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# Facing Gaia

## Six lectures on the political theology of nature

*Being the Gifford Lectures  
on Natural Religion  
Edinburgh, 18<sup>th</sup>-28<sup>th</sup> of February 2013*

For Peter Sloterdijk

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“I would sooner expect a goat to succeed as a gardener than expect humans to become responsible stewards of the Earth”  
James Lovelock  
*The Practical Science of Planetary Medicine*, p. 186.

“Gaia as metaphor; Gaia as a catalyst for scientific inquiry; Gaia as literal truth; Gaia as Earth Goddess. Whoever she is, let's keep her. If science cannot find room for the grand vision, if Gaia dare not speak her name in Nature, then shame on science. To recant now would be a terrible thing, Jim. Don't do it.”

Fred Pearce

*New Scientist* 28 May 1994

‘Ce n'est plus la politique tout court, c'est la politique climatique qui est le destin’,  
Peter Sloterdijk  
*Globes* p. 312

‘I have cast fire upon the world, and look, I'm guarding it until it blazes.’(10)  
Jesus in the *Gospel of Thomas*

‘Nous, en revanche, nous envions l'alternative ‘mauvais monde ou bon monde’. La fin nous menaçant, notre alternative aujourd'hui est: un monde ou pas de monde. Aussi longtemps qu'il dure, le monde actuel nous semble presque être: ‘le meilleur des mondes’.

Gunther Anders

*Le temps de la fin* p. 87

‘Ron Crossguns, who works for the Blackfeet tribe's oil and gas division, has oil leases on his land, a 10-foot cross in his yard, and little patience for that kind of pastoral veneration. He called it “movie Indian” claptrap, divorced from modern realities. Mountains, he said, are just mountains.

“They're just big rocks, nothing more,” Mr. Crossguns said. “Don't try to make them into nothing holy. Jesus Christ put them there for animals to feed on, and for people to hunt on.”

*NYTimes* August 15, 2012

‘L'esprit du monde utilise nos bras dans la sphère spirituelle, tout comme il se sert des volcans et des inondations dans la sphère physique ; Qu'importe qu'ils [les humains] meurent d'une épidémie ou de la Révolution !’

Georg Büchner

Saint Just dans *La mort de Danton*

‘The question of a new nomos of the earth will not be answered with such fantasies, any more than it will be with further scientific discoveries. Human thinking again must be directed to the elemental orders of its terrestrial being here and now. We seek to understand the normative order of the earth. That is the hazardous undertaking of this book and the fervent hope of our work. The earth has been promised to the artisans of peace. The idea of a new nomos of the earth belongs only to them.’

Carl Schmitt

*The Nomos of the Earth*

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## Summary of the lectures

Those six lectures in ‘natural religion’ explore what it could mean to live at the epoch of the Anthropocene when what was until now a mere décor for human history is becoming the principal actor. They confront head on the controversial figure of Gaia, that is, the Earth understood not as system but as what has a history, what mobilizes everything in the same geostory. Gaia is not Nature, nor is it a deity. In order to face a secular Gaia, we need to extract ourselves from the amalgam of Religion and Nature. It is a new form of political power that has to be explored through a renewed attempt at political theology composed of those three concepts: *demos*, *theos* and *nomos*. It is only once the multiplicity of people in conflicts for the new geopolitics of the Anthropocene is recognized, that the ‘planetary boundaries’ might be recognized as political delineations and the question of peace addressed. Neither Nature nor Gods bring unity and peace. ‘The people of Gaia’, the Earthbound might be the ‘artisans of peace’.

**Lecture one and two:** The lectures introduce the project of a political theology of nature. To compare political bodies in spite of the different names they give to their deities, we need to know three things: what is the people their form; what is the entity that summons them; what is the agency distribution they adhere to.

With this tool, it is possible to redistribute the paralyzing division between a naturalist and a religious ‘worldview.’ Nature is not a domain of reality but a specific form of political theology made commensurable with others.

A ‘people of Nature’ is a political body summoned by an entity that has, in theory, four characters — outside, unified, inanimate and undisputable — which is not so different from religious people who are summoned by an entity with three of the same — outside, unified and undisputable. The only difference being the tricky question of ‘design.’

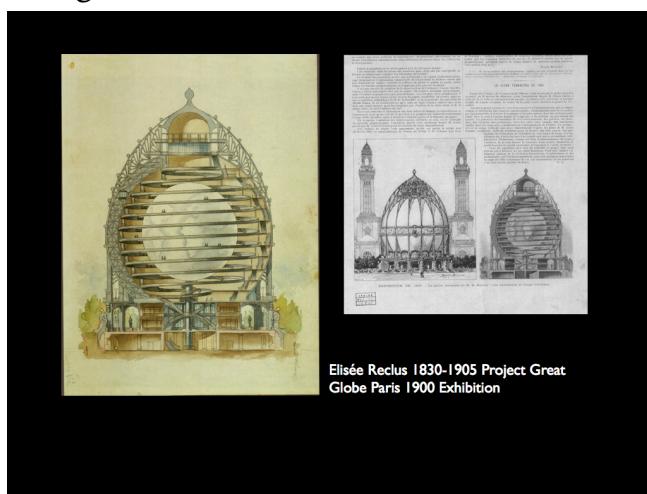
But in practice, the ‘people of Nature’ are summoned by an entity with four entirely different characters — it is inside, multiple, animated and controversial (Nature Two); those of religion (in its Christian definition) are also mobilized by four entirely different characters — Incarnation, Trinity, salvation and proximity (Religion Two). Which means that it is impossible to use the concept of ‘natural religion’ since Nature does not account better for what its people do than religion for what Religion is able to assemble.

