors are and do, a definition of capacities and properties that cannot be attributed in advance, because this pre-attribution would descend upon them from a higher authority (nature, neurosciences, society, politics, God...).

Instead of relying on the subject/object axis, or, what is the same, the human/nature axis that organizes the world in the modern constitution, one of Latour's suggestions is to add a second axis of nonmodernity. This second axis can be pictured perpendicular to the first one, like a Cartesian coordinate system. On the horizontal axis we keep the human/nature poles; on the vertical axis we position the two poles of "essence" and "event" (or "existence").[239] Beings are mediated, their ontology has a variable geometry on this plane. They do not simply jump, like old phenomena, between objects and subjective representations. The second axis adds their situatedness and the practice through which they emerge to their very definition. Existence of humans and nonhumans is an event. Their existence is unstable and never *ex nihilo*, but situated and historical. Their "nature" (being out there) or "social construction" (being made into a *fact*) is part of a gradient, not an essence, that also accounts for their stabilization as entities (essence) and their relative event-character. This is, actually, what has always happened in practice. The peculiarity of the modern constitution was exactly in the purification of the axis of practice, of the work of mediation of entities, jumping without chains of reference to a definition of entities' essences.[240] This is also one of the messages in *Pandora's Hope*; the modes of technical mediation reveal the idleness of the distinction between facts and artifacts, since what we know about the world emerges in laboratories and through the practice of the sciences (both humanistic and "scientific"!) that makes nonhumans speak. Existence is not a fact of nature, an all-or-nothing, but relative, historical and local.

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[237] Latour, *Politics of Nature*, 81.

[238] See the diagram in Appendix 2: the divide between subject and object can only be maintained or restated by philosophy that tries to overcome it.

[239] See diagram in Appendix 3.

[240] Facts are *black boxes*. *Cf.* Latour, *Pandora's Hope*, 113-215. On the black box concept see Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, 39-40.

The task is always the same for Latour, even in his new collective and multimedia project, *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence*. The project has been open for contributions through its web platform[241] and is still going on. Supposedly the inquiry group will publish its "final-ish" results in 2015.

An Inquiry into Modes of Existence undertakes the task of a completely egalitarian ontology. Ontology is not a theory of Being in the group's understanding. It is, instead, the attempt of offering an anthropology of the moderns (that is, of us), by accounting for the complex different ways being is being: a "flat ontology."[242] For example, the mode of existence of religious experience cannot be reduced to its historical, psychological and social explanations. At the same time it does not reveal a supernatural existence. The mode of existence of religion is not in the alternative "God exists" or "social explanations exist." The portion of the world religious experience arranges is an enigma that can be understood only in its differences and its clashes against other modes of existence.

Once we stop relying on the dualistic framework of the substratum of external nature on the one side, and on the world of ever changing society on the other, we cannot reduce any being to any field or definition. This is what Latour called in 1984 the *principle of irreduction*: "Nothing is, by itself, either reducible or irreducible to anything else."[243] All the actors are distributed on one single plane where they have a mediated, relational, local, network of existence. Humans, texts, objects, concepts, animals, traditions: everything is an actor, has its own voice and agency, and equally exists in the world allowing for a "chain of reference."

In his continuous reworking of the problem, Latour invents the term "matters-of-concern" as an alternative to objectivity conceived as "matters-of-fact." The expression "as a matter of fact" shows, even in everyday language, its authoritarian load in its appeal to an objective external reality of things. On the contrary, "matters-of-concern" account for the connections between the constitutive work of reality and its political, collective and practical character. This political character is not a mere collection of different opinions and preferences, but a gathering of the human and nonhuman elements that define the matter.

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[241] http://www.modesofexistence.org/

[242] Maniglier, "A Metaphysical Turn?," 37.

[243] Bruno Latour, *The Pasteurization of France*, trans. Alan Sheridan and John Law (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1988), 158.

For political ecology, the traditional concept of politics as concerning human affairs, interests, preferences and passions, comes from the ontological cleavage between the subjects of politics and the objects of "Science." In other words, traditional politics are embedded in the sharp distinction between epistemological concerns and "the lowly political questions - on values and the difficulty of living together."[244]According to Latour, "green nature" still relies on this idea of politics. By treating nature as something out there to which we belong, even more authentically than to our social dimension, we do not solve the fundamental separation of modernism. On the contrary, nature brought inside the political debate is inevitably the green nature of our feelings, our preferences, our attachments: conventional, subjective, interested, and even worse, in a desperate opposition to the nature explored by Science, the grey nature object of the "scientific worldview."

This classic notion of politics precisely prevents ecologists from securing their own political weight and the changes they promise, condemning ecological movements to stagnation; ecologists fight an uneven battle, nurturing the same settlement that is responsible for the ecological crisis. For example, as we saw, Naess' politics still comes as a second order of reflection, based on the inquiry into nature, as if the two were two separable domains of reality. If we want "green" politics to be effective, we need not only to let go of the concept of nature, but also of its counterpart, the classic concept of politics.

As Latour points out, the myth of the new collective is already there, in the narrations and hopes of ecological practice, it just does not have a conceptual institutionalization available. Politics have always been concerned with questions of nature: population, biology, objects of everyday use, agriculture, and so on. There has never been in practice a naked political dimension made and played by humans only. The very existence of society is based on nonhumans. Just like in the case of "nature", replaced entirely by the locution "collective of associations of humans and nonhumans," the concept of politics will shift

[244] Latour, *Politics of Nature*, 15.

from "power politics," the realm of human affairs, interests, preferences, and power relations to "politics conceived as the *progressive composition of the common world*."[245]

What political ecology claims to be able to do is, finally, to show that the "modern constitution" is not the only possible way to constitute our common world; it is not the only way to accord citizenship and recognition to the legitimate nonhuman members of the world we live in. In order to do this, political ecology has to rework the idea of representation.

4.1.3 - Political-Scientific Representation

Latour's analysis of representation shows the common ground between two problems: the political and the epistemological notions of representation. This distinction can be more easily seen, for example, in the Italian language. Unlike in English, Italian provides two different terms for representation: *rappresentazione* and *rappresentanza*. The first frames the problem of the representation of things,[246] while the second designates that of political representation. However, *rappresentazione* and *rappresentanza* do not articulate two separate problems in Latour's analysis, but one. The split between the two is, once again, a derivation of the modern dualism between culture and nature. We do not find neutral scientists anywhere in scientific praxis, who are the simple invisible intermediaries of the mute things of nature, representatives who say "nothing but what the things would have said on their own, had they only been able to speak."[247] Conversely, no political representative, no Sovereign is a simple intermediary of his citizens, who says "nothing but what the citizens would have said had they all been able to speak at the same time."[248]

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[245] Ibid., 18. Emphasis in the original. *Cf.* the definitions of politics offered by Latour, ibid., 247: "Politics: Used here in three senses that are distinguished by periphrasis: a) in its usual meaning, the term designates the struggle and compromises between interests and human passions, in a realm separate from the preoccupations of nonhumans; in this sense, I use the expression 'politics of the Cave;' b) in the proper sense, the term designates the progressive composition of the common world and all the competences exercised by the collective; c) in the limited sense, I use the term to designate just one of the five skills necessary to the constitution, the one that allows faithful representation by the activation - always to be repeated - of the relation between one and all."

[246] As well as referring to a staged or theatrical performance, eloquently enough.

[247] Latour, *Never Been Modern*, 142.

[248] Ibid., 143.

Objectivity and political will are both a matter of giving form and voice. Both scientists and the Sovereign represent by "translating" their objects. And since every translation is also a betrayal,[249] within the translation of representation we always have a doubt, an uncertainty both of epistemological and political nature. There is no safe and absolute way of telling whether the scientist translates or betrays, as well as we "shall never know whether representatives betray or translate."[250] The issue cannot be undersized to a matter of deviation from *normal* representation, out of bad conscience, self-interest, or lack of impartiality. This is clear when we consider that a third sense of representation is involved: re-presentation [ita: *ripresentazione*], which is the bringing to presence again through a translation. Every translation is a reduction to some other definite form, and it cannot be divorced from difference. Indeed, writes Latour, "no being, not even humans, speak on their own, but always through something or someone else.[251]

This is the reason why political ecology extends the doubt of a good representation to nonhumans as a way to deal with the challenges of the ecological crisis. Political ecology needs to reopen the political work that gives representation to nonhumans. The very concept of democracy needs to be reopened in light of the ecological crisis in order to include voices that will multiply and threaten us if we keep ignoring them. Instead of relying on the great transcendence of nonhuman nature, political ecology urges us to slow down and ask once again who are the citizens of this common world of humans and nonhumans.

The concept of "matters-of-concern," therefore, follows in Heidegger's footsteps: not just the critique of representation as *Vorstellung*,[252] but most importantly the "gathering" character that Heidegger attributes to the "thing" as opposed to the object [*Gegenstand*].[253] As Heidegger notoriously brings out, "thing" means something that is out there, but it is

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[249] See Latour, *Pasteurization*, 253n16.

[250] Ibid.

[251] Latour, *Politics of Nature*, 68. *Cf*. Bruno Latour, *Pasteurization*, 153-236.

[252] Heidegger, "L'epoca dell'immagine del mondo."

[253] Martin Heidegger, "La cosa" in *Saggi e discorsi*, trans. Gianni Vattimo (Milan: Mursia, 1976), 109-124.

also the ancient word for Parliament in all European languages.[254] Therefore, thing is not the object. It is the matter that preoccupies (concerns) a community; the matter that gathers an assembly in order to deal with it, to decide what it is, what is going on and how to handle it.

Objects have a form of realism like the one imposed by matters-of-facts, but the realism of matters of fact does not entail any great transcendence. All objects, including scientific facts, can go back to being a "thing."[255] Events such as climate change cannot be objects. They cannot be understood, nor tackled through the concept of object. A lot of spokespersons (scientist, politicians, associations, international commissions, etc.) are gathered around climate change in *the parliament of things*[256] in order to give the best possible representation to what is going on in our warming planet. Climate change (but, similarly, the Anthropocene) needs to be represented both scientifically, collecting all possible data that increase the degree of accuracy of the description and prediction models, and politically. Climate change needs to show *that it exists*, that it is there, in *our own* world, and we have to take action. The kind of politics pertaining to ecological issues are, then, called by Latour "Dingpolitik,"[257] in opposition to "Realpolitik" or "Naturpolitik" and the modern acceptation of realism.

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[254] "In all the languages of Europe, north and south alike, the word 'thing,' whatever its form, has as its root or origin the word 'cause', taken from the realm of law, politics, or criticism generally speaking. As if objects themselves existed only according to the debates of an assembly [...]. Thus in Latin the word for 'thing' is *res*, from which we get reality, the object of judicial procedure or the cause itself [...]. The word 'cause' designates the root or origin of the word 'thing': causa, cosa, chose, or Ding. [...] The tribunal stages the very identity of cause and thing, of word and object. Latour, *Never Been Modern*, 83. *Cf.* ibid., 142-145. See also Latour, "Why Has Critique?." *Cf.* Martin Heidegger, "La cosa," 109-124.

[255] Here runs a major difference between Latour and Heidegger: all objects need to return to be things, for Latour. The handmade jug can be a thing, while the industrially made can of Coke remains an object for Heidegger. "While the latter is abandoned to the empty mastery of science and technology, only the former, cradled in the respectful idiom of art, craftsmanship, and poetry, could deploy and gather its rich set of connections." Latour, "Why Critique?," 233. He attacks Heidegger's idea that being is in the artesan's *poiesis* but not in a can of coke or a pair of Adidas shoes. But Being just needs to be extracted, unfolded in its network. In the object Being is concealed, but things, networks are "full of Being." *Cf.* Latour, *Never Been Modern*, 65-67. This is also a major distance from Heidegger's concept of technology: modern technology is not an Autonomous Destiny, the counterpart of the technological neutral tool. For Latour, technology is mediation. *Cf.* Latour, *Pandora's Hope*, 176. *Cf.* the critical point of view of Jeff Kochan, "Latour's Heidegger," *Social Studies of Science* 40, no. 4 (2010): 579-598.

[256] Latour, *Never Been Modern*, 142-145.

[257] Bruno Latour, "From *Realpolitk* to *Dingpolitik* or How to Make Things Public," in *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*, ed. Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel, exhibition catalogue, MIT Press, 2005, 1-32.

Giving representation to nonhumans means, simultaneously finding a way to say what they are, while also giving them voice and political consideration. While Naess' ecosophy maintains a separation between the problem of objectivity and that of green policies, Latour convincingly shows the coincidence of the two. However, a common misunderstanding in Latour's approach mistakes political ecology for advocating a socially constructed idea of nature. It is not a matter of politicizing nature. Abandoning the belief in the transcendence of nature, in its universal and mysterious origin, does not entail asserting that nature is artificial or man-made. On the contrary, Latour proclaims that "it is perfectly possible to speak of external reality without immediately confusing it with its hasty unification by a power that dares not bear that name and that still displays itself under the less and less protective cover of the epistemology police."[258]

4.1.4 - Redistribution of Properties Between Humans and Nonhumans

By distancing himself from both nature as socially constructed, and from nature as naked external reality, Latour brings up the formulation of "hybrid." Remarkably, the idea of hybrid frames a wide space of ambiguities and equivocations in the concept of nature and the human-nature relation. What are genetically modified organisms? Are they natural or cultural? Is climate change a human or a nature problem?

Once we extend doubt of good representation to nonhumans, reopening the democratic process, anthropocentrism appears as simply rationalistic[259] and unsuitable to deal with the hybrids of nature and culture, of human and nonhuman agencies. But the answer to anthropocentrism is not ecocentrism, which does nothing but make the problem worse, by strengthening the bond to nature, emerging as a category in opposition to the humanistic one. Hybrids always have an anthropomorphic element in some sense. The problem with anthropomorphism, however, is in the tendency to reaffirm the human/nature bi-dimensionality. Anthropomorphism conveys the projection of "human" characters, taken in a reductionist, essentialist way, as if we had a universal definition of the essence of the *anthropos* ready at hand.

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[258] Latour, *Politics of Nature*, 50.

[259] Bruno Latour, "Agency at the Time of the Anthropocene," *New Literary History* 45 (2014): 1-18.

Therefore, the reopening of the collective does not only entail an experimental metaphysics through which we can reframe the old "natural" world. Humanism, too, needs to be experimental.[260] Indeed, "so long as humanism is constructed through contrast with the object that has been abandoned to epistemology, neither the human, nor the nonhuman can be understood."[261]

Far for providing an essence to the human, Latour prefers the term "morphism" to announce the "agency of the *anthropos*."[262] With this term, Latour tries to capture the artificial side, the action or role the human has, without thinking of the human as a pure subject. The human is a mediator, a translator. The human does this, not based on a predefined set of capacities, but through its presence, its action, its grasping, the very material setting of the conditions that bring aspects of the world to emergence.

Nevertheless, humanity does not occupy any special position in the universe. Humans are not the sole translators. Humans make nonhumans and nonhumans make us. "Morphism" is simply equated with the dimension of our practices of knowledge, be they speech, texts, narrations, or scientific laboratory setups. Practice allows the mediation between humans and nonhumans all the time, while the modern constitution denies it, purifies it from its outcome, from the represented object. Morphism, then, belongs to representation in its practice. Morphism is a "common trading zone - [...] a property of the world itself,"[263] as opposed to a shape arbitrarily superimposed by the observer, the speaker, or the writer. As an example we can think of carbon. What is carbon? It is a chemical element, the basis of life, a discovery of Lavoisier, 18% of the composition of the human body, the component of carbon dioxide (the gas we breathe out, the gas trees transform into oxygen, the gas responsible for the green house effect and the acidification of oceans). Is carbon absolutely human? Is carbon absolutely nonhuman? Carbon is the trace between all its translations, in which something is conserved and something is left behind.

If we abandon a reductionist, underestimated notion of the human as defined, for example, by his rationality and other mental qualities, agency is redistributed among the

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[260] Latour, *Politics of Nature*, 198.

[261] Latour, *Never Been Modern*, 136.

[262] Ibid., 137.

[263] Latour, "Agency," 13.

mediations, the relations, the translations, whenever "things" assume a shape. "It is true that by redistributing the action among all these mediators, we lose the reduced form of humanity, but we gain another form, which has to be called irreducible."[264] Morphism is also the property of another term Latour ascribes to things: that of "factishes," a play on words between "fact" and "fetish," reality and belief, in which the human and external reality once again cannot be told apart.[265]

The alternatives to the subject/object couple such as hybrids, *factishes*, things, and the associations of humans and nonhumans open a reality in which the properties of subjects and objects are not pre-distributed into two realms.