It is thus necessary to propose an alternative by recognizing two political theologies: one that ties together Nature One and Religion One (*Deus sive Natura*); and one that connects Nature Two and Religion

Two. The first starts with a world already unified and composed, that is either de-animated or over-animated; the second with a world to be composed.

## ‘Once out of nature’ — natural religion as a pleonasm.

What does it mean for a people to *measure*, to *represent* and to compose the shape of the Earth to which they are bound? If those are the questions I wish to raise in this lectures series, they were also those that Patrick Geddes, the curator of the Edinburgh Outlook Tower, a few blocks from this room, was raising when asked by his friend Elisée Reclus, the anarchist turned geographer, to help him sketch the giant globe he planned to build for the Paris Exhibition of 1900 at a scale of 1:100.000. The building was so big, two hundred meters, that it would have been almost as tall as the Eiffel Tower, using four times as much iron and costing five times as much, casting its thick globular shadow over the right bank of the river Seine. That Reclus, in spite of his celebrity, was not able to build it, speaks volumes about the difficulty of facing the Earth and more generally of addressing the question of the globe inside any global structure be they philosophical, architectural, scientific or theological.



Here is the way Geddes described his friend's enterprise:

‘Instead of a book, were it the best, the latest, here was now the most monumental of museums, the most simple of observatories, the **microcosm** of the **macrocosm** itself. Again the description went on, but now this was no mere **scientific model** in its institute, but the image, and shrine, and **temple** of the **Earth-Mother**, and its expositor no longer a modern professor in his chair, but an arch-**Druid** at **sacrifice** within his circle of **mighty stones**, an

**Eastern Mage**, initiator to **cosmic mysteries**. (...) With not only intellect but imagination and feeling thus fully aroused, the geographic vision thus rose into the **poetic** - indeed in no mean measure became the **prophetic** also. Yet once more, with ever nobler look and deepening word, the scene passed anew into the future of its accomplishments but with an interest no longer solely **cosmic**, but henceforth primarily **human** - the **unity of the world** now the basis and symbol of the **brotherhood of man upon it**; science is an art, geography and labour uniting into a reign of peace and goodwill. With not only intellect but imagination and feeling thus fully aroused, the geographic vision thus rose into the **poetic** - indeed in no mean measure became the **prophetic** also.<sup>1</sup>

All the words count here, not only the connection between 'microcosm' and 'macrocosm' but also the strange shift from scientific 'model' to 'shrine' and 'temple', from 'geography' to 'cosmic mysteries', 'Mage', 'Druid', from 'poetry' to 'prophecy' all the way to the charmingly outdated word 'panorama.' What were all those people doing at the time, with their obsession for models, temples and priesthood? What were they trying to assemble at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with their vastly expanded panoramas, exhibits and cabinets of curiosity? How strange to us, a century later, to hear about the 'brotherhood of man' and the 'unity of the world' celebrated through the making of a material scale model, a tiny facsimile, a replica of iron and plaster of Paris. One thing is sure: today as much as yesterday, the same question resonates: what is the exact shape of the Earth or, more exactly, what is the Earth that is now facing us?

Before we get started, I have to warn you that in the course of this week and next, I am going to draw somewhat unorthodox lessons from three different fields: science, politics and religious studies. The reason is that the three of them, as I will show, have taken for granted a concept of Nature that has rendered their interconnections increasingly difficult, just at the time when ecological crisis — or rather, ecological catastrophes — render their joint effort more necessary.

I will approach the question of science and scientific knowledge not from the point of view of epistemology, but from that of science studies (a field which, by the way, was born here, in Edinburgh, 34 Buccleuch Place — I hope there is a plaque! — in the 'Science Studies

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick Geddes, "A Great Geographer: Elisée Reclus, 1830-1905", Scottish Geographical Magazine, vol. XXI, sept/oct 1905, p.561. I thank Pierre Chabard for introducing me to the work of Geddes.

Unit' headed by David Edge). Foregrounding the practice, instruments and institutions of science, will help us to disengage the undisputed objectivity of science from its collusion with a philosophical and, as we shall see, a largely theological definition of Nature.

Out of necessity, the question of politics will not be limited to humans but will be extended to non-humans as well, that is, to all the agencies that make up the cosmos inside which humans do reside. Such an extension will force us to disengage political theory from its long attachment with an epistemological definition of Nature. If Nature known by the sciences is no longer the ultimate referee able to settle conflicts, then politics has to take over and the common world has to be progressively composed.