First of all, subjectivity is redistributed. A subject is an agent that translates.[266] It is attached, active within the network of relations and mediations. The subject is not the *fundamentum inconcussum*[267] anymore, the unmovable foundation, such as in Descartes. In ecological terms, understanding the subject as foundation means, for Latour, proposing again the "Male Western Subject [that] dominated the wild and savage world of nature through His courageous, violent, sometimes hubristic, dream of control."[268] It is the same model of subjectivity that instigates the realist's protests in the face of the idea that there is no ontological split between nature and artifact: as if humans' hubristic interference overflowed, spoiling the whole natural world and leaving only a constructed artificial milieu. Subjectivity is redistributed because being a subject means being *subjectum*, "subjected," indeed, related, conditioned, connected, mediated, entangled just like ecology says: "to be a subject *i*s not to act autonomously in front of an objective background, but to *share an agency with other subjects that have also lost their autonomy*."[269]

Not only subjectivity, but also *humanism* is redistributed. The powers and capacities that characterized the reductionist concept of human do not define a separation between matter and spirit anymore. Humans are not just the asymmetrical counterpart of Science's

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[264] Latour, *Never Been Modern*, 138.

[265] *Cf.* Latour, *Factish Gods*.

[266] See Maniglier, "A Metaphysical Turn?"

[267] Russo, *Filosofia ed Ecologia*, 264.

[268] Latour, "Agency," 5.

[269] Ibid. Emphasis in the original.

objects. The human regains in political ecology "the other part of itself, the share of things."[270]

Similarly, activity and passivity are redistributed. They correspond to a crucial anthropomorphic distinction that made it impossible to confer agency, history, and locality to nonhumans by means of separating epistemology (who discovers facts and how) from ontology (what are the matters of fact).[271]

The *capacity of speech* is also redistributed. It is not just human, when nonhumans cease to be objects looking for a designative word, and start to be given a voice, offered in their singularity as propositions, as articulations of chains of reference that define their agency.[272]

Finally, *agency* is redistributed; instead of subjects and objects Latour notoriously speaks of *actors* or *actants*. Beings, before being something, do something. We can say what they do, their performance, notice that there is an agent, an interference in a process. Only afterwords can we purify their agency into a black box that says what they are, an essence.[273]

Who has the capacity to represent such hybrids? The work of representation of nonhumans does not remain the task of traditional professional politicians. The sciences (as opposed to "Science")[274] are the key to the phonation of nonhumans: "We can go much further in the redistribution of roles between politicians and scientists if we agree to take seriously the little suffixes "-logies" and "- graphies" [...]. Each discipline can define itself as a complex mechanism for giving *worlds the capacity to write or speak*."[275] Politics,

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[270] Latour, *Never Been Modern*, 136.

[271] Latour, *Pandora's Hope*, 146.

[272] Ibid.

[273] The semiotic actant is a better formulation since it does not deliver the anthropomorphism of the word "actor." "Actant is a term from semiotics covering both humans and nonhumans; an actor is an entity that modifies another entity in a trial; of actors it can only be said that they act; their competence is deduced by their performances; the action, in turn, is always recorded in the course of a trial and by an experimental protocol, elementary or not." Latour, *Politics of Nature*, 237. *Cf*. Latour, *Pandora's Hope*; Latour, "Agency;" Bruno Latour, "How Better to Register the Agency of Things," Tanner Lectures, given at Yale University, 26th and 27th of March 2014. Manuscript. To be published in a volume of Tanner Lectures.

[274] Science is an ideological term, which withdraws the practice of mediation, instruments and laboratories from the sciences and relinquishes reality as a transcendence in the exclusive hands of epistemology, the only authority on what is real or not. *Cf*. Latour, *Politics of Nature*, 249.

[275] Ibid., 66. Emphasis in the original.

redefined, simply gets rid of nature and society as two distinct realms of reality, and replaces them with a gradient of nature-culture hybrids, as well as a redistribution of the role of sciences in democracy with their complex and unpredictable things.

4.1.5 - Ecological Crises as Crises of Objectivity

In a world of hybrids, the reading of the ecological situation shifts from a crisis of nature to a crisis of objectivity.

The destruction of the natural world perpetuated by the ideological means of the human/nature dualism was a side effect of the effectiveness and instrumental excellence of the modern constitutional enterprise:

> Modernization, although it destroyed the near-totality of cultures and natures by force and bloodshed, had a clear objective. Modernizing finally made it possible to distinguish between the laws of external nature and the conventions of society. The conquerors undertook this partition everywhere, consigning hybrids either to the domain of objects or to that of society. [...] The past was a barbarian medley, the future a civilizing distinction.[276]

The main focus in Latour's account does not stop at the acknowledgement of the degree of environmental degradation. Nor does it promote a double dimensional reading: a crisis of ecosystems *and* an existential crisis of the subject.

The character of the ecological crisis lies in the instability of the concept of nature and of the nature/society distinction. It is worth noting that, in Latour's words, natures and cultures have been destroyed, in their local and historical characters, rather than external nature in its abstract wholeness. Even the global frameworks of the crisis, such as the Anthropocene, climate change and Gaia, show the agency of global processes without ontological unification. They show, instead, a redistribution of agency in different processes that involve both the side of nature and human, "Earth" and "Earthlings."[277]

In *We Have Never Been Modern*, the ecological crisis is framed as one of the most relevant effects of the modern constitution, together with human population growth. Thanks to its separation between nature and society, modernism has allowed for the

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[276] Latour, *Never Been Modern*, 130.

[277] Latour, "Waiting for Gaia," 8-10.

development of the sciences and techniques on such a large scale that hybrids, so mobilized, spun out of control:

> If we had been able to keep the human multitudes and the nonhuman environment repressed behind us longer, we would probably have been able to continue to believe that modern times were really passing while eliminating everything in their path. But the repressed has returned. The human masses are here again, in the East as well as in the South, and the infinite variety of nonhuman masses have arrived from Everywhere. They can no longer be exploited. They can no longer be surpassed, because nothing surpasses them any longer.[278]

The ecological crisis is, then, the consequence of modernism and cause for its end.[279] The modern constitution is exhausted because it does not guarantee its original task anymore: the separation of external reality and social/subjective world. The efficacy of the modern constitution depended on the concealment of mediation that the proliferation of hybrids instead exposes. According to this first formulation, then, we need to change the categories of subjective and objective if we finally want to understand our western contemporary world and, at the same time, start accounting for "the totality of the human and nonhuman third worlds."[280]

Only in *Politics of Nature*, however, does Latour offer his definition of the ecological crisis (or better, plural "crises") as "crises of objectivity," as opposed to "crises of nature." The ecological crises appear as general crises of "constitution" bearing "on all objects, not just on those on which the label natural has been conferred."[281] The objects involved in these crises are matters-of-concern, "associations of beings that take complicated forms - rules, apparatuses, consumers, institutions, mores, calves, cows, pigs, broods - and that it is completely superfluous to include in an inhuman and ahistorical nature."[282] A perfect example of this notion of ecological crisis is, then, the Anthropocene: the era in which humanity as a whole has become a genuine geological force.

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[278] Latour, *Never Been Modern*, 76-77.

[279] "Truly exceptional events must have weakened this powerful mechanism for me to be able to describe it today with an ethnologist's detachment for a world that is in the process of disappearing" Ibid., 35.

[280] Ibid., 74.

[281] Latour, *Politics of Nature*, 20.

[282] Ibid., 21.

In other words, the crisis comes from the emergence of phenomena that disconcert our previous established ideas about nature and the environment, about the nonhumans that surround us. A doubt is raised, by an ecological crisis, about what we are related to. The ecological crisis that carried the name of "ozone hole" let ozone emerge not just as a material component of the atmosphere we took for granted. The ozone's agency emerged as different than what we expected; it could be depleted by human emissions. Its objectivity and the consequences of its performance had to be studied and handled again. The ozone was thrown into our public life and our industrial policies.

We are thrown into crises by acid rain, species extinction, and ecosystem deterioration because we do not know anymore if their agency is following anthropic causes or the causality of the laws of nature, if it is affecting our civilization, or if we need to rethink our place in the world and our relation to it.

What comes knocking on the door, says Latour, "no longer has the polemical form of a silencing matter of fact, but the ecological form of a perplexed nonhuman entering into a relationship with the collective and gradually being socialized by the complex equipment of laboratories."[283] The ecological crisis, understood in terms of crises of objectivity, explains why, paradoxically, we worry about the environment "when there is *no more environment*;"[284] through its crisis, we find ourselves deprived of a zone of reality, an external nature "that would serve politics simultaneously as a standard, a foil, a reserve, a resource, and a public dumping ground."[285] An environmental crisis reveals some of the conditions of our very own existence, opening at the same time the question about natural objects and our human identity and activity.[286]

Ecological crises do not happen in nature, but in the complex associations of humans and nonhumans. These associations have risky, furry, uncertain outlines. Uncertainty is an intrinsic character of ecological crises. An ecological crisis as crisis of objectivity bears intrinsic uncertainty because it is not clear anymore who is the subject and who is the object, who acts and who is acted upon, who has agency and who is inert, who is an end to itself and who is a mere means.

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[283] Ibid., 77.

[284] Ibid., 58. Emphasis in the original.

[285] Ibid. *Cf*. Ibid., 241.

[286] *Cf*. Latour, "A Plea for Earthly Sciences."

The uncertainty regarding the ontology of nonhumans is, at the same time, the uncertainty about the ethical imperative that concerns them. As a consequence, Latour addresses the ecological crises also in terms of "generalized revolts of the means:"

> [...] no entity - whale, river, climate, earthworm, tree, calf, cow, pig, brood - agrees any longer to be treated "simply as means" but insists on being treated "always also as an end." This in no way entails extending human morality to the natural world, or projecting the law extravagantly onto 'mere brute beings,' or taking into account the rights of objects "for themselves;" it is rather the simple consequence of the disappearance of the notion of external nature.[287]

An ecological crisis as a crisis of objectivity means that a nonhuman which was categorized as an object, as a means to other ends, shows its connections within the collective and demands to be treated as an end in itself. We can make the example from fisheries. They have been considered for a long time as a mere reserve for fishing. In 2002 the Food and Agriculture Organization estimated that 75% of the world's ocean fisheries are overfished, beyond capacity or at the limit of their capacity for sustainable replenishing without pushing the species to extinction.[288] Starting as a mere resource-object, the North Atlantic cod demanded to be treated as an end in itself, as a part of the collective, our common world; we just took it for granted. While depleting, fisheries show not only the value and meaning they had in our human world, but all the entanglements that make them a part of our common world in the network of relations within the ocean ecosystem and the human food habits.

Consequently, reopening the constitution of the collective in order to include nonhumans as citizens is something we can do as an act of civilization, or under the pressure of ecological crises. In both cases, it entails its doing without the separation between facts and values because recognizing the intrinsic connections of a nonhuman in our world means offering it political representation and citizenship, a value to be carefully taken into consideration.

If ecological crises open a doubt about who is a means and who is an end, the Kantian obligation, not to treat human beings simply as means but always also as ends cannot be limited to some categories of beings (in Kant's case, to humans). Latour acknowledges that

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[287] Latour, *Politics of Nature*, 155-156.

[288] Meadows, "Limits to Growth: the 30-Year Update," 1.

Naess brings up the same formulation. Nevertheless, comments Latour, "Naess's limitation to 'living beings' reflects the same error Kant made, even if what he takes into account is a little broader."[289] Latour's attack is on the way Naess maintains naturalism, even if he wishes to dismiss it. From Latour's point of view, Kant's obligation is extended by Naess to nonhumans as already (or *still*) unified as nature, transported *en mass* to invade *human* politics.

Latour and Naess also share a reference to nature's primary and secondary qualities in order to rethink the spilt between facts and values:

> Here I am politicizing Whitehead's critique of the distinction between primary and secondary qualities, as well as of the strangeness of the role given to the human mind: "The theory of psychic additions would treat the greenness [of a blade of grass] as a psychic addition furnished by the perceiving mind, and would leave to nature merely the molecules and the radiant energy which influence the mind toward that perception." [...] The same critique, based on Whitehead and James, of the division between primary and secondary attributes is also found in Naess 1988, but with a very different solution.[290]

Latour's utilization differs from Naess's in that, after the end of nature, the point is not to naturalize the secondary qualities, by making nature "green and warm." Once again, what is lacking in Naess' account is the amount of political work that is necessary[291] after we have realized that the House of nature and the House of society are not the only possible institutions of our common world. Moreover, Naess lacks an elaboration of the problem of the modern constitution, precisely of the *a priori* unification that happens without directly interrogating the citizens, distributing from above properties and agency potentials.

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[289] Latour, *Politics of Nature*, 276n44.

[290] Latour, *Politics of Nature*, 260 n56.

[291] *Cf*. Latour's opinion on Naess' ecosophy: "Even if Arne Naess's work goes a little deeper than deep ecology, he aims at 'self- realization', which confuses the issue, for we return finally to a solid anthropocentrism. He nevertheless addresses a question that I have left aside, that of the psychology of citizens linked by what he calls relational fields to the totality of the biosphere, thanks to 'ecosophy.' We shall see [...] how to grant ethics a completely different role and what political work is necessary before we can speak of 'relational field', 'ecospheric belongings', or even any sort of unification. Naess, in his pleasant gobbledy-gook, is a good representative of this philosophy of ecology that does feel the metaphysical limits of the division between nature and humanity, but that strives to 'go beyond' the 'limits of Western philosophy' instead of delving into the political origins of this division. If we are to combat this division, it is by adopting a different politics, not a different psychology." Latour, *Politics of Nature*, 256-257 n29.

"Politicizing" the split between primary and secondary qualities means, then, that constitutional work regards not merely the problem of a common world, but that of a "good common world," asking the question, in what kind of world do humans and nonhumans want to live together:

> The modernist constitution in fact saw debates over ecology merely as a mixture to be purified, a mixture combining rationality and irrationality, nature and artifice, objectivity and subjectivity. The new constitution sees in these same crises disputes [...] a completely different topic: every where, every day, people are fighting over the very question of the good common world in which everyone - human and nonhuman - wants to live. Nothing and no one must come in to simplify, shorten, limit, or reduce the scope of this debate in advance, by calmly asserting that the argument bears only on 'representations that humans make of the world' and not on the very essence of the phenomena in question.[292]

Facts and values belong to the same political task. That is to say, there is not one unified Scientific protocol, exclusively accessing things as they are on one hand, and a plurality of affective representations of them on the other. Sciences are reliable, local, historical practices of knowledge, which deliver the common world to us. By doing this, they do politics: they interrogate nonhumans about what they are, what they do, and therefore reopen the question about who should have citizenship.

4.2 - A Constitution of a Collective of Humans and Nonhumans

The composition of the common world and the composition of a "good common world" need to be reassembled into one and the same problem. In order to do this, Latour suggests a possible protocol to create an ecological constitution, that redistributes powers in a different way than the old bicameralism of nature and culture did.

The first step is to disentangle the confusion in the power distribution that is included in the concepts of fact and value. Both facts and values are transversely crossed by two contradictory powers: the "Power to take into account" and the "Power to Put in Order."[293]

The Power to Take into Account is present in the concept of fact because an interrogation of what are the facts opens the question about what is there. In the

[292] Ibid., 129-130.

[293] Ibid., 102.

experimentation of the sciences, facts present themselves as uncertain actors that present their candidacy for existence. In this power of facts resides the whole sense of research, and its freedom of exploration. The Power to Put in Order is also a power of the concept of fact because, at some point, facts institutionalize actors. Facts need to be *made* in order to close the discussion about "what it is." They need to be accepted or denied based on evidence that agents have presented as candidates for existence, and then established as entities within a state of nature, as real.

The same two contradictory powers are exercised by the concept of value. The Power to Take into Account is the power to open the discussion about what has value, the core of all ethical discussions. The concept of value is constantly brought up together with the warning that "some voices are missing from the roll call;"[294] we are leaving someone out of our moral consideration.

In its contrary movement, value also responds to the requirement of closing the discussion about what has value through the Power to Put in Order. With this movement, values establish who are those we have to live with. The concept of value includes the necessity to make life together compatible for those who have been institutionalized as citizens of the common world.

Therefore, Latour suggests that we represent the collective of humans and nonhumans as constituted by the two Houses of "Taking into Consideration" and "Putting in Order," which are transversal to the two old facts/values (or nature/culture) Houses.[295]

The House exercising the "Power to Take into Consideration" will ask the question: "How many are we?," and by doing so, it will answer two requirements.

The first requirement already pertained to the old notion of fact, and is the requirement of "Perplexity." No one can simplify, in advance, the number of agents making up reality. This is, for example, what social conventions, superstition and other obscure authorities were accused of doing by the Enlightenment movement.

The second requirement pertained to the old concept of value: the requirement of "Consultation." Consultation reinforces the opening work of Perplexity about the composition of the common world, by making sure that "reliable witnesses," spokespersons, for example scientists who give voice to nonhumans, are consulted.

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[294] Ibid., 106.

[295] See diagram in Appendix 4.

Therefore, no other authority short of legitimacy can cut, in advance, the number of agents who participate in this examination of the reopening of the collective, for example, by consulting only humans' preferences reductively considered as the only beings who have the power of speech.

The second House exercises the "Power to Put in Order," and will ask the question: "Can we live together?"

Here again, the first requirement that the answer to this question needs to match is an old pertinence of the concept of value: "Hierarchization." Instead of the old order disposed of by the concept of nature, the order here establishes all the states of the world that need to be considered as a premise for further discussion. We can think of the example of human rights. In the new constitution their establishment becomes public, and openly discussed and supported by evidence that makes the case, instead of hiding in some essence that relies on the authority of nature.

The second requirement met by the House of "Putting in Order" is an old task of the concept of fact: "Institution." It answers the necessity of a closure of the discussion that determines that facts are real.

What really changes in comparison to the modern constitution is the idea that this constitution is always re-discussible, and able to be re-opened. On the contrary, the modern constitution considered only the side of society as uncertain, with its multitude of preferences, opinions, interests and illusions, and the plurality of representations that humans had of the one and same world. The House of nature was established once and for all out there.

A third power is, instead, added by Latour: the "Power to Follow Up," a power of periodical, but permanent control of the protocol of the common world representation, which coincides with the art of governing.[296]

The reopening of the collective needs to happen, remarkably, when an ecological crisis emerges. Ecological crises are, then, *constitutional* crises of objectivity. In light of this reflection, Latour reformulates the task of environmental ethics.

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[296] Latour, *Politics of Nature*, 200-209.

4.2.1 - The Role of Morality

A crucial role of control of the way the common world is represented is played, indeed, by morality: one of the professional competences that participate in the discussion about a good common world, together with the other professional bodies of scientists, politicians, economists, etc.

In the nature/society split, morality used to be praised as the research of the universal or formal foundations of ethics, or as the discipline that knows "what must be done and not done."[297]

In the ecological constitution, instead, moralists are the ones who "know that everything that will be done well will necessarily be done badly, and as a result will have to be done over again right away."[298] The closure and stabilization of the collective are always dangerous and artificial in the eyes of morality, no matter how progressive and provisional. Morality's role lies in calling for suspension and inclusion, a reexamination of the excluded from the common world, of the "new externality."

External reality in the modern constitution was the world, nature as other than human. With the inclusion of nonhumans in the political representation of our common world, external reality becomes what remains excluded, both human and nonhuman. Latour brings the example of the eight thousand people who get killed every year from car accidents in France. These dead are outcasts, devoid of a full citizenship, considering that in their name no intervention is made to modify our mobility habits, our infrastructures or the automobile industrial policies.[299] The car accident victims belong to the problem of the representation of a good common world just as much as ocean acidification.

The *other*, then, is not the nonhuman, but the outcast from the collective. Our beloved houses, for example, are nonhumans but are obviously and gladly included in our world, as are our pets, tomatoes and recreative landscapes. The *other* is not nature as opposed to the human. The other simply does not have full citizenship in our common world and makes herself heard in an ecological crisis that can be very dangerous for our present world: "the exterior is not a nature, but an otherness capable of doing us harm."[300]

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[297] Latour, *Politics of Nature*, 156.

[298] Ibid.

[299] Ibid., 124.

[300] Ibid., 282n27.

For this reason, being moral, in principle, means including in our consideration all there is both morally and ontologically: "Thanks to morality, outcasts will be able to make themselves heard once again. Keeping this virtue for humans alone will soon be seen as the most immoral of vices."[301]

The ethics of suspension are, therefore, the opposite of the ethics of foundation. We can reformulate the concept of value with reference to Latour's parliament of things. The Heideggerean "thing," that gathers a preoccupied assembly, negotiates and brings evidence both around what the thing "is" and around its value (using the old term). The thing is discussed for its relational weight in our common world, the degree of its connections with the rest of us and the emergency with which we have to handle it.

In the end of nature, something like Naess' formulation of intrinsic value cannot but be understood as the continuous reopening of the ontological question, as suggested by Latour with the new role of morality. The uncertainty about the nature of humans and nonhumans prevents them from being attributed with the roles of means or ends in advance. This kind of continuous exercise of doubt, of *epoché*, would be the moral thing to do.

Both in Latour and Naess the value of nonhumans does not come from altruistic care but from an actual reformulation of the ontological question. Regardless, in light of Latour's political ecology, Naess fails to follow up all the way through his non-dualistic attempt. This becomes clear if we consider how the normative system of "Ecosophy T" combines, juxtaposing, prescriptive moral norms ("N!"), and descriptive hypotheses about the state of the world ("H").[302]

Latour, on the contrary, rejects for political ecology both the label of normative and descriptive, since this distinction depends on that of facts and values, which are also rejected. Moreover, Latour warns us that, "there is in 'mere description' an overly powerful form of normativity: what is defines the common world and thus all that must be - the rest having no existence other than the nonessential one of secondary qualities."[303] Precisely because of the normative weight of ontology, the ontological question needs to be constantly reopened.

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[301] Latour, *Politics of Nature*, 160-161.

[302] Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, 196-210.

[303] Latour, *Politics of Nature*, 224.

4.2.2 - Cultural Policies

The articulation of the representation of the collective of humans and nonhumans is not a task of politicians who make decisions based on the information coming from a restricted number of Scientific bureaucrats. The answer to the ecological crisis and the ambition of political ecology to give representation to nonhumans can be achieved by bringing the sciences into democracy.[304] This means two important things.

Firstly, the sciences become a responsibility of the citizens of the collective. It is less about basing political decisions on indisputable facts, and more about taking the responsibility to support more research, more experimentation, in the concrete, practical interest of every citizen, human and nonhuman, that needs to be fairly represented.

Secondly, after the end of nature, the distinction between hard sciences and human sciences becomes pointless. All the different sciences are *scholarships*.[305] That is to say, they are sciences not on the basis of the hardness of their objects, but based on the capacity to reopen black boxes and retrace all the paths that bring back their objects from *essences* to *performances*. "Humanities" and "science" stand on the same side. Their split was due to the modern split, where the former dealt with mobile, uncertain subjectivities and the latter represents hard objectivity. In Latour's view, instead, they all offer a phonation of common worlds, because worlds are made up symmetrically of humans and nonhumans. They deliver variable ontologies. The geometry of these ontologies includes networks of equal mediators: texts, discourses, practices, habits, agents, things, among others.

Also, in the ecological reopening of the common world, the role of the sciences (both ecology and philosophy!) is that of experimenting, taking risks, and assembling.[306] Experimentation and research in response to the ecological crisis may sound unusual, considering that a big part of environmentalism insists on withdrawing from interference, on acting less on the side of humans.

According to Latour, however, the precautionary principle is completely misinterpreted. Ignorance about our ecological conditions and the ecological consequences of our actions,

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[304] Beside Latour, *Politics of Nature*, see Bruno Latour, "A Plea for Earthly Sciences."

[305] Latour, "How Better to Register the Agency of Things."

[306] An important aspect of Latour's concept of science is its affirmative, creative character. See Latour, "Why Has Critique?," 246: "The critic is not the one who debunks, but the one who assembles."

which is also a warning invoked by Naess,[307] does not mean that we should abstain from acting. This interpretation of the precautionary principle holds if we rely on a decision model in which "action follows knowledge without adding much to it, except in its final application and realization."[308] A science-based rational action is not realistic in the case of phenomena such as climate change, which show the constitutive uncertainty of the "experts" agreement, since every action or non-action we undertake everyday changes the base line. Moreover, with the ecological reopening of the collective, the work of scientists and of politicians is not distinct anymore because the decision making process is not merely human, but participated in by nonhumans in their scientific phonation.

Re-assembling the collective is a slow task. We need to retrace our steps, instead of struggling to overcome an impossible human/nature split. Latour appeals to the end of war between humans and nature, and against radical epistemological breaks or revolutions. Seeing things from a network, retracing their emergence as events, makes them more ordinary, even banal, in their locality. Even the endeavors of the modern remain important and clear achievements, although they lose their fatal, epochal, radical destiny.[309]

Political ecology means, in Latour's understanding, giving an institutional form to what already exists in everyday practice, a common world of humans and nonhumans.

4.3 - The "King-Self"

Latour's political ecology is focused on finding a protocol to deal with ecological issues and their contradictory, but as merited and ambitious demands. Humans are part of nature; humans are the other to nature. Humans and their activity belong to the biosphere; humans should leave nature alone. In Latour's proposal, the common world of humans and nonhumans is constituted by a network of constitutive relations and mini-transcendences. We can experiment in this direction as an alternative to the Great Division between humans

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[307] Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, 27: "It appears that public and private offices who heed ecological expertise must become accustomed to a new normal procedure: the recommendation and instigation of bold, radical conservation steps justified by the statements of our lack of knowledge."

[308] Bruno Latour, "Which Protocol for the New Collective Experiments?" manuscript, 14. http://www.bruno-latour.fr/sites/default/files/P-95-METHODS-EXPERIMENTS.pdf

[309] See Latour, *Never Been Modern*.

and nature. The common world is constituted by humans and nonhumans *together*. This does not mean that cats will now be sent to vote, but that nonhumans are asked by the sciences to show their existence, to let us know what they do and what they are. The nonhumans, who take part in our common world as equal citizens, participate in the public question about what kind of world we want to live in.

The change in constitution is made by letting go of the subject-object couple. Instead of overcoming it, it is retraced to its origins and political use, and deemed simply as one of the products of the moderns. In place of the couple, according to Latour, we may think of: actors, propositions,[310] and associations of humans and nonhumans. The double bind paradox between being connected to the world and being other to it is loosened and scattered in the wider enigma of the cosmos.

Nevertheless, we cannot be completely sure that the paradox simply vanishes. The grip of subjectivity onto the world posing its object in front of herself, the longing of the subject towards the unity of her "I" are matters hard to weaken.[311] At the end of the *Politics of Nature*, Latour makes a fleeting reminder of how the old idea of republic (*res publica*) in the modern constitution was ultimately built on "the most arbitrary of smallest denominators: the king-self."[312] The materialization of the subject into its relational conditions, translations and agencies, as well as the anthropological symmetry between "Us" and "Them" (westerners and other cultures, humans and nonhumans), are powerful political and collective frameworks that can replace the subjective center. In order to accomplish their tasks, we need to find a way to loosen the grip of the subject that perceives itself as "I, mine, my self"[313] against the rest of the world.

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[310] "In its ordinary sense in philosophy, the term designates a statement that may be true of false: it is used here in a metaphysical sense to designate not a being of the world or a linguistic form but an association of humans and nonhumans before it becomes a full fledged member of the collective, an instituted essence. Rather than being true or false, a proposition in this sense may be well or badly articulated. Unlike statements, propositions insist on the dynamics of the collective in search of good articulation, the good cosmos. To avoid repetition, I sometimes say "entities" or "things." Latour, *Politics of Nature*, 247-248.

[311] Pier Aldo Rovatti and Gianni Vattimo, eds., *Il pensiero debole* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2011). Pier Aldo Rovatti, *Inattualità del pensiero debole* (Udine: Forum, 2011).

[312] Latour, *Politics of Nature*, 223. See also Latour, *Factish Gods*, 58.

[313] "This is mine, this is I, this is my self" is a recurrent formula in canonic Theravāda Buddhism and exposes the central task of showing how the empirical self, personal identity as psychophysical unity, is nonexistent, *anattā.*

This is a central question in Naess, framed in terms of wisdom and an expanded "ecological self." In Naess, the ecological crisis opens a space for a spiritual question, rethinking the situatedness of the subject in the world and its belonging to a wider reality.

Despite the very different (opposing for Latour) solutions to the problem of relationism and representation Naess and Latour offer, the knot of subjectivity remains the hardest to unfasten, even though this unfastening appears to be, within this perspective, a fundamental condition for dealing with ecological issues.

It is not by chance, therefore, that Naess turns, among his various sources, to Buddhist elements. Even though Buddhisms do not have the word "subject," most of the Buddhist enlightenment quests revolve around the knot of not-self, and make the issue of egocentric tendencies of subjectivity something similar to an ancient problem that might go beyond its modern constitution in proper "subject" terms. We will see through an interpretation of Nāgārjuna's thinking in which sense, and to what extent, this is meaningful for a dialogue with current environmentalism.

PART 2
EQUIVOCATIONS OF NATURE AND BUDDHISM

CHAPTER 5 - BETWEEN ENVIRONMENTALISM AND EMPTINESS

5.1 - BUDDHISM IN NAESS' ECOSOPHY

Buddhism is a recurring reference in Naess' environmental writing as well as a philosophical-religious world to which he looks up to through his idea of deep ecology.[314]

There are two sites in which Naess instills a dialogue between relevant topics in ecosophy and Buddhist teachings, namely the articles "Gestalt Thinking and Buddhism" (1985) and "Through Spinoza to Mahāyāna Buddhism or Through Mahāyāna Buddhism to Spinoza?"(1977).[315]

In particular, "Gestalt Thinking and Buddhism" makes mixed references to a variety of Buddhist schools: both Theravāda and Mahāyāna; the *Majjhima Nikāya* and the *Dhammapada* in the Pali Canon; the *Visuddhimagga* by Buddhaghosa; the "The Diamond Sutra" of the Prajñāpāramitā; Dōgen; and the *haiku* poetry of Bashō. Dean Curtin mainly recognizes references to Nāgārjuna and Dōgen.[316] The Buddhist references are brought up as a suggestion of a parallelism or dialogue with central ecosophical ideas such as overcoming the subject/object dualism, identification with all life, the insubstantial and impermanent self, intrinsic value, and egalitarianism.

"Through Spinoza to Mahāyāna Buddhism or Through Mahāyāna Buddhism to Spinoza?" discusses instead the concept of liberation in reference to the idea of *vita activa*.

Moreover, all over Naess' environmental, philosophic production are scattered references to a Sanskrit "Buddhist formula," "s*arvaṃ dharmaṃ niḥsvabhāvaṃ*," that

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[314] Arne Naess, "The Deep Ecology Movement: Some Philosophical Aspects," in *Deep Ecology for the 21st Century*, ed. George Sessions (Boston and London: Shambala, 1995), 75.

[315] Arne Naess, "Gestalt Thinking and Buddhism," in *The Ecology of Wisdom: Writings by Arne Naess* ed. Bill Devall and Alan Drengson (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2008) 195-203. Arne Naess, "Through Spinoza to Mahāyāna Buddhism or Through Mahāyāna Buddhism to Spinoza?," in *Spinoza's Philosophy of Man. Proceedings of the Scandinavian Spinoza Symposium 1977*, ed. Jon Wetlesen (Oslo: Oslo University Press, 1978), 136-158.

[316] Deane Curtin, "A State of Mind Like Water: Ecosophy T and the Buddhist Traditions," *Inquiry. Special Edition. Arne Naess's Environmental Thought* 39, no. 2 (1996): 239-255.

Naess renders with the idea that "every element" has no separate and self-subsistent self.[317] This is to be read as a reference to Nāgārjuna's main idea of emptiness.[318]

From a philosophical point of view, the reference to Nāgārjuna and emptiness is the most relevant because it revolves around the central problems Naess raises about the impossibility of a rift between self and nature, which is consequently replaced by the idea of intrinsic relatedness. This usage can be read in excerpts such as the following, "If interrelated phenomena lack substance, essence, or self-existence, as suggested by the Buddhist formula *sarvam dharmam nihsvabhavam*, there is no ultimate ontological gap between self and not-self, humanity and nature."[319]

The depth of Naess' references to Buddhism is shallow at best. Padmasiri de Silva even criticizes Naess for making use of different works for the same purpose. He references both the Buddhist *anātman* and the Hindu *ātman*, one of the main oppositions in Indian philosophy.[320]

Naess, himself, considers Buddhism as an area of interest and possible parallelism, but not one that is necessary for his ecosophy:

> "*relata* [...] are not things or entities in themselves, in spite of the existence of words and phrases suggesting the possibility of isolating each of them. The relations between *relata* are internal. There is a similarity between this view and those expressed by the Buddhist formula *sarvam dharmama nihsvabhavam*. Every element is without 'self-existence.' But the views I defend need no support from Buddhist philosophy. Western tradition suffices."[321]

Nevertheless, Naess' reference to emptiness is worth exploring because, despite its peripheral weight in Naess' production, it allows us to see even more clearly the problems with Naess' relationism as exposed by the parallel with Latour's political ecology. In particular, an analysis of the meaning of emptiness shows that the structure of

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[317] Some recurrences of the "formula" are to be found in: Arne Naess, "Reflections on Gestalt Ontology," *The Trumpeter* 21, no. 1 (2005), 121; Arne Naess, "Heidegger, Postmodern Theory and Deep Ecology," *The Trumpeter* 14, no. 4 (1997): 4, http://trumpeter.athabascau.ca/index.php/trumpet/article/view/175/217

[318] As also Colette Sciberras does. Colette Sciberras, *Buddhist Philosophy and the Ideals of Environmentalism* (PhD diss., Durham University, 2010), 138. http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/535/.

[319] Naess, "Heidegger, Postmodern Theory," 4.

[320] Padmasiri De Silva, *Environmental Philosophy and Ethics in Buddhism* (London: Macmillian Press LTD, 1998).

[321] A. Naess, "Concrete Contents," 419.

representation, and the reliance on the "natural" character of nature are the obstacles that impede ecological relationism from fully understanding itself and from providing an insightful alternative to the humanity/nature divide.