To be able to appeal to religious studies, at least to the Christian tradition, I will have to explore why so many definitions of God are indistinguishable from those of Nature and what sort of politics such collusion entails. We will have to free religious enunciation from its confusion with information and to link it back with a power to transform and to convert. If we are not able to disengage theology from an epistemology that has ruined the distinction between Nature and Creation, it is in vain that the psalmist has sung: '*You send forth your spirit (...): and you renew the face of the earth.*'

The reason why I want to draw on those three different fields at once is because I wish to shift your attention from the science, politics and religion of Nature to the science, politics and religion of the Earth. The two should not be confused any more. Earth should be understood as a historical, or better, as a *geostorical* adventure, a term I will propose so as to absorb what it means to live at the epoch of the Anthropocene.

To clearly disengage the question of the historical Earth from that of Nature, I will invoke the controversial figure of Gaia, borrowing James Lovelock's term for an entity that is composed of multiple, reciprocally linked, but ungoverned self-advancing processes. Far from being the Sphere that Atlas holds on his shoulder, or the Creation that Saint Christopher feels when he helps the child Jesus to ford the river, or any unified and living Globe, Gaia, as I will show at length, is the most secular figure of the Earth ever explored by political theory. It is because it is *not* already unified that it should be composed, thus becoming the only entity able to mobilize in a new way science, politics and theology.

The project I will pursue in this lecture series could receive the label of political theology, an even stranger and more unusual one to be sure, because it will be a political theology of *nature*. To put it as starkly as possible, I would claim that those who intend to survive the coming cataclysms of climate on hope and faith, or who square off against it armed only with the results of externalized and universal knowledge are doomed. The age of such faiths is over. I hope to show that it is by facing Gaia, that wholly secularized and earthbound set of processes, that there is a dim possibility that we could 'let the Spirit renew the Face of the Earth.'

Let me now begin by defining the three notions that we will follow all along in our political theology of nature — people, cosmos and deities — which are clearly visible already in this Orphic poem in honour of Gaia:

*O mother Gaia, of Gods and men the source, endured with fertile, all-destroying force; all-parent, bounding, whose prolific powers produce a store of beauteous fruits and flowers. (...) Come, blessed Goddess, listen to my prayer, and make increase of fruits thy constant care; with fertile seasons in thy train draw near, and with propitious mind thy suppliants hear."*

But such an address, such a beginning, such a prayer would look to be either cheap irony or a futile attempt at resurrecting a cult forever long gone. For a prayer to be addressed to a divine entity, you need not only a cult, but also a culture, a whole thriving culture. More importantly, you need a real people associated with this divinity; a *demos* for whom such a celebration would be the most deeply engrained and most deeply cherished ritual.

We know this for as long as anthropology has existed: no rite without a collective for whom the only way to assemble truly as a group would consist in having been summoned by this spirit and in appealing to it in return. This much we know from Durkheim. But we also know that such a feedback loop connecting people assembled by their deities and assembling deities invoked by their people cannot resist too long the corroding influence of critique. The slightest distance or indifference is enough to reduce the deities to decorative themes for paintings, poems and operas. This is what has happened to the immortals gods of Antiquity: they are gone with the people who had them and who were held by them. Mortals they were and it is only their ghosts that have become a source of amusement or nostalgia. However,

the last thing I want is to make you laugh at the evocation of Gaia or

*how many ways are there to be assembled by an entity for which rites are performed that maintain this people and this entity in existence*

believe that Gaia is merely a figure of the past — a shadow, a ghost.

So I will not attempt addressing this character directly since we don't share enough of the same local culture, pertain to the same people, or go through the same rituals to be able to salute it by the name of *sanctissima Tellus*. What I will explore instead is this connection between a people summoned by an entity — let us put aside the words deity, divinities and gods for a moment — and this very same people sustaining this entity in return. It is this circular process that will be of interest to us all along: ?

Jan Assmann, the great Egyptologist, has reminded us that it was a tradition in the ancient cities of the old world, before the advent of Judaism and Christianity, to establish tables of translations for the names of gods worshipped in many different cities and lands around the Mediterranean and the Middle East. At a time of cosmopolitanism (what could almost be said to be an early form of 'globalisation') those translations offered a sort of practical solution to the soft relativism with which every adept of one city-cult recognized the family resemblances amongst the city-cults of the many foreigners that were by now living in their midst. 'What you name Jupiter, I call Zeus' etc.

Ogygiadae me Bacchum vocant  
Osirin Aegypti putant  
Mysi Phanacem nominant  
Dionyson Indi existimant  
Romana sacra Liberum  
Arabica gens Adoneum  
Lucaniacus Pantheum. (Assmann p. 82 French)

With such a procedure in mind, I'd like to raise the following question: is it possible to reuse this tradition of translation tables for the names of gods to list other entities, other cults, other people and to detect among those different collectives the family resemblances that remain invisible as long as we stick to our too local, too ethnocentric, too sectarian point of view ('collective' being the word I use as an alternative to the word 'society')?