5.2 - EQUIVOCATIONS OF NATURE IN "ECOBUDDHISM"

There has been a considerable amount of interest in the association between various forms of Buddhism and various concepts of environmentalism coming both from Buddhist scholars, engaged Buddhists,[322] and Western philosophers.[323] A few years ago, Ian Harris and Donald Swearer both offered a categorization of the possible approaches that have become established references.[324] A spectrum of proposals have been pinpointed. This runs from an enthusiast endorsement of an environmental value of Buddhist thinking (e.g. Martine Batchelor);[325] to writers who consider Buddhism to have intrinsically environmentalist teachings, and resort to original sources in order to single them out (e.g. Johanna Macy);[326] to skeptical scholars who accept the possibility of constructing an environmental ethics based on Buddhist teachings, although classical Buddhism does not

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[322] Engaged Buddhism is a term created by the Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh. It refers to activist social movements that emerged during the last century applying traditional Buddhist principles to issues of war and peace, economics, the environment, and human rights. The most famous "engaged Buddhist" can be considered H.H. the Dalai Lama. *Cf.* Sallie B. King, *Socially Engaged Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2009).

[323] Some fundamental references include collections such as: Allan Hunt Badiner, *Dharma Gaia: A Harvest of Essays in Buddhism and Ecology* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1990); Tucker and Williams, *Buddhism and Ecology.*

[324] Ian Harris, "Getting to Grips with Buddhist Environmentalism: A Provisional Typology," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 2 (1995): 173-190; Donald K. Swearer, "An Assessment of Buddhist Eco-Philosophy," *The Harvard Theological Review* 99, no. 2 (2006): 123-137. Pragati Sahni, *Environmental Ethics in Buddhism. A Virtues Approach*, (New York: Routledge, 2008), 8-31.

[325] Martine Batchelor and Kerry Brown, *Ecologia buddhista*, trans. L. Dal Lago (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 2000).

[326] Joanna Macy, *Mutual Causality in Buddhism and General Systems Theory: The Dharma of Natural Systems* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991); Joanna Macy, "The Greening of the Self," in *Dharma Gaia*, ed. Badiner, 39-52.

clearly endorse any respect for nature (e.g. Lambert Schmithausen);[327] to, finally, critical scholars who consider the association between Buddhist teachings and environmental tenets as fundamentally based on a series misunderstandings (e.g. Ian Harris).[328]

We can notice a tendency where Buddhist academic scholars are usually more critical about the possibility of simply making parallelisms between ecology and Buddhism. One main criticism regards the lack of a rigorous hermeneutics that can maintain the meaning of the distance (geographical, cultural, and historical) between the discourses in dialogue.[329]

This hermeneutical awareness includes the obvious observation that classical Buddhism has no anachronistic concern, whatsoever, for ecological issues. For example, in his extensive work on environmental attitudes in Early Buddhist primary sources, Lambert Schmithausen points out that Buddhisms show antithetical attitudes to nature, summarized in a "pro-civilization strand" and a "hermit strand."[330] Moreover, from the point of view of the Buddhist analysis of existence nature is practically irrelevant, if not part of the issue, being ultimately unsatisfactory and impermanent.[331]

Another severe element of difficulty is highlighted by Harris when he points out that Buddhism has *no idea of nature*. He suggests a list of possible commonly mentioned Indic terms that may constitute an equivalence to the western nature: *saṃsāra*, *prakṛti*,

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[327] Lambert Schmithausen, *Buddhism and Nature. The Lecture Delivered in Occasion of the EXPO 1990* (Tokyo: Studia Philologica Buddhica, Occasional Papers Series VII, The International Institute for Buddhist Studies, 1991); Lambert Schmithausen, "The Early Buddhist Tradition and Ecological Ethics," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 4 (1997): 1-74. http://jbe.gold.ac.uk; Lambert Schmithausen, "Buddhism and the Ethics of Nature. Some Remarks," *The Eastern Buddhist* 32, no. 2 (2000): 26-78.

[328] Ian Harris, "Buddhism and the Discourse of Environmental Concern: Some Methodological Problems Considered," in *Buddhism and Ecology*, ed. Tucker and Williams, 377-402; Ian Harris, "Buddhist Environmental Ethics and Detraditionalization: The Case of EcoBuddhism," *Religion* 25 (1995): 199-211; Ian Harris, "How Environmentalist is Buddhism?," *Religion* 21 (1991): 101-114; Harris, "Getting to Grips;" Ian Harris, "Causation and *Telos*: The Problem of Buddhist Environmental Ethics," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 1 (1994): 46-57.

[329] Harris, "Buddhism and the Discourse of Environmental Concern."

[330] Schmithausen, *Buddhism and Nature.*

[331] Ibid.

svabhāva, *pratītyasamutpāda*, *dharmadhātu*, *dharmatā*, *dhammajāti*.[332] He also underlines that the question to which extent these richly nuanced terms can refer to nature "has [not] even begun to be answered."[333] According to Harris, the West has developed its concept of nature, first, through the distinction between natural and supernatural, and later on, after the scientific worldview denied the supernatural pole, through a re-appropriation of pre-scientific wholeness similar to a Spinozist *natura naturans.* In order to articulate the impossibility of bringing any of those Indic renderings of nature into the western pattern, Harris develops the example of *saṃsāra*, which, denoting "in its usual sense the totality of sentient beings [*sattvaloka*] caught in the round of life after life,"[334] includes, from the point of view of the West, beings that can fall under the concept of nature, such as animals and beings below sentience, but also "supernatural" elements: hell beings, gods, as well as other regions of reality such as the "triple-decker" classic Buddhist view of the universe.[335]

Some scholars find it safer and more consistent to "limit" themselves to a virtue environmental ethics approach which highlights, for example, the meaning of non-harm [*ahiṃsā*] or compassion [*karuṇā*] for the emancipation of individuals in a, possibly, environmental sense*,* although Buddhist virtues do not have, once again, nature in the range of their interest.[336]

The problem with the criticism of the possibility of a dialogue between Buddhism and environmentalism is that its understanding of nature rests on the same kind of naturalism we have discussed in the previous chapters of this work. Nature having the character of an external reality to the proper human dimension causes equivocations and ambiguities not only to any kind of Buddhist environmentalism, but also to western environmentalism.

This is what Prof. Schmithausen, for example, has in mind when working on Buddhist attitudes towards nature: the nature that is today destructed, exploited or subjugated in the

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[332] Harris, "Buddhism and the Discourse of Environmental Concern," 380-381. With a fair degree of simplification, possible translations are: *saṃsāra* = existential cycle of death-birth; *prakṛti* = fundamental causal force; *svabhāva* = intrinsic nature, identity; *pratītyasamutpāda* = arising from conditions; *dharmadhātu* = essence of the dharmas, *dharmatā* = reality, *dhammajāti* = things perceived by senses.

[333] Ibid.

[334] Ibid., 381.

[335] Ibid.

[336] Sahni, *Environmental Ethics in Buddhism*. Damien Keown, *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics*, Palgrave, New York 2001.

sense of individual and ecosystemic natural entities.[337] In another work, Schmithausen refers precisely to Krebs' definition of nature we discussed earlier.[338]

As Latour points out, "nature" is only one way of framing the world, that distinguishes it from what is considered human (mind, consciousness, opinions, culture, civilization, men, etc). It is precisely this framework, according to the analysis we have unfolded so far, that creates difficulties in the sacrosanct and ambitious objectives of most environmental movements: the possibility of a framework of a common world of humans and nonhumans. As Latour writes, "non-western cultures *have never been interested* in nature; they have never adopted it as a category, they have never found a use for it."[339] Quoting François Jullien's works on the Chinese world, Latour highlights how western nature is the peculiar result of a historical dramatization of nature as externality, and of the battle between human freedom and natural necessity.[340]

The fact that Buddhism does not have an equivalent concept of nature, therefore, does not have to be regarded as an obstacle to environmental meaningful discourses. The West itself has shifting concepts of nature, and should even consider eliminating it altogether, if we listen to Latour's idea of political ecology. Rather, this difficulty is proof that the human/nature axis is not the only way of looking at the world.

The problem, therefore, does not lie in the excellent work of scholars in unfolding complications in "ecobuddhism," nor in the respect they show for the texts, sources, and context, avoiding easy mystifications within difficult intercultural discourses: a guarantee that only their scholarship can grant us. On the contrary, the problem lies in basing the possibility of a meaningful environmental dialogue with Buddhism onto the (im)possibility of the correspondence between Buddhist categories and Western naturalism.

In the association that follows in this work, between Nāgārjuna's concept of emptiness and the previous work on Naess and Latour, there is no attempt to import a "Buddhist idea of nature" or worldview that could replace the western one, not even if "relative" and "insubstantial."

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[337] Schmithausen, *Buddhism and Nature*, 1.

[338] See Chapter 3 of this work. See Schmithausen, "Buddhism and the Ethics of Nature," 26.

[339] Latour, *Politics of Nature*, 43.

[340] Ibid., 265.

The aim is not to offer a plain relational ontology, a representation of nature through an ontology of not-self. Naess risks proposing something like this. The same risk is in Macy's utilization of the doctrine of "dependent origination" [*pratītyasamutpāda*] as a description of ecological open self-regulatory systems.[341]

We will see the kind of movement, and the way of being in the world that "the emptiness of all beings" can offer through the act of deconstructing any "nature", any independent thing, or essence of anything in existence.

5.3 - NAESS, LATOUR, NĀGĀRJUNA

The parallel between Naess, Latour and Nāgārjuna is motivated by the following hypotheses:

- Naess' references to emptiness are mistaken, inasmuch as they essentially put forth an ecological *vision* of interrelation and insubstantiality of selves, while Nāgārjuna's premise is the inconsistency of any vision or worldview precisely *as vision* [*dṛṣṭi*].
- Relationism in ecological thinking entails a more sophisticated operation than simply a paradigm shift to a relational worldview. One viable way of understanding this problem is through Latour's reworking of *representation* and the idea that the "nature" character of nature is itself an obstacle and a source of insurmountable ambiguity for environmentalism, inasmuch as representation is the structure that maintains the subject/object dichotomy in which the two poles posit each other.
- The misunderstanding Naess demonstrates in relation to emptiness is the result of the same difficulty Naess has with representation. Naess poses the problem of the subject/object dichotomy, without acknowledging that his own solution is trapped in the same problem he denounces.

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[341] Joanna Macy, *Mutual Causality*. See Harris, "Causation and *Telos*." In this direction also point Sponberg's critique when he says that "ecobuddhism" often highlights horizontal relational aspects of Buddhist doctrines without deepening the hierarchical and transformative elements. Sponberg, "Green Buddhism and the Hierarchy of Compassion."

- Looking in depth to the meaning of emptiness (in this case mainly through Jay Garfield's interpretation) can help in understanding the import and limits of Naess' relationism for environmentalism.
- The problem of emptiness and the problem of representation can dialogue with each other. Emptiness opens a meaningful space for dialogue with ecology, even though not for the reasons it is usually brought up (ultimately, as a worldview). Emptiness can spark thinking about the kind of exercise required in order to release the grip of the subject onto its external object, as in the structure of representation. This movement can dialogue with the idea of "the end of nature," the central point in Latour's political ecology.

5.4 - The Intercultural Operation

The distance between Nāgārjuna on the one side, and Naess and Latour on the other is nothing less than immense. The operation of bringing them together is not comparative. Just like in Jullien's accusation, comparison allows for the idea that the different texts and the different cultures ultimately speak on the same universal object, as multiple cultural representations of the same underlying positivity.[342] This would be the first and most obvious instance of the multiculturalism/mononaturalism framework (many representations of the same thing out there) from which Latour's critique of nature started.[343]

Nevertheless, there is here a risk to be taken. We can concretely apply the same *principle of irreduction* we saw in Chapter 4 where "Nothing is, by itself, either reducible or irreducible to anything else"[344] to the relation between two (or more) texts. We cannot, and do not want to say that Latour says the same as Nāgārjuna, or that Naess' problem of the subject/object dichotomy is the same as the *emptiness* of *svabhāva* [own-nature].

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[342] François Jullien, *Contro la comparazione*, ed. Marcello Ghilardi (Milan and Udine: Mimesis, 2014). Giangiorgio Pasqualotto, *Per una filosofia interculturale* (Milan: Mimesis, 2008), 35-57. See Michel Foucault, *Le parole e le cose: un'archeologia delle scienze umane* (Milan: BUR, 1998, Kindle Edition).

[343] And, indeed, Latour does not hide his anthropological pedigree. See in particular how the "Us"/"Them" divide is a function of the more general modern human/nature divide. Latour, *Never Been Modern*; Latour, *Factish Gods*; and Latour, *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence*.

[344] Latour, *Pasteurization*, 158.

In the relation between them, however, a *displacement*, a *translation*, and a *betrayal* happen between different actants, which are in this case the texts, their traditions, their scholarships, their problems, the network of their conditions of existence. What Latour wrote about actants can also be set into motion in this little concrete case: "Either the same is said and nothing is said, or something is said but it is something else. A choice must be made. It all depends on the distance that we are prepared to cover and the forces that we are prepared to coax as we try to make words that are infinitely distant equivalent."[345]

In the hope that this work can create the space for thinking endowed with a geometry that would not be possible without this dialogue, we can only make sure that the steps and elements that come into play are traceable. This cannot but be an asymmetrical geometry. We do not possess the skills of a scholar in Sanskrit, therefore, we rely on a higher number of passages, which in this case are recognized interpretations and translations through which Nāgārjuna's main work, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, has already been brought into accessibility for western philosophy.

In the unfolding of the concept of emptiness and its possible contribution to the problem of ecology without a worldview of external nature, we will only make use of Nāgārjuna's exposition, as it is found in the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* text, mainly relying on Garfield's interpretation. We will try to respect the internal movement of the text and its concepts within its hermeneutical context in the hope that a little space is opened where our original problem can be tested.

[345] Latour, *Pasteurization*, 181. See also ibid., 178.

CHAPTER 6 - NĀGĀRJUNA: MUNDANE REALITY AND EMPTINESS

6.1 - NĀGĀRJUNA AND THE MŪLAMADHYAMAKAKĀRIKĀ

The Indian philosopher Nāgārjuna is probably the most important and influential figure in Buddhist history, after the historical Buddha Siddhārta Gautama. He is known as the founder of the Mādhyamika school [Middle Way] of the Mahāyāna Buddhism [Great Vehicle]. The most credited biographical interpretation speaks of a Buddhist monk who lived at the end the 2nd Century A.D. in the Andhra region, in the central-east India.[346]

As if the dialogical space to be bridged between current environmentalist theory and a 2nd Century Buddhist monk were not enough, historians and scholars do not even agree on Nāgārjuna's identity. Historical sources are mainly hagiographical and contain numerous mythical elements such as the practice of alchemic arts and etiological episodes through which the name and relevance of Nāgārjuna are explained in the Buddhist world.[347] Not only are the details of Nāgārjuna's life hard to reconstruct, but even an agreement about his historical figure is not unanimous. There are some who maintain that his figure is the result of two to four overlapping different Nāgārjunas, who lived in different times and regions of India. Despite the impossibility of resolving these uncertainties, recent studies[348] defend the plausibility of the majoritarian interpretation of the monk Nāgārjuna who really existed

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[346] Raniero Gnoli, *La Rivelazione del Buddha* (Milan: Mondadori, 2004), Vol. 2, CXIII-CXX.

[347] One of the recurring elements in Nāgārjuna's traditional biographies is the episode of the *Nāgas*, the snakes that would have delivered to the *brāhmaṇ* the *sūtras* on the Perfection of Wisdom (the first Mahāyāna literature of the Prajñāpāramitā), leading him to convert to Buddhism. See the recent reconstruction by Joseph Walser, *Nāgārjuna in Context: Mahāyāna Buddhism and Early Indian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), pp. 59-88. This is an attempt to put order between different studies and interpretations about the philosopher's life, comparing them with epigraphical sources and adopting a sociological approach. See also Paul Williams, *Il Buddhismo Mahāyāna*, trans. G. Milanetti (Rome: Ubaldini, 1983), pp. 69-71; Emanuela Magno, *Nāgārjuna: Logica, dialettica, soteriologia* (Milan-Udine: Mimesis, 2012), pp. 48-55.