Of course, I am well aware of what Assmann has so cogently shown: once the 'mosaic division,' as he calls it, is in place, those tables, and the soft relativism that went with them, are not only impracticable but deeply sinful and impious. The 'true' God becomes untranslatable by any other name and no other cult than His cult should be maintained anywhere else. Everything happens as if the 'true God' had fulminated: 'Thou shall not make, under any circumstance, my entity commensurable with any other.' From this point on, 'relativism' has been turned into what it is still today for many people, a term of detestation and ostracism. But since I want to draw a relation among the different ways to associate people and entities, I am not worried about this accusation of relativism. In spite of the radical 'division' most local cultures would like to make, I wish to render fully comparable those different ways of being assembled around an entity. At a time of yet another globalisation, as the time quickly approaches when many different globes will be crashing into one another, we need another table of translations. Yes, it is a form of cosmopolitanism or, more exactly as we shall see, of cosmopolitics. And yes, it would be foolish of me to hide it: it is relativism, or rather, relationship. Whom do we have to invoke so as to gather us together when different people have different sky above their head, different soil under their feet and different cities they inhabit?

The way the translating tables worked, according to Assmann, was to shift attention from the proper name of the divinities to the series of features that this name summarized in the minds of their worshippers. Not 'Zeus', for instance, that is, a name, but 'Leader of the Fates' (Moiragetes), 'Protector of Suppliants' (Ikesios), as well as 'god of fair Winds' (Euenemos) and of course 'Bearer of the Lightning' (Astrapaios); that is, a set of qualities or attributes. The idea was that if the lists of features were more or less the same, then the proper name might be taken as indifferent or at least negotiable: 'Your people name it that way, my folks name it this way, but we designate by those invocations the same deity carrying out the same sorts of actions in the world.'

Such a mode of translation is tantamount to shifting from names to agencies. It is a fully pragmatic method, a move that William James would have approved of. And a move that would fit the semiotics method as well: always shift from actors to actants, from competences to performances. More importantly, it's also a political move: as long as you stick to names, you fight endlessly and fruitlessly; if we direct our

common attention to agencies — that is, which real differences does it make in the world? — we might come to agree. And even if we still disagree, at least we move toward a common search for what divinities actually do. Translation tables for the names of gods in the ancient cities were clearly diplomatic negotiations. Similarly today, if we have to go to war — and war is very likely — we want to make distinctly possible that we don't cut our throats over names but over features that do make a difference between friends and enemies.

One such mock fight, as you are well aware, risks pitting those who speak of various gods against those who speak of 'Nature.' I know that the first reaction would surely be to say that those two invocations are incommensurable since they designate entirely different names and concepts. If you talk about Gaia, or God, or Jesus, or Buddha, or any spirit, it is not possible that you are also talking about 'Nature.' Between the five first names and the last word, that is, 'Nature', there is a chasm that no amount of negotiation may bridge. We recognize here the wedge that comes from the 'radical division' between the false gods and the true one; I should have said, between, on the one hand, all the talk about gods and, on the other, about 'reality' — a word that, as a devoted relativist, I protect inside well padded quotation marks. 'You cannot possibly compare those entities.' 'You have to choose your camp.' 'Nature is not a religion.' Swords, bayonets and guns are drawn at once. Mobilisation is ordered.

But wait! We said that we wanted to shift attention from names to agencies. So before we burn each other at the stake, let's have a look at the list of features that you lump together with your emblem and that others lump together under another concept. 'But "Nature," you might say, is not an emblem, nor a concept; it is the stuff out of which and inside which we are all made.' I know, but I asked you to wait, to be patient; let's see what we all have in store, let's call each other's bluff and show our hands. Then, we will decide whether or not it's worth fighting.

If for a moment you agree to this truce, what will happen? As soon as we shift the discussion, or rather the parley, in that way, it's my impression that the call to arms might come to a standstill. Why? Because in order to deploy all the features that are lumped together under the entity named 'Nature', we are going to delay the fight for at least as long as Scheherazade delayed her execution by the sword of King Shahryar. In spite of its reputation for indisputability, 'Nature' is

the most complex entity there is and the hardest to invoke to bring a story to an end. One could say that Nature is full of suspense; just what is needed to keep awake the attention of any cruel prince!

In order to follow some of the coming stories more comfortably, I am going to use a trick: I am going to replace the word 'Nature' to which we are much too habituated, with a weird exotic expression that will allow us to distance ourselves from it. At this point we don't need a grandiose new concept but just a provisional name, a mere placeholder with no other function than that of making us forget our familiarity with the name of this entity. I promise to discard this little ploy once it does its work.

What to call the entity under which this specific people are summoned, the entity that is generated in turn by their activity? So as to remain close to the etymology of the word nature, let's call this entity whose features we are trying to entangle: 'Out-of-Which-We-Are-All-Born', 'OWWAAB' for short. It's a bit bizarre at first, smacking of science fiction, but it is just this sort of oddity that I need because later it will help the translation to run more smoothly with many other titles and invocations. For now, it's just convenient for foreigners to greet one another by saying for instance: 'You are the people of Owwaab; belong to yhe people of Zeus; those folks over there are the people of Odun.'

But how are we going to name the group, the nation, the people assembled under the auspices of Owwaab? We could use the word 'naturalists' but it risks being confused with many other trades and professions. To pursue my little game, let's call them 'Born-from-Owwaab.' If you find this too strange, be reminded that the venerable word 'human' means etymologically 'from the soil' and shares the same root — pun intended — with 'humus', the soil. 'Remember that you are dust and to dust you will return' — pretty hard, as you see, to escape from Gaia.