[348] *Cf*. Walser, *Nāgārjuna in Context*, 60.

at the end of the 2nd Century A.D. and who is the author of some central works in the Mahāyāna literature.[349]

Even if questions of authenticity about Nāgārjuna's figure and works have an intrinsic importance, his philosophical relevance is related to the exceptional grade of his historical and philosophical influence. 1800 years of hermeneutical tradition in Asia, and an increasing interest of the West in the last century, make him one of the most relevant Buddhist philosophers of the Great Vehicle. His philosophical school of the Middle Way [Mādhyamika] or of Emptiness [Śūnyatāvāda] formulates the foundational doctrine of the Mahāyāna Buddhist world and the teachings at the basis of Tibetan Buddhism. It has spread throughout China, Japan, and Corea,[350] and has influenced other Indian philosophical strains such as Vedānta.[351] Despite the when, where, and how of many of the historical Nāgārjunas, this intersubjective Nāgārjuna has a philosophical weight difficult to ignore. He lives through interpretations and traditions, always necessary in order to grasp the meaning of his thinking. This is not merely a general hermeneutical point, but also a necessity in relation to the hermetic character of Nāgārjuna's texts, including his fundamental *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*.[352]

The *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* is the fundamental *śāstra*[353] of Middle Way Buddhism and its theoretical heart. The title is translated as "Stanzas - or Verses - on the Middle

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[349] Among the several works ascribed to Nāgārjuna, it is common to present as authentic and sufficiently representative the six works the Tibetan tradition of Buddhism credited to him.

This thesis is defended by Jan Westerhoff, *Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka: A Philosophical Introduction* (Oxford - New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 5-6. *Cf*. Paul Williams, *Buddhist Thought: A Complete Introduction to the Indian Tradition* (London: Routledge, 2000), 141-142; Magno, *Nāgārjuna*, 80-83; Seyfort D. Ruegg, *The Literature of the Mādhyamaka School of Philosophy in India* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz), 1981.

[350] Williams, *Il Buddhismo Mahāyāna*, 90-93.

[351] As Magno, *Nāgārjuna*, 48 and T.R.V. Murti, *La filosofia centrale del Buddhismo*, trans. Francesco Pregadio (Rome: Ubaldini, 1983) report, this amounts to an influence on the almost totality of traditional schools existing nowadays in the Buddhist world, excluding Theravāda Pali Buddhism.

[352] Huntington reports some disputes about the hermeneutics of Nāgārjuna's interpretations between scholarships which extract objective logical reasoning from his texts and those who insists on historical exegesis. C.W. Huntington Jr., "The Nature of the Mādhyamika Trick," *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 35 (2007): 103–111. The most careful translators and commentators usually do not exempt themselves from declaring on which traditions their study is based, both in reference to the ancient interpretative distinctions that emerged in the Indian and Tibetan debates (the two main lines of Mādhyamika philosophy: Svātrantika and Prāsaṅgika), and in terms of western philosophical provenance.

[353] "treatise" (sanskrit).

Way."[354] As explained by Siderits,[355] the text is conceived in complement to a master's commentary. The verse form [*kārikā*] is meant to ease its memorization for the student, who later explored its philosophical content through the masters' comments. These comments put in written form are the origin of the tradition of commentaries in which the Middle Way school unfolds its philosophy.[356]

The Mādhyamika, literally meaning "he who proclaims the middle way *par excellence*"[357] presents itself as the philosophical, systematic exposition of the Mahāyāna strain. More precisely it deals with the formulation of the emptiness of all things, which was already present in the Prajñāpāramitā literature. The middle way *par excellence* means that the Mādhyamika brings to its deeper consequences the middle way doctrine, which was already preached by the Buddha. The Buddha's middle way [*madhyamā pratipad*] is the way of liberation from sorrow. It has both theoretical and ethical significance of withdrawal from extreme positions. The ethical dimension focuses on aversion from mortifying the body and from exceeding in indulgent behavior, while the theoretical focuses on a retreat from the metaphysical extremes of both substantialism and nihilism.

The strategic objective of early Buddhism is the dismantling of the sense of "I" and its objects, which build up the necessity and illusion of a personal identity. With the Mahāyāna, the accent shifts onto the lack of self, or intrinsic nature of all phenomena in existence. As Garfield summarizes, the central theme of most Buddhist traditions, in general, revolves around the existential problem of suffering, and the egocentric tendencies it generates, which in turn perpetuate it. These are grounded in a fundamental confusion about reality, because we take what is interdependent, impermanent and essenceless (both on the subject and on the object sides) to be independent, enduring and substantial. This

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[354] Williams, *Buddhist Thought*, 141; Magno, *Nāgārjuna*, 48.

[355] In the most recent translation of the MMK available in a European language: Mark Siderits and Shoryu Katsura, *Nāgārjuna's Middle Way: Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2013).

[356] Murti, *La filosofia centrale*, 55-89. Williams, *Il Buddhismo Mahāyāna.* Seyfort D. Ruegg, *The Literature of the Mādhyamaka School of Philosophy in India* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1981).

[357] Magno, *Nāgārjuna*, 68. Both the term Mādhyamika and the title *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* are not self-definitions by Nāgārjuna, but are to be found in Candrakīrti (VI-VII sec. d.C.). Ibid.

attitude, as urged in Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra*[358] is considered an innate cognitive instinct. The extirpation of this "ignorance" requires both philosophical reflection and the cultivation of a moral sensitivity that loosens the attachment and aversion gestures implicated in the instinctual metaphysical error.[359] Reflective thought has to become "experiential knowledge," a spontaneous cognitive set, a way of being in the world.

The *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* is one of the highest and sophisticated interpretations of Buddhist phenomenology, and of the famous "silence of the Buddha" in front of metaphysical definitive affirmations.[360]

The continuity of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* with the original word of Buddha and its critical belonging to the cultural and religious Buddhist framework[361] is reclaimed in the text on an apparently curious road: a *reductio ad absurdum* to a logical contradiction of all the Buddhist doctrines from within a Buddhist framework.

Nāgārjuna's critical target is the Ābhidharmika scholastic: the phase in Buddhist reflection that began after the death of Gautama Buddha (486 B.C.), in which different sects soon differentiated within the Buddhist community and systematized the Buddhist doctrinal identity.[362] Abhidharma [metaphysics or ulterior doctrine] aims to give a rational

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[358] Maybe the most important text about ethics for Mahāyāna Buddhism. Jay Garfileld, "What Is It Like to Be a Bodhisattva? Moral Phenomenology in Śāntideva's Bodhicaryāvatāra," Manuscript. http://www.smith.edu/philosophy/documents/WhatisitLiketobeaBodhisattvaforJIABS.pdf

[359] Ibid.

[360] Murti, *La filosofia centrale.*

[361] See Williams, *Buddhist Thought*, 140: "Just as Mahāyāna Buddhism as a whole can best be seen as a vision, an aspiration, within a Buddhism which therefore in itself is non-Mahāyāna, mainstream Buddhism, so I think Mahāyāna philosophy should be understood as a particular expression of and response to Buddhist philosophy as a whole. The name for Buddhist philosophy as a whole, it seems to me, is 'Abhidharma', in the sense that Abhidharma sets the agenda, the presuppositions and the framework for Buddhist philosophical thought."

[362] There are two Ābhidharmika canonical collections surviving today: the Theravāda Abhidhamma of the Pali Canon, and the Sarvāstivāda (Vaibhāṣika) Abhidharma, mainly in Chinese translations. Williams, *Buddhist Thought*, 87. Nāgārjuna's opponent is established to be, in particular, the Sarvāstivāda school. See Murti, *La filosofia centrale*; Magno, *Nāgārjuna*, 55-67. The characters common to the Ābhidharmika schools are summarized by Siderits and Katsura, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, 4-7: 1) There are two levels of reality or truth: a conventional and an ultimate one; 2) Only dharmas(elements) are ultimately real; 3) Dharmas are originated in dependence of causes and conditions; 4) Dharmas have intrinsic nature [*svabhāva*]; 5) Liberation from sorrow is achieved through knowledge of the ultimate reality of self and world.

and systematic sense to the ultimate truth underlying Buddha's teaching, which originally is characterized by a rather pragmatic, pedagogical and soteriological accent.[363]

The relationship of Nāgārjuna's text with his tradition are the political and sociological dimensions that have been highlighted by Walser's recent study. Walser's hypothesis has the value of deflating the traditional Murti's Hegelian reading of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, which risks presenting the Mādhyamika as the *Aufhebung* of Buddha's word in a linear progression of Buddhist exegesis history.[364] Moreover, Walser demythologizes Nāgārjuna's figure, as well as the theoretical purity of the reasoning in his text:[365] a problem that should be taken into consideration in intercultural operations of comment. If we avoid falling into a completely sociological reductionism of the philosophical significance of the text, it is interesting recognizing to recognize the hermeneutical space of Mahāyāna's transformations and practices intertwining new watchwords and teachings, most significantly of all with the expansion of the Buddhist community to lay dimensions (from which the term Great Vehicle comes).[366]

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[363] *Cf*. Huntington, "Mādhyamika Trick," 112. See the metaphor of the *raft*, current in canonical texts, according to which the Dharma, the teaching, is a raft that needs to be abandoned on the river bank after it is crossed. See "Alagaddūpamasutta," *Majjhima Nikāya*, 22 in *La rivelazione del Buddha*, ed. Raniero Gnoli (Milan: Mondadori, 2001), vol. 1, 239-240; "Mahātaṇhāsaṅkhayasutta," *Majjhima Nikāya*, 38 in *La rivelazione del Buddha*, ed. Gnoli, vol. 1, 29; *Suttanipāta*, 1, in *La rivelazione del Buddha*, ed. Gnoli, vol. 1, 847. A post-canonic variation of this strongly pragmatic and transformative nature of Buddha's messages, as opposed to truth formulations, is to be found in the Mahāyāna doctrine of the *upāya kauśalya* or "skill in means [for salvation]." Teachings are here conceived as stratagems that can be adapted to the audience in order to trigger a change. Damien Keown, *Dictionary of Buddhism* (Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press 2003), 318; Michael Pye, *Skilful Means. A Concept in Mahāyāna Buddhism* (London: Duckworth, 1978).

[364] See for example in reference to the examination of the silence of the Buddha: Murti, *La filosofia centrale*, 40-54.

[365] Nāgārjuna's monastic context, for example, was a mixed one from the a doctrinal point of view. Mahāyāna was still in the minority and the dialogue with the authority of the Buddhist tradition at the time was a premise for putting forth new ideas, and have the discontinuity of the Great Vehicle accepted. Walser puts it with an interesting metaphor: it is like saying that the monk needed to get published. Walser, *Nāgārjuna in Context*. *Cf*. Magno, *Nāgārjuna*.

[366] From this expansion and opening of the Buddhist community come the terms Mahāyāna and its derogatory counterpart Hīnayāna [small vehicle] accorded to canonic Buddhism. See Williams, *Il Buddhismo Mahāyāna*. See distinctions between "canonic Buddhism," Hīnayāna, Theravādin, Pali Buddhism and Early Buddhism in Magno, *Nāgārjuna*, 44.

6.2 - Emptiness and its Fundamental Elements in the Mūlamadhyamakakārikā[367]

The *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* is a small treaty on the fundamental theme of emptiness [*śūnyatā*]. The central concept around which the whole text revolves is that everything is empty [*śūnya*] of its own nature [*svabhāva*].[368] The philosophical and soteriological objective of the treaty is the attack on the ontological prejudice of the "in itself" of entities.

The emptiness of every being means, in its first sense, that everything existent is conditioned and relative. This is the meaning of the *pratītyasamutpāda* [dependent origination], the fundamental doctrine of Buddhism together with that of not-self [*anātman*]. Everything arises from causes and conditions, has no substance and cannot be conceived as independent.

The ontological prejudice of the essence of things hides at the bottom of *every dṛṣṭi*. Literally speaking, *dṛṣṭi* is *vision*,[369] and its translation is delimited by the concepts of opinion, point of view, perspective, worldview, theory, and philosophical system.[370]

Every conceptualization, then, brings with itself an irreconcilable contradiction. Both every naive object present in perception and experience, and every philosophical speculation about the world reify something that is entirely relative and insubstantial.

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[367] I will refer mainly to Jay L. Garfield's translation and interpretation, comparing it within central points to the recent translation by Mark Siderits and the translation by Emanuela Magno, as well as to other interpretations. It is more of a philosophical than a philological choice because Garfield's way of highlighting the paradoxical character of emptiness both on epistemological and ontological levels seems more pregnant than other readings for a dialogue with the kind of topics I have brought up in this work. Nevertheless, Garfield's effort of making the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* accessible for philosophical dialogue does not sacrifice philological commitment and a precise hermeneutical contextualization within the Indo-Tibetan tradition of interpretation of Nāgārjuna, in which the scholar has been directly trained. Jay L. Garfield, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Nāgārjuna's Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Siderits and Katsura, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*; Magno, *Nāgārjuna.* For an account of translations and critical editions of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, see Appendix 5.

[368] Thanks to Candrakīrti's comment, *svabhāva* is translated as "intrinsic" or "own nature." In Sanskrit, *sva* is equivalent to the English *own*, and *bhāva* comes from the root √*bhū*, to be, to become, to exist. Candrakīrti (VI-VII secolo d.C.) is maybe the most important commentator on the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, at least among the commentaries extant today. To Candrakīrti we owe the "original" Sanskrit text of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* within his commentary, the *Prasannapadā*.

[369] From the Sanskrit root √*dṛś*, "to see."

[370] *Cf*. Rohana Seneviratne, "Seeing is Believing thence Knowing," manuscript, University of Oxford, http://users.ox.ac.uk/~pemb3753/media/Seeing.is.Believing.pdf. The author, for example, highlights that the declension of √*dṛś*, "*darśana*," means "philosophy" or "profound thinking" and is "heavily pregnant with both meanings 'seeing' and 'knowing/perception'." Ibid., 4.

Making sense of emptiness and seeing its deep implications means, therefore, circumscribing a paradox that has to do with a practical and ethical dimension of thinking in its gesture of grasping reality, and in direct connection with the possibility of enlightenment [*bodhi*] and liberation from sorrow.

In order to outline a possible understanding of emptiness and its implications, it is necessary to refer to some fundamental elements of the emptiness discourse contained in the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*.

Emptiness is never defined in the text. It is merely associated with the operations of negation of all the possible positions that describe any Buddhist philosophical element describing existence, the sphere of personal self, or the world. Every chapter of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* deconstructs a theory or a doctrine, and its defining value, using the critical method of *prasaṅga*, literally "bringing to consequence," or *reductio ad absurdum*.

Every possible predication of an object is negated by making use of two-valued logic. Differing with the Aristotelian logic, a foundational framework is rejected and any attempt to resort to an essentialist view leads to contradiction. This is testified by the possible predications of every entity, which are not two but four in the renowned "four-cornered negation" or tetralemma [*catuṣkoṭi*], according to which, either something:

1) is
2) is not
3) both is and is not
4) neither is, nor is not

Everyone of the 4 conceivable predications is negated through a *reductio ad absurdum*.

The logical methodology of the text immediately creates a paradoxical atmosphere. Not only the principle of non-contradiction and the principle of *tertium non datur* are not reliable instruments for the knowledge of reality, but Nāgārjuna's logic itself, which still

makes use of a two-valued logic in which contradictions are meaningful,[371] creates its own short-circuits.[372]

The discourse, indeed, proceeds indirectly evoking a continuous impurity: not pointing to an error in reasoning to be fixed, nor an irrational strategy, nor an agnostic *epoché*,[373] but the effect of a necessary movement of thought, a swinging between different logic plans that are invoked every time the discourse attempts to stick to one in order to describe "what something is." Every possible predication of an existing object is affirmed and immediately negated. Any act that tries to cut this referential swinging condemns our knowledge to convention, opinion, or worse, condemns our "I" to surrender in front of its desperate need of foundation, dwelling in sorrow.

The negation of all the four possible predications, by showing that each and any of them has an empty object, does not aim to discover a possible ulterior view or position. The operation of rational thinking, which cannot but disprove itself through its own power and making use of its own rational rules (which are, therefore, affirmed as valid), is one of the fundamental elements of Mādhyamaka. This fundamental element never recurs to posit emptiness as an ulterior vision or philosophical position.[374]

This theme is not secondary, and marks one of the fundamental philosophical knots of the Middle Way school. In regard to this, it is necessary to mention that in the *Vigrahavyāvartanī*[375] Nāgārjuna defends himself from the objection of his contemporary

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[371] There are not other truth value in use, other than the two true and false. See Magno, *Nāgārjuna*, 123-124. *Cf.* Jay L. Garfield and Graham Priest, "Nāgārjuna and the Limits of Thought," *Philosophy East and West* 53, no. 1 (2003): 7-10.

[372] This vision of logic that destroys itself is adversed by the formalist interpretation of Robinson who talks of a mere "Mādhyamaka trick." Richard H. Robinson, "Did Nāgārjuna Really Refute All Philosophical Views?" *Philosophy East and West* 22, no. 3 (1972): 325-331. Magno, *Nāgārjuna*, 242.

[373] On emptiness and ancient skepticism see Jay L. Garfield, "Epoché and Śūnyatā: Scepticism East and West," *Philosophy East and West* 40, no. 3 (1990): 285-308.

[374] At least in the strain of interpretation we are following. Indeed, around the question of whether the Mādhyamaka is a philosophy or merely a deconstructive act, the two main schools, Svātrantika and Prasaṅgika separate relatively soon. Garfield refers to the prasaṅgika line, that runs from Candrakīrti's commentary to Āryadeva and Śāntideva up to Tibetan Buddhism today. See also Seyfort D. Ruegg, "Does the Mādhyamika Have a Thesis and Philosophical Position?" in *Buddhist Logic and Epistemology*, ed. B.K. Matilal and R.D. Evans (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1986), 233-236.