Now to complete the 'alienation' or 'distantiation,' as Bertold Brecht would have said, from the too common expressions of 'nature' and 'naturalism,' we need a third term so that we may render comparable what should apparently, in our tradition at least, not be comparable. How are we to designate the loop that connects those 'Born-from-Owwaab' and the assembling entity 'Out-of-Which-We-Are-All-Born'?

If I take up the word 'religion' to designate this loop, even if I stick to its etymology, *religere*, the negotiation, I am afraid, will break down

immediately without shedding any light on either ancient cults or the 'naturalists.' 'To be from the people of 'nature' is not a religion!' adepts would shout indignantly — and they would be right (and right also to say they don't deserve to be called 'adepts' either).

Let's be careful here. If they are right, it's for the simple reason that all the words that should make up the vocabulary for the titles at the top of the translation table should be well balanced, at least neutral enough to keep the attention focused simply on the list of features, on the actants. That's the only way to allow the parleys to continue. As an umbrella term, it would have been nice to use the word 'cosmopolitics' but the two words 'cosmos' and 'politics' have too much rich baggage to be easily accepted by all the parties at the beginning. 'Cosmology' would be okay, but then we will not know if it is acceptable to speak of cosmologies, in the plural, or of a cosmology in the singular. Hostilities might quickly resume over this question of the plurality of cosmos. The word *nomos*, law, as in economics, nomenclature, or nomothetic would be better to point out this power to divide and share plots, lands and fields. Let me propose a vague, boring and poor enough term, 'agency distribution.' Let's agree that we are going to compare different people each summoned by a different entity that defines, orders, ranks, organizes, composes, dispatches, in brief distributes various types of agencies in different ways. Nothing more sophisticated.

Please note that such a level playing field for making comparisons and swapping translations has become necessary — remember Assmann — only because we have to transact with a lot of foreigners bringing in their own affiliations, organizations and rites. And only because we cannot simply exclude them at once from our cities, but are forced, at the minimum, to tolerate their presence without being able to assemble them as one single people summoned by one entity. (We no longer live in the benighted time of Reclus able to merge the 'unity of the world' with 'the brotherhood of mankind'.) Today, as in the Antiquity, it is because we live in cosmopolitan cities and disagree on every issue that we are forced to indulge in such a risky exercise. If we could stick to our old ethnic particularities, we would not need to devise any instrument for tolerance. But here we are, globalized haphazardly, somewhat torn between trying to avoid an all out war and pretending a complete harmony. In brief, we wish to enter into some sort of *modus vivendi*. Those who are already in combat gear and ready to cross swords would do better to depart now from the negotiation table.

For those who remain, let's start the negotiation and, in a way, call the bluff of those who insist on the importance of names. Those who define themselves as 'Those who belong to Owwaab' emphasize four adjectives to designate some of the most important qualities of the entity they invoke: Owwaab, for them, is *outside*, *unified*, *inanimate* and its workings are *undisputable*. The difficulties begin, however, when they are asked to develop more precisely those four attributes.

Let me start with the expression 'outside.' Apparently what is meant here is something like: 'not dependent on the wishes, whims and fancies of the people that invoke it.' 'Owwaab is non-negotiable.' Fine, this is an attribute common to all the entities able to assemble a people around them. It's precisely because they are *beyond* that they possess the force to summon and gather.

But if we dig a little further, we fall upon a strange and apparently contradictory attribute: Owwaab is simultaneously *out* and *beyond*, yes, but also *inside* tiny networks of practice that seem necessary to access it and that are called 'scientific disciplines.' Every time we designate a feature of the 'natural world' that has some of the properties of Owwaab, we are also asked to follow the path of a knowledge producing procedure. Our sight goes simultaneously far away and close at hand focusing on two opposite places at once. As if there was a tension between the exteriority and the interiority of this entity: as a set of results, Owwaab is *outside*, 'untouched by human hands'; as a process of production, the same Owwaab resides *inside* conduits where many human hands with the help of much paraphernalia are busy making it an *outside* reality. Remember the brouhaha around 'climategate'? In 2009, the public and the climatologists had simultaneously to hold that the global warming was 'out there' but also that it was generated inside the networks of practicing scientists exchanging thousands of emails and swapping data interpretations about computer models, satellite surveys and ice core samples. It's as if the public debate could not accommodate — in the optical sense of the word — to those two levels at the same time, one level always remaining fuzzy while the other is in focus.

And yet no one should have been surprised as this is common to all entities: they have to be *made*, constructed, elaborated, fabricated. But the reason why, in this case, such bifocalism takes a strange conflicting character is that there seems to be no way for this peculiar

people who call themselves Those-Born-from-Owwaab to reconcile the two. Whereas many other cultures have worked out this contradiction to the full — the whole anthropological literature could bear witness to this — not a thought seems to have been invested by this peculiar people in the necessary bifocal nature of 'nature.' It is as if those people had to make their cosmology turn around two foci at once: one where everything is outside, not human made; the other where everything is inside, human made. An unstable Copernican revolution with two suns at once and the Earth alternating wildly in some demented zigzagging pattern without ever finding a centre of rest. (We will come back to this next Monday). An indication, surely, for those who attempt the translation of this entity into their own language, that there is something odd about such a people. 'On which Earth do they reside?' they might ask.