[375] The other text attributed to Nāgārjuna without much disagreement. See Williams, *Buddhist Thought*, 142: "The *Vigrahavyāvartanī*; verses extant in Sanskrit together with an autocommentary —a reply by Nāgārjuna to his critics." The objections taken into consideration come from both Buddhist and non-Buddhist adversaries, such as the Vedic school Nyāya.

critics that accuse him of proposing emptiness as an absurd. In their understanding, in fact, the Mādhyamika statement *par excellence*, "all entities [*bhāva*] are empty [*śūnya*] of self-nature [*svabhāva*]" represents an absurd, inasmuch as it would be an empty statement if it were true, and therefore it could not affirm what it affirms.[376] To the accusation, Nāgārjuna replies that there is no absurd, because he simply does not have a thesis ["I have no *pratijñā*"].[377]

As Seyfort Ruegg explains, the refusal of a "philosophical thesis of emptiness" is based on three internal premises of the Middle Way.[378]

1) On a logical, ontological, and epistemological level,[379] the binary structure of conceptual thinking carries the original mark of contradiction. Every affirmation not only raises a negation, but reveals to be in itself a negation, not standing, inasmuch as it predicates an empty object.[380] Neither a thesis, nor a counter-thesis holds in fact, even less does a thesis about emptiness.[381]

Understanding the emptiness of things as a theory means reifying emptiness itself, completely missing the point and turning philosophy into a discourse that can only reify or annihilate, instead of understanding the relatedness of reality. In the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* 24.11, Nāgārjuna admonishes not slipping into a dangerous misunderstanding of emptiness:

> By a misperception of emptiness
> A person of little intelligence is destroyed.
> Like a snake incorrectly seized

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[376] "If [as you maintain] no-self-nature (*svabhāva*) exists for all entities (*bhāva*), then your [own] statement (*vacana*) [that all *bhāvas* are empty of self nature, which is therefore itself] also without self-nature, cannot controvert self-nature [which I maintain]." Ruegg, "Does the Mādhyamika Have a Thesis," 229.

[377] Ibid.

[378] Ibid., 230-231.

[379] Ibid., 231.

[380] See Ian W. Mabbett, "Nāgārjuna and Deconstruction," *Philosophy East & West* 45, no. 2 (1995): 203-225.

[381] Ruegg, "Does the Mādhyamika Have a Thesis," 230-231.

Or like a spell incorrectly cast.[382]

Indeed, strictly speaking, the emptiness of things cannot be either said, nor negated. As argued in *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* 22.11:

Empty should not be asserted.
"Nonempty" should not be asserted.
Neither both nor neither should be asserted.
They are only used nominally.[383]

As Siderits and Katsura comment, empty is itself empty.[384] All conceivable predications of emptiness [*catuṣkoṭi*] need to be rejected. This is not absurd. Emptiness can be at best nominated with a practical, pedagogical value. The authors add a comment from Bhāvaviveka clarifying this topic:[385] those who claim the absurdity of emptiness because affirming that all entities are empty of self-nature equals making a positive statement on reality's self-nature are mistaken. It is like someone who, wishing to prevent sound, utters "Quiet!"[386] The two ways this comment can be interpreted highlight a fundamental tension in the predication of emptiness: on the one hand emptiness is emphasized in its negative task of rejecting false statements about reality; on the other hand, emptiness can emphasize the necessity of making statements about reality, although these are only effective in different contexts inextricably correlated to their practical aims.[387]

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[382] Garfield's translation. Garfield, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, 68.

[383] Garfield, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, 280. Siderits' translation is in tune: "It is empty" is not to be said, nor "It is non-empty," / nor that it is both, nor that it is neither; ["empty"] is said only / for the sake of instruction. Siderits and Katsura, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, 247.

[384] As it will be explored more in depth with the central "metaphysical" stanza, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, 24.18.

[385] Siderits and Katsura, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, 248.

[386] Ibid., 247. Nevertheless, Siderits proposes a semantic interpretation of emptiness that is not the same as Garfield's, where the latter points out both the epistemological and the ontological importance of it. The way Siderits puts it highlights that emptiness means the impossibility of predicating anything about the ultimate nature of reality. See: Jay L. Garfield, "Mādhyamaka is Not Nihilism," in press. http://www.smith.edu/philosophy/docs/garfield_nihilism.pdf; Jay L. Garfield, "Dependent Arising and the Emptiness of Emptiness. Why Did Nagarjuna Start with Causation?" *Philosophy East and West* 44, no. 2 (1994): 219-250. Mark Siderits, "On the Soteriological Significance of Emptiness," *Contemporary Buddhism* 4, no. 1 (2003): 9–24. See also Mark Siderits, "Nāgārjuna as anti-realist," *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 16, no. 4 (1988): 311–325. See also Giuseppe Ferraro, "A Criticism of M. Siderits and J. L. Garfield's 'Semantic Interpretation' of Nāgārjuna's Theory of Two Truths," Journal of Indian Philosophy, 41 (2013): 195-219.

[387] Siderits and Katsura, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, 247-249.

The second premise of the Middle Way that excludes the possibility of understanding the *śūnyatā* as a speculative element regards the ethical character of reasoning through emptiness:

2) The deconstructive reasoning of the *prasaṅga* [*reductio ad absurdum*] is the opposite of fighting a conflict between philosophical positions. The *prasaṅga* has an ethical purpose of reducing hostility by leading the rival to self recognize a contradiction in his vision, without attempting to convince him of someone else's vision.[388]

There is an ethical aspect in emptiness that is related to loosening the affirmative, superimposing force of one's vision. Finally,

3) At the level of ultimate reality [*paramārtha*], only the "silent of the saints" is appropriate.[389]

As Ruegg explains, this is not to be understood as agnosticism or an antirational, antiphilosophical statement. "I have no thesis [*pratijñā*]" about emptiness is not to be understood as a prohibition to talk. The problem with predication in general is seen in the character of positing an entity (a *svabhāva*) typical of the assertive character of language.[390]

Nevertheless, this last point might be the most delicate, which concerns the emptiness of all existence. The point introduces a central aspect of the Middle Way "tool box," which is necessary to mention in order to understand the swinging between affirming and not affirming emptiness. This is the doctrine of two truths or realities [*dve satye*]. These are enunciated in the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* 24.8-10:

The Buddha's teaching of the Dharma
Is based on two truths:
A truth of worldly convention
And an ultimate truth.

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[388] Ruegg, "Does the Mādhyamika Have a Thesis," 231.

[389] Ruegg is quoting Śāntideva's *Bodhicāryavatāra* here.

[390] Ibid., 234-236.

Those who do not understand
The distinction drawn between these two truths
Do not understand
The Buddha's profound truth.

Without a foundation in the conventional truth,[391]
The significance of the ultimate truth cannot be taught.
Without understanding the significance of the ultimate
Liberation is not achieved.[392]

The ambiguity in the translation of *dve satye*, often indifferently rendered as "two truths" or "two realities" is not always openly explained.[393] This point does not merely raise a problem of translation entanglement, but rather the necessity to reckon with the philosophical sense of emptiness itself between semantics and ontology.[394]

The relative truth of the mundane dimension, *saṃvṛti satya* o *vyavahāra satya*, describes the conditioned, dependent, and relative nature of all phenomena. The Buddhist doctrine *par excellence* describing the emergence of phenomena as events, according to relation and condition is the *pratītyasamutpāda.*

In a first sense, the conventional truth refers to phenomenal reality, existence itself, described in the Buddhist phenomenology by the simultaneous emergence of phenomena in their dependent origination. The short formula recounted in the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* recites, "When this exists so this will be."[395] Phenomena are not separate events, which we

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[391] This verse (24.10a) is translated by Gnoli as "without relying on the practical order of things." Raniero Gnoli, *La Rivelazione del Buddha* (Milan: Mondadori, 2004), vol. 2, 634. My translation. Siderits stresses the meaning of *vyavahāra* as "customary ways of *talking and thinking*" or "commonsense beliefs." Siderits and Katsura, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, 274.

[392] Garfield, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, 296-299.

[393] *Cf*. for example Williams, *Il Buddhismo Mahāyāna*, 85 where the scholar says Buddhism had established for a long time a distinction between two truths, "or better, two levels of reality."

[394] In fact, the two truths are not a new concept in Buddhism. The Abhidharma distinguished between naive, commonsense convictions useful in the everyday world, and statements of metaphysical import about the nature of reality. Siderits and Katsura, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, 4. Therefore, the interpretation of emptiness clarifies that of the *dve satye* and its peculiarity in the Mādhyamaka context.

[395] Garfield, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, 4 (Verse 1.10). For the long exposition of the *pratītyasamutpāda* see *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, 26: the examination of the twelve links that describe the conditionality and interdependence in the context of human existence. We remind here the twelve links: 1) ignorance; 2) volition; 3) consciousness; 4) *nāmārūpa* (the groups of psychophysical elements); 5) the six sense organs; 6) contact; 7) feeling; 8) desire; 9) appropriation; 10) being; 11) birth; 12) suffering (old age and death). See Siderits and Katsura, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, 307-308.

can connect by causal relations, but they emerge conditioned and conditioning, as conditions of existence to all other phenomena.[396] According to Garfield, the conditionality of phenomena is central for the understanding of conventional reality, and therefore, for the understanding of what emptiness is. The centrality of the *pratītyasamutpāda* would be testified by the position of dependent arising in the beginning of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, being "Conditions" the first of the Buddhist doctrines criticized by the text.[397] In particular, the thesis of Nāgārjuna in the interpretation of the *pratītyasamutpāda* defends the idea of phenomena as events arising by multiple conditions of existence, expressing regularities in nature, and refuses to reify the *relata* of the dependent arising by offering a reading of the *pratītyasamutpāda* as causation. Therefore, the doctrine of the emptiness of causation and the *pratītyasamutpāda* paradoxically coincide.[398]

Moreover, following Candrakīrti's comment, Garfield explains that the *saṃvṛti* [conventional truth of the worldly dimension] is conditioned in three senses:

1) the everyday perception of things, or common sense
2) a transactional agreement or social construction
3) a dependency on a particular linguistic convention.

In this sense, according to the conventional truth, things *appear* as objects in the moment we grasp them, we perceive them, we name them, and the procedure is legitimate in the everyday world of conventions.

Saṃvṛti is also presented as the *concealing*, deceiving character of phenomenal reality. Still following Candrakīrti, what the *saṃvṛti* occults is simply and precisely the relativity and conditionality of phenomena, that is to say, their emptiness.[399]

The ultimate truth [*paramārtha satya*], according to the *prasaṅgika* tradition conveyed by Garfield's interpretation, is neither an extra-worldly dimension, nor the *noumenon*

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[396] *Cf*. *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, 1.

[397] Garfield, "Dependent Arising."

[398] As will be clearer in *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, 24.18, "the central verse" of the work. This concept is looked at more closely later on in this chapter. See Garfield, "Dependent Arising."

[399] Garfield and Priest, "Limits of Thought," 5.

underlying *phenomena*,[400] nor the ineffable that cannot be predicated. It is a change of look, the look of those who have realized the conditionality and interdependent relativity of all entities, freeing themselves both from a representative illusion where language matches its objects, and from the natural cognitive tendency to consider phenomena as independent external objects that can be possessed, desired, and observed. The difference between the *dve satye* is to be understood in this sense.[401]

With this said, it is possible to disentangle the meaning of *śūnyatā* a little in the way it is presented within the celebrated "central" stanza of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*. The stanza is considered to contain the whole Mādhyamika system in a nutshell.[402]

Mūlamadhyamakakārikā 24.18:

Whatever is dependently co-arisen
That is explained to be emptiness.
That being a dependent designation,
Is itself the middle way.[403]

The verses condense the quadruple equivalence of:

- dependent origination [*pratītyasamutpāda*]
- emptiness [*śūnyatā*]
- linguistic designation [*prajñaptir upādāya*]
- Middle Way [*madhyamā*].

First of all, emptiness is "dependent origination" [*pratītyasamutpāda*]. The idea that all existents are dependently arisen phenomena, empty of intrinsic nature, means that the Middle Way refuses the idea of a substance. Everything is interdependent and radically

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[400] *vs* Murti's classical Kantian interpretation, according to which the *saṃvṛti* is the phenomenal world, while the *paramārtha* is the absolute of the *noumenon* that can be accessed by the non-dual intuition of *prajñā*, cultivated insight or wisdom. See Garfield, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, 297.

[401] Garfield and Priest, "Limits of Thought," 5-6.

[402] Garfield, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, 304.

[403] Garfield's translation. Garfield, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, 304. The Sanskrit text recites: "*yaḥ pratītyasamutpādaḥ śūnyatāṃ tāṃ pracakṣmahe / sā prajñaptir upādāya pratipat saiva madhyamā* //. Siderits and Katsura, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, 277. Katsura and Siderits translate the central verse as: "Dependent origination we declare to be emptiness. It [emptiness] is a dependent concept; just that is the middle path." Magno translates *prajñaptir upādāy*a as "linguistic designation," instead of dependent designation. Magno, *Nāgārjuna*, 323.

relative. The levels of this interdependence are the ones attributed to conditioned reality: language, social transaction, perception, and the phenomenology of the *pratītyasamutpāda*. Therefore, reality is conditioned, the world is empty of essences.

Emptiness is, moreover, a "dependent designation" [*prajñaptir upādāya*]. Emptiness itself is empty. It is not an object to be predicated. This is what Candrakīrti will later call "the emptiness of emptiness" [*śūnyatāśūnyatā*], in which emptiness, the key concept of Mādhyamaka, is deconstructed and, indeed, can never be offered as a thesis itself, a worldview. Emptiness cannot be objectified. It is not nihilistic essence, which would make it precisely an essence of nothingness, and, therefore, would reduce emptiness to the circularity of the two hypostatizations of substance and nothingness, which the Middle Way refutes.

Finally, emptiness is equivalent to the "Middle Way," that is to say, to the Buddha's teaching as a middle path. In this sense, the character of emptiness is to avoid both reification and annihilation. The two extremes presuppose the idea that to exist is to exist inherently, have a nature. Therefore, they entail each other. If we reify the conventional world, emptiness cannot but be nihilistic. If we reify emptiness, our phenomenal world cannot but be denied nihilistically.

Emptiness cannot be a representation of reality, but it is the act of emptying every kind of representative thinking. This gesture of emptying is the soteriological exercise that constitutes the practice of the Middle Way philosophy. Emptying is not the annihilation of thought. It is the exercise of a look that does not see an object out there, nor a solid reality identifiable as its counterpart, *ātman*.[404] Through emptiness reality emerges as a complex of conventions and relations, both because of its relativity in reference to multiple conditions, and because every existent is inseparable from its linguistic and social designations. Not even naming things as empty frees them from their conditionality.

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[404] In canonic Buddhism identified with the formula "This is mine. This is my self. This is what I am" Cfr., *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, 22.59, trans. Thanissaro Bhikkhu, Access to Insight, 2013, http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn22/sn22.059.than.html The concept of *ātman*, criticized by the Mādhyamaka, is presented by Murti in two extensions: a restricted concept meaning the soul, spirit, and the subject of experience; a wider concept as the substance in general. Both acceptations circumscribe the main category of permanence. There are two main vision of the *ātman*: the Brāhmanic vision of *ātman* as substance, criticized by Buddhism, and the Buddhist vision of *ātman* as conventional, as a construct [*vikalpa*] that falsely posits a unity for a modal flux of momentary states. The Mādhyamaka also criticizes the modal concept of the Abhidharma in *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, 18.8. See Murti, *La filosofia centrale*, 163-167.

Emptiness does not unfold things completely because it is not a speculative theory: a description. It is the exercise of thinking itself.

He who relies on emptiness as a theory about reality is, indeed, said to be "incurable:"[405]

> The victorious ones have said
> That emptiness is the relinquishing of all views.
> For Whomever emptiness is a view,
> That one will accomplish nothing.[406]

The therapeutic metaphor brings the logical critique back to its nest: the liberation from the sorrow of existence, that is the practical significance of the Middle Way.

6.3 - Interpretation and Practice of Śūnyatā

Almost two thousand years of exegetical and philosophical history have attributed to the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* a multitude of interpretations of the *śūnyatā*, some even radically conflicting. We can read the unceasing interest in the text, that makes it one of the highest Buddhist philosophical expressions, symptom of the presence of an irreducible philosophical knot in the concept of *śūnyatā*. The hermeneutical problem of emptiness brings its radical and fundamental philosophical knots to the surface.

Western scholars have taken interest in the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, and have attempted to explain the concept of emptiness with reference to several different philosophical western schools. We can even dare to say within the crossing of these different interpretations of emptiness, problems about what philosophy is altogether have emerged.

The different accents and purposes of philosophy inform the disparate available interpretations of emptiness.

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[405] By Magno and Siderits translations: Magno, *Nāgārjuna*, 291; Siderits and Katsura, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, 145

[406] Garfield, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, 212. According to their semantic interpretation, instead, Siderits and Katsura translate *sarvadṛṣṭīnāṃ* as "all [metaphysical] views." Siderits and Katsura, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, 145.

As Ruegg mentions,[407] each interpretation is sustained in some respect by text and has its own *raison d'être*.

Siderits analytic approach divides the possible readings of emptiness into two groups: a semantic and a metaphysical approach (the latter being both nihilist and absolutist). He positions himself on the semantic problematization of emptiness, according to which the *dve satye* open a problem in the discourse of truth, on the limits and capacity of our representation of things, and not on reality as being non existent. In a nutshell, we can only offer limited, conditioned descriptions of reality, while an ultimate truth is empty, and cannot be given.[408]

Outside of Siderits' dualistic categorizations of possible "emptinesses," Magno singles out a wider panorama: a nihilist reading, typical of the first European translations such as La Vallée Pussin's and Stcherbatsky's; an absolutist reading such as Murti's, offering the negative exposition of an ontology; the "orthodox" reading, that traces the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* back to a simple therapeutical reworking and systematization of canonical teachings (Kalupahana); a mystical, irrationalist reading, that insists on the ineffability of the *paramārtha satya* and on the contradictory nature of *logos*; a Kantian critical interpretation associated with a dialectical accent, also present in Murti, according to which the *saṃvṛti/paramārtha* distinction overlaps the one between *phenomenon* and *noumenon*; and a "post-analytic" approach that presents Nāgārjuna's thinking as anti-metaphysical and contextual, at the very limits of the philosophical discourse.[409] We can also add recent attempts to compare Nāgārjuna and deconstruction.[410]

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[407] Ruegg in Magno, *Nāgārjuna*, 223. Ruegg mentions the following readings of emptiness: nihilist, monist, irrationalist, misologist, agnostic, skeptical, critical, dialectical, acosmist, absolutist, relativist, nominalist, and therapeutical analysis of language.

[408] Siderits, "On the Soteriological Significance of Emptiness." Siderits, "Nagarjuna as anti-realist."

[409] Magno, *Nāgārjuna*, 223-250. See also Andrew P. Tuck, *Comparative Philosophy and the Philosophy of Scholarship: On the Western Interpretation of Nāgārjuna* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

[410] Ian W. Mabbett, "Nāgārjuna and Deconstruction," *Philosophy East & West* 45, no. 2 (1995): 203-225. See also Garfield and Priest,"Limits of Thought."

6.3.1 - The Paradox and Practice of Emptiness

Through Garfield's reading of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* we have seen the tension of transposing the *prasaṅgika* tradition and contemporary Tibetan interpretations in western serviceable philosophical terms.

His reading revolves around the exposition of the paradoxical character of emptiness. Garfield proposes two deeply entangled levels of emptiness' paradoxical character, the epistemological and the ontological.

At first glance, emptiness is a paradox of expressibility, not unknown to West.[411] In the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* 22.11, as we saw earlier, Nāgārjuna, indeed, refutes the *catuṣkoṭi* of emptiness itself.[412] Language is by definition one of the dimension of relativity and conditionality. At the same time, we have nothing but language for our attempts at ultimate truth. We cannot transcend the conditionality and relativity of language. Therefore, nothing can be said, not even that phenomena are all empty, or its negation, or that "nothing can be said." Nevertheless, we just did *say* it, and we *have to* say it. Therefore, in the way Garfield puts it, "the ultimate truth is that there is no ultimate truth."[413]

It is essentially important that we *say* emptiness, even though we cannot really *say it*, or predicate it. Without saying emptiness there is no liberation, but we have to let it go immediately, at the same time. And right afterward, we have to say it again because there is no path of silence. It has been argued that it is not by chance the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* ends with a salutation to the Buddha who, *out of compassion*, taught the Dharma, "which leads to the relinquishing of all views."[414] This final aspect revolves around the paradox of the relinquishment of all views, and yet, the true doctrine [*Dharma*] needs to be taught.

The tension of the paradox remains open and gives rise to a second sense of the paradox of emptiness, the ontological one. In fact, emptiness is not an attribute, it is not a predication of things. This means that, as Candrakīrti comments, "things are not empty because of emptiness; to be a thing is to be empty."[415] Within this line of investigation,

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[411] Garfield and Priest, "Limits of Thought," 12-13. Reference to the second Wittgenstein.

[412] "Empty should not be asserted / "Nonempty" should not be asserted / Neither both nor neither should be asserted. / They are only used nominally."

[413] Garfield and Priest, "Limits of Thought," 14.

[414] *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, 27.30. Garfield, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, 352-359.

[415] Candrakīrti in Garfield and Priest, "Limits of Thought," 15.

emptiness cannot merely be limited to a semantic interpretation. It is not the case that the *dve satye* are alternately rendered as "two truths" and "two realities."[416]

The ontological paradox centers around the equation with existence and emptiness on either side of the equal sign. Nāgārjuna does not limit himself to an analysis of language. In continuity with the Buddhist motifs, he undertakes an inquiry into experience, into our access to the world, into the nature of reality: questions raised by the existential interrogative about sorrow and its extirpation. Emptiness in this context means that a foundational ontology that serves as reference to language is impossible. As Nāgārjuna puts it: "All things have one nature, that is, no nature."[417] Emptiness is not a (problematic) predication of things. Being a thing is not being an empty thing, but being emptiness. Being, is being emptiness. Existence is the emptiness of existence. But emptiness also is empty, it is not a reified emptiness that causes annihilation. So, existence is the emptiness of existence.

In Garfield's philosophical unfolding of emptiness, then, "emptiness is immanent in the conventional world."[418] *Saṃvṛti* in this sense is concealing: conventional reality is conventional because of ignorance about its conventionality. The ultimate truth or reality is, then, the acknowledging of the relativity of conventional reality. In other words, it is the accepting that relative things are, indeed, relative.

The paradox of emptiness is a fundamental part of the Mādhyamika path to liberation. As the Indo-Tibetan tradition reported by Garfield puts it, one has to come "to tolerate the groundlessness of things."[419]

This reading has the important merit of bringing the logical and philosophical discourse within a revaluation of everyday experience: the ultimate reality of conditioned things is to be conditioned. Eventually *saṃvṛti* and *paramārtha* coincide. The important difference between the two is in that *paramārtha* is a way of looking at the world, of being in the world from the internalized standpoint of emptiness. There is no space left for nostalgia of a lost unity, nor for any myth of the deep, in which the authenticity of Being can one day

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[416] A similar interpretation is summarized by Williams, *Buddhist Thought*, 148.

[417] Nāgārjuna, *Vigrahavyāvartanī* in Garfield and Priest, "Limits of Thought," 16.

[418] Garfield and Priest, "Limits of Thought," 16.

[419] Ibid., 15.

finally be found.[420] The ultimate truth is "taking conventional truth seriously."[421] The nature of reality is precisely *not having any nature*. Reality simply unfolds - never completely, or plainly - in our experience and all the dimensions of its relatedness: language, conventions, and conditions of existence.

This is also why *nirvāṇa* is said to be the same as *saṃsāra*.[422] There is no difference between the two: "*nirvāṇa* is simply *saṃsāra* seen without reification, without attachment, without delusion."[423]

There is an important critique to Garfield's reading. Magno sees in this "conventionalist" position a possible problem. She points out that revealing the ultimate truth of emptiness as being the conventionality of conventionality, may leave out an ulterior element. She does not refer to this residue, this "ulterior," as a foundational value of the ultimate reality to which we need to resort once the limits of conceptual thought are torn down. Rather, she points out the necessity of not losing the sense of the operation intrinsic to the *prasaṅga*, of the fundamental mechanism of Nāgārjuna's refutations: the systematic deconstruction through thinking of the very instruments that construct thinking.[424]

The risk is that emptiness turns into the acceptance of an empty phenomenal dimension, that emptiness turns into a pacified skeptical stand point, and that, in the end, we find ourselves with a wiser subject, that finally sees things more *clearly*. Emptiness, instead, is, in her view, something that is still to be realized. The realization of emptiness that

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[420] Garfield and Priest, "Limits of Thought," 16.

[421] Jay L. Garfield, "Taking Conventional Truth Seriously: Authority Regarding Deceptive Reality," *Philosophy East and West* 60, no. 3 (2010): 341-354.

[422] *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, 25.19-20. Garfield's translation: "There is not the slightest difference / Between cyclic existence and *nirvāṇa*. / There is not the slightest difference / Between *nirvāṇa* and cyclic existence. // Whatever is the limit of *nirvāṇa* / That is the limit of cyclic existence. / There is not even the slightest difference between them / Or even the subtlest thing.//" Garfield, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, 331.

[423] Garfield, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, 331.

[424] Magno, *Nāgārjuna*, 249-250.

corresponds to *prajñā* [insight][425] or to the *bodhi* [the Buddha's enlightenment][426] entails a practical-experiential-soteriological dimension that has to do with Nāgārjuna's fundamental operation: "uprooting every vision pertaining to the mind [*dṛṣṭi*] and *its powerful matrix: self*."[427]

Theorizing a change of attitude/look about the nature of the world is different than realizing it. The leap, the change that is expressed in the concept of *nirvāṇa* or liberation translates into a leap from conceptual thinking as *appropriation* [*upādāna*] to conceptual thinking as detachment.

The text (especially the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* text) does not remain speechless, because it continues to rely on logic and rationality. Nevertheless there is a movement of thinking in the understanding of the text, the analogous of a meditative practice that teaches us to "see without seeing."[428]

The text does not turn into a mere instrument to be used for liberation, as it seems to do in those interpretations that privilege the soteriological import of it.[429] It is not a mere exercise of style nor the application of emptiness as a method.

Conceptual thinking itself can be both valid and relative. It is through philosophy, logic and rationality that we can liberate ourselves from the residue of *attachment*. Appropriation or attachment [*upādāna*] are the cognitive acts through which the "I" gives herself a reality, an identity, declaring time by time "this is me."[430]

Therefore, the last outpost of representative thinking, of a *dṛṣṭi*, is the *self*, the *I*, and is the fear of thinking of herself and of her world without an absolute foundation, losing every ethical reference.

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[425] See Murti defining the concept of philosophy for the Mādhyamaka as *Prajñāpāramitā*, perfection of insight or wisdom. Murti, *La filosofia centrale*, 169-184. See also Magno, *Nāgārjuna*, 255.

[426] See Mabbett, "Nāgārjuna and Deconstruction," 206. The author identifies the *bodhi*, rather than the *nirvāṇa* at the core of the Mādhyamaka message. In fact, the spiritual ideal of the *Bodhisattva* in the Mahāyāna procrastinates *nirvāṇa*. See Murti, *La filosofia centrale*, 210-218.

[427] Magno, *Nāgārjuna*, 250. My translation; my emphasis.

[428] Magno, *Nāgārjuna*, 253-255.

[429] C.W. Huntington Jr. and Geshé Namgyal Wangchen, *The Emptiness of Emptiness: An Introduction to Early Indian Mādhyamika*, University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu 1989.

[430] Garfield, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, 182.

The liberation from sorrow comes through the extinction of representational thinking, through the way we think of our sense of reality and the practices of the confirmation of self in experience.

Existence in terms of *saṃsāra* (the sorrowful wheel of existence and rebirth) and existence in terms of *svabhāva* [own-nature] are part of the same soteriological and philosophical quests for liberation.[431] Liberation in the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* is in condensed in the praxis-ethics of philosophical thinking and in the extinction of subjectivity's grip and attachment.

The *emptiness of all things* means taking the *saṃvṛti-satya* (conventional truth and reality) seriously. The conditioned and unstable world in which we are entangled emerges as the only possible reality through the interplay of the *dve satye*. From the stand point of *conventional truth*, the world is *conventional*, and, therefore, sorrowful, impermanent, and always slipping away. From the standpoint of *ultimate truth*, the world is *conventional* and its conventionality is its *ultimate reality*.

From Garfield's reading of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*'s movement of emptiness[432] the two truths coincide, and yet remain two opposite ways of being in the world, as well as two opposite potentials of logical thinking.

Emptiness runs between the possibility of saying, of predicating, and its impossibility. Emptiness does not annihilate thinking. "The true Dharma of the abandonment of all views"[433] needs to be taught. Without relying on the *saṃvṛti-satya*, "the practical order of things,"[434] the *paramārtha-satya* cannot be taught.[435]

The *catuṣkoṭi* affirms in order to negate. Propositions are affirmed and immediately let go. Emptiness is not silencing. The kind of negation we assist in is not a falsification in terms of bad correspondence of words to their object. It is not a misrepresentation. Instead, precisely in virtue of the relativity of language itself (one of the senses of conventional

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[431] See the extinction of the *dṛṣṭi* that keep us chained to the *saṃsāra*. Garfield, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, 343.

[432] We would be tempted to say "concept of emptiness," but certainly emptiness is no concept, no thesis. It is maybe a movement, an agent without ontological status. From a conventional point of view, that is the impossibility of leaving the reality of language, any of these renderings can work, up to a certain extent.

[433] Siderits and Katsura, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, 334.

[434] Gnoli, *La Rivelazione del Buddha*, 643. My translation.

[435] *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, 24.10.

truth, [*saṃvṛti-satya*]), linguistic convention can never separate a positive object from itself.

This is an extremely delicate point, dancing on a slippery line. We can be prone to emphasizing the deconstructive and self-deconstructive character of every instrument of thought, or, on the contrary, we can emphasize the affirmative character of accepting relativity for what it is, playing with it, giving back authority to the conventional truth and existential meaning to the conventional world.

Certainly, what emptiness cannot be said to be, within this reading, is a mere therapeutic expedient, although it is *also* a practical and soteriological exercise. Emptiness is telling us something about existence: that the nature of things is that there is no nature. Being in the world and defeating suffering comes, then, after an exercise of emptiness *as* knowledge or wisdom [*prajñā*].

The ethical meaning of emptiness is in this wisdom, not in the formulation of ethical norms. Indeed, although Buddhisms have ethical paths and virtues, these are frequently seen as preparatory to the understanding of reality. Liberation from sorrow is the practical implication of *prajñā*.[436]

[436] Murti, *La filosofia centrale*, 179.

CONCLUSIONS

What has emptiness to do with environmental issues? Nothing, if we expect it to deliver us the naturalistic basis for an ethics of nature.

Maybe everything, if we do not look into the *śūnyatā* in hope to find an organicist, relational image of nature. Emptiness is a critique of the *svabhāva* [own nature] of all things, and for this reason has triggered parallelisms with those western instances of environmentalism that strive for a non-substantial image of entities, humans, and nonhumans. Emptiness would "prove" the impossibility of a "grey nature," to use Latour's term, of nature as the materialistic substratum described by primary qualities.

Nevertheless, there is nothing in the *śūnyatā* at work in the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* that allows us to see in emptiness a sign of "green nature," a cosmological wholeness to which we belong in relational unity. And, in fact, "relation" is yet another category victim of the emptiness deconstruction.[437]

Emptiness does not provide an image of relational nature because every *dṛṣṭi* is dogmatic inasmuch as it poses a "nature," however, we want to intend it. Even emptiness is empty. Emptiness as a view is empty.

Possibly the only direct "environmental" value we can derive from Garfield's reading of emptiness is in taking the conditionality of conditional reality for what it is. In fact, one of the main objections to the possibility of a Buddhist environmentalism is the "escapist" character of Buddhism (at least Early Buddhism).[438] The mundane dimension is seen as sorrowful, intrinsically unsatisfactory out of its impermanent and insubstantial character, and the practitioner ultimately strives for *nirvaṇā*. But this unsatisfactory character of our mundane reality acquires a whole different sense in the mundane ultimately seen as mundane, without nostalgia.

We see the power of the emptiness discourse for environmentalism in a whole different element.

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[437] *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, 14. The chapter of "Examination of Connection." Garfield, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, 219: "That does not connect to itself. / Nor do different things connect to one another. / Neither connection nor / Connected nor connector exist." Garfield points out this is another affirmation of the emptiness of emptiness, since it refutes not only macro-entities, but even the modal idea of compounds of existence typical of the Abhidharma.

[438] Schmithausen, *Buddhism and Nature*, 12.

In Naess' case, emptiness is brought up in order to find an alternative idea of nature outside the subject/object dichotomy. Nevertheless, Naess' reference fails in understanding that emptiness does not deliver this image. The reason of this failure is internal to Naess' thinking. Although Naess' relationism poses the problem of representation, of a subject that poses an object, he does not follow the problem all the way through.

Latour's political ecology considers, instead, the problem of the representation of nature as central to the possibility of thinking of a common world of humans and nonhumans in the face of the ecological crisis. The character of nature is posited by the representation structure itself. In order to do political ecology we have to get rid of the "natural character" of nature, its transcendence, its reality out there. Nature itself, as deriving from the human/nature opposition instead of being a composition of the common world, is what traps environmentalism in the tension between belonging to nature and being other to it.