That this people might belong to *no Earth at all* becomes an even more intriguing possibility when the second adjective is taken into consideration. 'Owwaab is unified and make every agency obey its universal laws.' But this feature too is hard to reconcile with the bewildering multiplicity of scientific disciplines, specialties, subspecialties, thematic networks and topics by which those 'unified' and 'universal' laws are implemented in practice. Of course, practice could be omitted from the description, but the transaction into which we have agreed to enter is precisely to shift from ideas to practice, from names to features, from concepts to agencies. That's the only way, we seemed to agree, to move on and explore some common ground.

Looked at in this way, the jungle of intertwined scientific disciplines looks more like a legal process, with its complex casuistic of multiple codes and entangled jurisprudences, than the smooth unification implied by the traditional expression of 'laws of nature.' Of course, locally, there exists some process of unification, one topic being explained, accounted for, digested, absorbed, understood by another more encompassing solution, and fortunately so. But such a process to sum up and assemble is itself always local, costly, and has to be achieved through the immense efforts of many organizations, many theories, many paradigms. The process resembles the way legal precedents slowly ascend in importance through many cases, suits, appeals and countersuits, until they are invoked as precedent, as a matter of course, by several courts and thus begin to become relatively universal —at

least as long as they are kept up, well archived, documented and commented upon.

If, throughout the negotiation, the acquaintances of those odd people might have been surprised by the two first attributes of Owwaab — exteriority and unity — what should they think of the third: that Owwaab deals only with *inanimate* agencies. This is very puzzling for them. The contradiction resides in the very words employed: an agency, an actant, by definition is *what acts*, what has, what is endowed with agency. How could you render the whole world 'inanimate'? It turns out that this is not a mystification but a *mystique*, a very interesting and respectable one at that; and also a very spiritual form of contradiction, a surprising form of piety. Here again, every discipline, every specialty, every laboratory, every expedition, multiplies the surprising agents with which their world is made of — agents that may be easily followed through the proliferation of the technical vocabulary that invades scientific reports and indeed through the exponential epidemic of the scientific literature itself. If we were to expect unification — or as the official saying goes 'reductionism' — we should prepare ourselves to read fewer and fewer papers that are shorter and shorter, written by fewer and fewer scientists, each explaining more powerfully many more phenomena, all the way to one tiny equation from which everything else would be deduced, a fabulously powerful flash of information that could be written on a bus ticket, a real Big Bang out of which everything else could be generated.

And yet the practice, here again, is exactly the opposite. Even if you factor in duplication, replication, and the race to 'publish or/and perish,' a calm and cold consideration of the scientific literature shows that it ceaselessly multiplies the number of agents that have to be taken into account for any course of action to be achieved. If you now replace the technical name of each of those agents by what they do, as the simplest semiotic method requires, you are not faced by the oxymoron 'inanimate agencies' but, on the contrary, by a fabulous multiplication of the potentials for action. This is exactly what allows so many engineers, inventors, innovators, and investors to devise unprecedented, improbable, and surprising courses of action. The net result of the scientific disciplines is an immense increase in what moves, agitates, boils, warms, and complicates; what in brief, yes, *animates* the agencies making up the world. To explain, to account for, even to simplify,

always requires an *addition* not a subtraction of agents. This is what makes scientists and engineers so interesting to talk to.

Until, that is, they shift to the opposite end of their contradictory form of mystique and, blissfully unaware of the contradiction, begin to tell you that they, *they alone*, contrary to all the other people, deal only with completely inert and inanimate 'objects' — as they are often strangely called — that have *no agency* except the one given to them by their *antecedent causes*. But the problem is that those causes too behave as so many agencies — so many *actants* — quite unable to absorb so totally their consequences that those consequences could disappear from the world, as if the *explanandum* could be gobbled up, so to speak, by its *explanans*. The result is that the people of Owwaab face simultaneous tasks: they have to wade in a first flood made up of all the agencies they multiply at every turn, and they also wade in a second flood, *adding to the flow of the first*, of antecedent causes active enough to absorb, explain, and deduce all the other agents. When you follow those concatenations of causes and consequences, it's clear that the sea level is not going to lower, as expected, but rather that a deluge is coming!

'Why are those three contradictory features not better instituted and more efficiently recognized or even better ritualized?' the other parties to the parleys could ask the 'people of Owwaab': 'faced with similar contradictions, this is certainly what we would have worked out', the other collectives could say. Why indeed? Because of the fourth and last attribute given to this entity: *indisputability*. In itself the attribute is not remarkable. All entities able to summon their people do it through decrees that are beyond doubts and disputes. The peculiarity of this feature in this case is, once again, that it does not register the long and necessary procedures of discussion through which this *indisputability* is achieved. 'Matters of fact,' to use the most common expression, are only the terminal results of highly complex assemblages of disputing parties, reliable witnesses, peers, proofs, apprentices and masters which are in no way captured by the word 'fact' — except if one is reminded of its etymology. Isolated, left alone, cut from its networks of practice, a 'matter of fact' is a terribly weak and too easily ignored injunction. As Austin said, a 'constative' statement is a poorly contextualized performative statement. It gains its *indisputability* only when carefully serviced and accompanied by its support crews. The paradox is the same as what is visible in 'automated technologies': they

are automatic only as long as a whole crowd of helpers stays around to keep them working automatically. Nothing is more heteromatic than a robot.

But what makes the attribution of indisputability to Owwaab even stranger today is something other than the process of production of 'matters of fact.' It's the unexpected expansion — one could almost say the leakage — of the disputes way beyond the narrow confines of specialists and experts. Controversies have grown to the point where, for almost every topic, a field of contention has spread out of the academy and forced those involved in the slow production of indisputability — laboratory scientists — to increase dramatically the number of their contributors; they have enrolled many more ordinary members of the public who, in another time, would have simply been asked to study, rehearse, repeat or dumb down the established facts, not to discuss or participate in their production, evaluation or revision.

This is not something that Elisée Reclus would have expected. Imagine what would happen if we were trying to recreate his model of the globe today, let's say in the heart of Beijing or downtown Copenhagen or Rio, and if we attempted to agree on what shape to give the Earth and with which agencies to compose it. Even though Reclus was an anarchist and a former 'communard,' he would have been horrified to be interrupted at every step, when trying to lodge every plaster panel in its right location, by a crowd of dissenting voices asking for more research, different protocols and other alternate scenarios! And yet, this is exactly what is happening now when shifting collectively from a world made of indisputable 'matters of fact' to a world built with disputed 'matters of concern.' The giant globe at a scale of 1:100000 would never be completed, not because it is too costly and made of too many tons of iron, but because it would have a constantly moving girth and be composed of too many changing tiles.

On the one hand, such an expansion of the number of parties to the disputes could be welcomed since it expands also the number of the people who could invoke Owwaab as their most cherished entity — remember that its name is 'Out-of-which-we-are-all-born.' 'We' and 'all': that's quite a vast ambition! On the other hand, it makes the assembling of 'the people of Owwaab' incredibly difficult since it appears that its limit, borders and confines will never be settled. What Reclus and Geddes could still imagine — microcosm and macrocosm mirroring one another in a beautiful arrangement, that is a *cosmos* —, has become,

to put it bluntly, a mess, certainly a cacophony, or, to use another blunt Greek term, a *cacosmos*.

After having looked at the four features — each of them defined also by a specific form of contradiction —, let's come back to the translation table to see whether it might help us to compare different 'agency distributions,' different *nomos*. Remember that such is the banal expression I proposed for the structure allowing a *modus vivendi* between different entities and the various people they manage to summon.

But before we can do that, we need to solve a little problem of invocation. How should we address those who call themselves 'born-out-of-Owwaab'? It's not possible just to say: 'Ah! You are those who accept living under the auspices of an entity that is outside, unified, inanimate, indisputable and thus indefeasible.' It's impossible because the attributes that they insist on also emphasize that Owwaab is inside, multiple, animated and highly disputed. Extra care should be taken here not to hurt the feelings of people who seem immensely sensitive to those contradictions but also immensely devoid of ways to overcome them. It's actually because they can't overcome the contradictions that they are so touchy, so sensitive and in a constant state of anxiety, their feelings so easily hurt that they tend to reach for a weapon with which to launch a pre-emptive strike against whatever smacks of 'relativism.' It's as if Owwaab was in constant danger of being weakened, as if there existed a vast reservoir of furious crowds always ready to be mobilized at a moment's notice to chant hostile slogans against opponents they take to be so many desecrators — proof that those adepts might be so unsure of the solid foundation of their entity that they can't swallow any blasphemy. To quiet them down and introduce some sort of reassurance, we should be able to address Owwaab respectfully in its full force as an entity strong enough to resist any desecration. (You will understand that we are not indulging here in the old game of irony or deconstruction but are engaged in the highly delicate travails of composition).

I am not sure I am the one with enough of a healing touch, but I will propose to say that Owwaab is not invoked respectfully enough when addressed in what could be called an epistemological tonality since, in this case, only the four attributes — exteriority, unity, inanimate agencies and indisputability — are taken into account. But it is not

invoked respectfully enough either when only the four contradictory attributes — interiority, plurality, the proliferation of animated agencies and controversies — are underlined in what I will call a *critical* tone (the one most often associated with my field of science studies). Insisting on those four terms only would simply be irritating to the people of Owwaab.

It's already more polite, I would argue, more respectful of this entity's full power, to address it in what we could be called an *anthropological tonality* — by which I mean a way of talking that would list the eight features at once. That there has never been an accepted repertoire to register the two lists of contradictory features together should not be set against my attempt. Remember that the task is novel since we have to absorb the plurality of 'agency distributions' made necessary by our cosmopolitan situation. If we strive for a *modus vivendi* then we have to devise new, even odd ways of being tolerant of one another. To talk of Owwaab epistemologically, critically or anthropologically does make a crucial difference in the definition of friends and enemies and in our mobilizing capacities.

This other way of addressing Owwaab might comfort and reassure the people Owwaab assembles. Simply compare these attributes with those of other people summoned by another entity. For instance, by one who would possess the same four attributes, except that one of them would be different. This is the great service I am expecting from our little translation table: to render comparable what would have been impossible to compare had we just indulged in name-calling.