The character of nature, its being an object, a definition, a portion of external reality is, for Latour, an all-modern and western way of seeing the world as split into two, a world of objectivity out there and outside the mind. Latour sees the common world as political with collective work to be done without sticking to nature as given on the human/nature axis.

Nevertheless there is one thing Latour leaves out, which was instead crucial in Naess' concern of relationism: the difficulties of weakening subjectivity, or the power of the "king-self," as Latour called it. For Naess, environmentalism is a matter of wisdom, a spiritual question of expansion of self in our relations. In this endeavor, Nāgārjuna's emptiness proves to be a powerful tool. Nāgārjuna can add to the work in progress of creating a common world of humans and nonhumans a deep insight on one of its main obstacles. Emptiness offers a way of thinking about the tension between relative reality and the loosening of the grip of subjectivity that poses the representation of nature in response to its attachment and needs of assurance.

The outlined approach to ecological issues and its way of framing the speculative knots of the ecological crisis can be a fruitful basis for further developments. These would go in the direction of exploring environmental practices which show how the human and nonhuman dimensions are simply entangled and translate each other, instead of fighting an ecological battle. Here we can imagine projects such as permaculture or the implementation of the sciences in political decisions. This entanglement can become a

political task with the purpose of including nonhumans in our everyday concerns as full citizens of our lived world. It is utterly necessary that politics and environmentalism do not continue to see themselves as opponents, as if one defended the interests of humans, while the other defended the interests of nature. An exploration of environmental practices with this task in mind could be a pregnant framework for a more ecological collective.

APPENDIXES

APPENDIX 1

The modernist settlement according to science studies.

Source: Bruno Latour, *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 14.

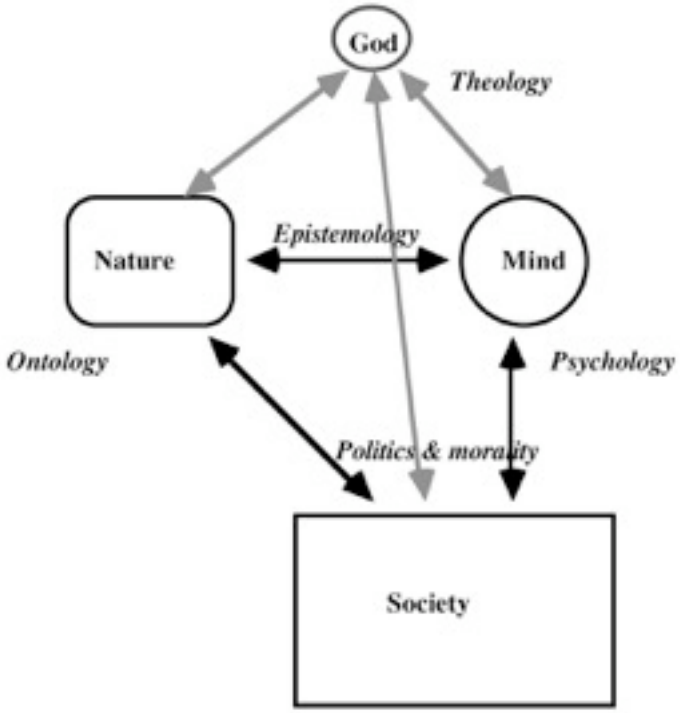

Figure 1-1 The modernist settlement. For science studies, however, there is no sense in talking independently of epistemology, ontology, psychology and politics —not to mention theology. We do not claim that these spheres are cut off from one another, but rather, that they all pertain to the same settlement, a settlement that can be replaced by several alternate others.

APPENDIX 2

The subject/object divide cannot be overcome, even in the attempt to do so.

Source: Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter. (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), 58.

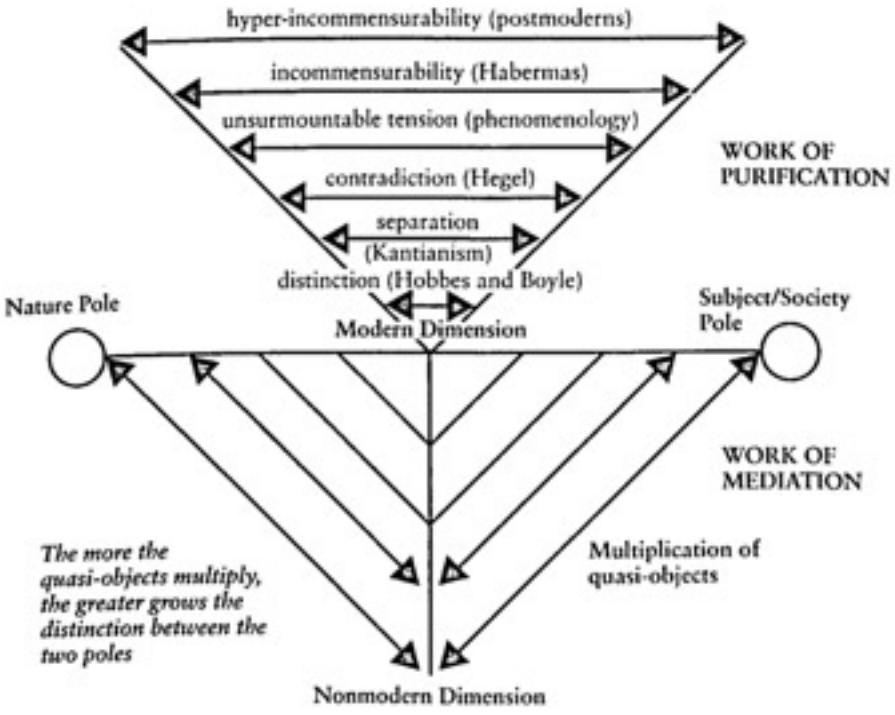

Figure 3.3 The modern paradox

APPENDIX 3

Instead of one human/nature axis, entities can be described by variable geometry ontologies on the plane created by the two axes subject/object and essence/existence. (In the present diagram Latour illustrates the geometry of different concepts of void in the history of science).

Source: Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter. (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), 86.

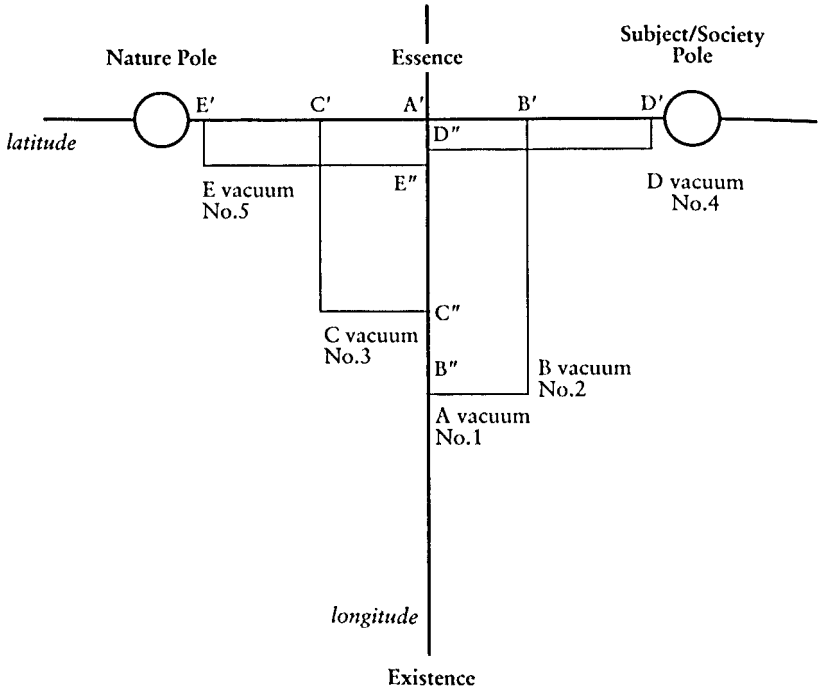

Figure 3.4 The modern Constitution and its practice

APPENDIX 4

The new bicameralism suggested by Latour is transversal to the old bicameralism of the modern Constitution.

Source: Bruno Latour, *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy.* Trans. Catherine Porter. (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2004), 115.

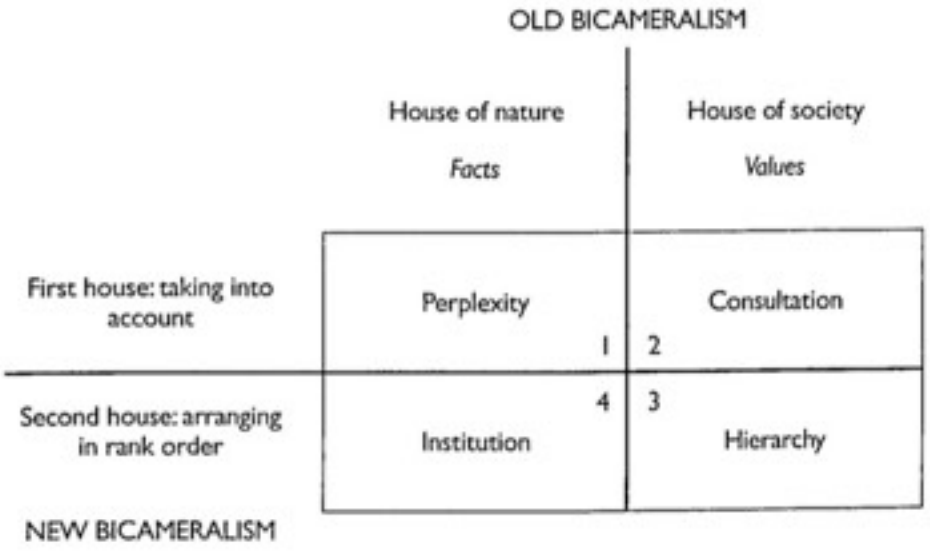

Figure 3.1 After a ninety-degree reversal, the fact-value distinction becomes the distinction between the powers of taking into account and the powers of arranging in rank order.

APPENDIX 5

What is the Mūlamadhyamakakārikā Sanskrit Text.

Source: Emanuela Magno, *Nāgārjuna: Logica, Dialettica e Soteriologia* (Milano-Udine: Mimesis, 2012), 261.

- 1903-1913: Luis de La Vallée Poussin edits Candrakīrti's *Prasannapadā* text based on three Sanskrit manuscripts and on the Tibetan version.
- 1959: From the *Prasannapadā* P.L. Vaidya edits the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* text together with the commentary.
- 1977: Following the discovery of a fourth manuscript in Nepal by G. Tucci, J.W. DeJong completes and changes the previous critical edition, offering the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* text independetly from the commentary.
- 1985: Akira Saitō introduces more remarks to the text.
- 1988: Critical edition by R. Pandeya.

- We add the recent edition by Ye Shaoyong (2011) to Magno's list, based on newly identified manuscripts of the Sanskrit text,[439] possibly written in Nepal between the 6th and the 7th Century, which makes them the oldest Sanskrit *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* manuscripts available.

Main Accepted Translations of the Mūlamadhyamakakārikā in European Languages

- 1961 (Italian): Raniero Gnoli, *Nāgārjuna, Le stanze del cammino di mezzo: Madhyamaka kārikā* (Turin: Boringhieri, 1961). Reprinted in Raniero Gnoli, *La rivelazione del Buddha* (Milan: Mondadori, 2004), vol. 2, 585-656.
- 1967 (English): Frederick J. Streng, Emptiness: *A Study in Religious Meaning* (Nashville and New York: Abingdon, 1967).

[439] http://en.cnki.com.cn/Article_en/CJFDTOTAL-BDZK201001023.htm

- 1986 (English): David J. Kalupahana, *Nāgārjuna, The Philosophy of the Middle Way* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986).
- 1991 (English): R. Pandeya and Manju, *Nāgārjuna's Philosophy of No-Identity* (Delhi: Eastern Book Linkers, 1991)
- 1993 (English): Kenneth K. Inada, *Nāgārjuna: Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1993)
- 1995 (English): Jay L. Garfield, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Nāgārjuna's Mūlamādhyamakakārikā* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995)
- 2002 (French): Guy Bugault, *Nāgārjuna: Stances du Milieu par excellence* (Paris: Gallimard, 2002)
- 2004 (Italian): Marcello Meli, *Nāgārjuna: Il cammino di mezzo* (Padova: Unipress, 2004)
- 2012 (Italian): Emanuela Magno, *Nāgārjuna: logica, dialettica e soteriologia* (Milano-Udine: Mimesis, 2012)
- 2013 (English): Mark Siderits and Shoryu Katsura, *Nāgārjuna's Middle Way: Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2013).

We integrated the list reported in Magno's study. Emanuela Magno, *Nāgārjuna: Logica, Dialettica e Soteriologia* (Milano-Udine: Mimesis, 2012), 84.

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SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Chapter 1 reaffirms the validity of radical ecological approaches that think of ecological issues in terms of necessity of reassessing the nature-humanity reciprocal identities, instead of stopping at management approaches.

Chapter 2 explores Naess' idea of intrinsic relation with nature and its internal critical aspects, providing a closer look to Naess' philosophy. The traditional debate, indeed, usually focuses on deep ecology in general. Naess' problem of humanity's intrinsic relation with nature poses valid questions about overcoming the modern subject/object dichotomy in our understanding of nature, but eventually finds itself trapped in the same premises.

Chapter 3 examines the basic humanity/nature axis in environmentalism, which underlies the ever changing concept of nature. It concludes that when environmentalism uses a concept of nature framed as other-to-human, it falls into the ecological *aporias* between human continuity with nature and nature's otherness.

Chapter 4 explores Latour's solution of a non-modern framework that does not make use of the historical modern humanity-nature and subject-object axes. Latour's constitution of the common world through political and scientific representation of nonhumans also offers a solution to Naess' central pitfall of representation. Nevertheless, Latour's political solution leaves one possible interrogative open: how to concretely weaken the centrality of subjectivity in order to reopen the problem of the common world of humans and nonhumans.

Chapter 5 and 6 explore a parallelism with Nāgārjuna's concept of emptiness [śūnyatā], also addressed by Naess. Nāgārjuna's concept of emptiness [śūnyatā] proves to be a powerful insight into the tension between a radically relative reality and the attachment of the subject's view to a "nature of things."

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Kapitel 1 bekräftigt die Gültigkeit grundlegender ökologischer Ansätze, welche über simple Bewältigungsstrategien hinaus gehen, und sich stattdessen ökologischen Fragestellungen, im Sinne einer Neubewertung des Konzepts der Menschheit und der Identität der Natur zuwenden.

Kapitel 2 untersucht Naess' Idee der intrinsischen Relation zwischen Natur und deren innerer kritischer Aspekte, wodurch tiefere Einblicke in Naess' Philosophie gegeben werden. Der traditionelle Meinungsaustausch konzentriert sich normalerweise durchaus auf deep ecology im Allgemeinen. Naess' Problematik der intrinsischen Relation zwischen Menschheit und Natur wirft zwar berechtigte Fragen in Bezug auf die Bewältigung der modernen Subjekt/Objekt Gegensätzlichkeit in unserem Verständnis von Natur auf, läuft jedoch in Gefahr, ins Spannungsfeld derselben Prämissen zu geraten.

Kapitel 3 untersucht die grundlegende Menschheit-Natur Achse in der Umweltphilosophie, welche dem ständig wechselnden Konzept von Natur unterliegt. Das Kapitel gelangt zu dem Ergebnis, dass Umweltphilosophie, sofern sie ein Konzept der Natur benutzt, welches den Naturbegriff als das gegenüber dem Menschen Andere definiert, in die ökologischen Aporien zwischen menschlicher Kontinuität mit Natur und deren Andersartigkeit fällt.

Kapitel 4 erforscht Latour's Lösung einer nicht modernen Rahmenbedingung, welche keinen Gebrauch der historisch modernen Menschheit-Natur und Subjekt-Objekt Achse macht. Latour's Konstitution der gemeinsamen Welt, durch politische und wissenschaftliche Repräsentation von Nichtmenschen, bietet ebenso eine Lösung für Naess' eigenen Problematik mit Repräsentation. Nichtsdestotrotz lässt Latour's politische Lösung eine mögliche Fragestellung offen: Wie genau wird die zentrale Bedeutung der Subjektivität geschwächt um die Problematik der gemeinsamen Welt von Menschen und Nichtmenschen neu zu verhandeln.

Kapitel 5 und 6 setzen sich mit der Parallelität zu Nāgārjuna's Konzept der Leere [śūnyatā] auseinander, welches auch von Naess angesprochen wird. Nāgārjuna's Konzept der Leere gewährleistet einen tiefen Einblick in die Spannung zwischen einer radikal relativen Realität und der Bindung der Sicht des Subjekts an eine „Natur der Dinge."

PUBLICATIONS

Elisa Cavazza. "From the Problem of 'Secondary Qualities' to Intrinsically Relational Identity. Environmental Implications." *Esercizi Filosofici* 8 (2013): 13-40.

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Elisa Cavazza. "Ecosophy at the End of Nature." *The Trumpeter* 30, no. 2 (2014): 115-140.

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis and the work reported herein was composed by and originated entirely from me. Information derived from the published and unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text and references are given in the list of sources.

Elisa Cavazza