Suppose a people assembled by an entity — let's give it another cheap and provisional name like, let's say, Geity — whose attributes are exteriority, unity, animation and indisputability. Then we could easily pass the Zeus-Jupiter translation quiz by comparing Owwaab's and Geity's features. Having the same attributes means that it's the *same* entity *save for the name*. As long as we address them in an epistemological tonality, the same people is mobilized by more or less the same entity with the only difference that agencies are linked by *animated* connections in one case and *inanimate* ones in the other. But what difference that really makes is not so clear, as we shall see. So the two peoples assembled by those two instances could still cut each other's throats; however, bystanders will have to recognize that the difference is as moot as the one in the conflicting land of Lilliput between big-enders and little-enders.

What happens if one shifts to an anthropological repertoire? Then, at once, the difference between Owwaab and Geity becomes enormous. They cannot be confused any more, since Owwaab — such is its full dignity, its fantastic power, the reason why it draws upon the faithfulness of such a vast and powerful people — benefits also from the four contradictory attributes we have listed above: it resides inside clever networks of practices, it's infinitely far from unification, it makes agencies proliferate and it is *animated* in all sorts of new ways. When it ends up producing indisputability, it's through a healthy process of disputes and ever expanding controversies. At such a game, Geity is no match. Its people are stuck in an epistemological rendering that does not move an inch, the only margin of manoeuvre being to decide whether the world is made of animate or inanimate agency, whether it has a 'purpose' or not...

We will have to come back to this question of how to compare agencies, but it's important to sketch the point here because of the exaggerated hope that has been invested in the concept of 'design' as an ideal touchstone. The argument could be exactly the same as the one I have borrowed from Assman for the names of deities. If you shift attention to the range of attributes that their proper names sum up, you may distribute similarities and differences in ways you would have never guessed from considering just their official names, their emblems, or their coats of arms. The semiotics of scientific literature provides just the same set of refreshing views, at a different level, for the name of agents. The mere name of the actor does not tell you much about what the actant is doing.

If for instance you write a moving elegy about the structure of the eye 'so obviously made up by a benevolent designer since no amount of chance encounters could have produced it,' you certainly stage a magnificent fight with another argument in which another author, with the same readiness to pick a good fight, is happy to show that the structure of the eye is 'nothing more than the unintended result of small changes accumulated through generations after generations of chance encounters.' (How delightful to hear this little tricky expression: 'it's nothing more than.') Great fight indeed: design and designer versus no design and no designer!

But now, I pray that you shift your attention to the level below so as to detect what amount of action, of animation, of activity both

arguments have developed. You will be surprised to see that the 'admirable structure of the eye' in the first argument actually does strictly nothing more than being another fully redundant example of the benevolence of the arch designer — an argument that has been made four thousand times before and in the same repetitive way about everything from the 'admirable structure' of the hand, the 'admirable structure' of the heart, of the cat, the dog, the horse, all the way to the 'admirable structure' of the watermelon (to pick rather unfairly on Bernardin de Saint Pierre)... It might be beautiful and uplifting to hear that 'lilies sing the glory of God' but not if the song does not vary from one creature to the next. The insistence on those creatures being 'designed' instead of produced 'by chance' most often does not result in their being endowed with any other activity than demonstrating, once again, the same creation by the same mysterious hand of the same Creator. He acts; not the eye, nor the lily. To use my jargon, the Creator is a mediator, the lily is a mere intermediary. In term of actantiality — a horrible word for a beautiful thing — the net result is zero since the amount of animation has not increased one iota.

What is so amusing as well as puzzling for those, like me, who are as interested in chanting the glory of God as the objectivity of the sciences, is that when you turn to the other narrative, the one that boasts of aligning only concatenations of 'purely material objective agents,' clever descriptions of the most intricate details of the eye trigger surprises. Most importantly, specific lessons are drawn from fresh material, one after another, about what it is to evolve over time. And these are not the lessons you would have drawn from the lily or the watermelon. The specificity is so precise that dozens of new experimental pathways are suggested that allow the reader to imagine new forays inside new properties of the world. Plurality is vastly increased.

Now, who celebrates better the 'glory of the Creator'? The one who draws the same conclusion *à propos* every single agent or the one who multiplies the agencies with which the worlds could be composed? I will say the second, even though I am fully aware of the fact that, at the end of the demonstration, spurred by his opponent, the naturalist will most probably draw from the structure of the eye the same repetitive lesson according to which its evolution 'demonstrates once again beyond a shadow of a doubt' that there is no design and no designer: 'so that the course of nature is conceived as being merely the fortunes of matter in its

*adventure through space,'* to quote Whitehead. Another triumph for reductionism: Nature 1; God 0. No adventure left in this second official narrative, no story told. A strange form of triumph, I agree, since our intelligent naturalist strives to be as dumb as his opponent, his left hand (he is most probably a man) trying to withdraw from the world the agencies that his right hand has so cleverly multiplied.

And yet I would maintain the striking superiority of the second narrative over the first. If you strip the second from its 'please no design' gloss, the long retinue of actants are still there (I would even say that you may hear them rehearsing backstage before coming in to chant the glory of God!) while the first narrative, the one you hear so often from the pulpit, once stripped it of its old tune, has not added one single new specific voice to the sum of agents. The parson is left with the same choirboys and the same respectable maiden at the organ to play the same song. The lesson we should draw out of this shift in attention is that we should not predict the alliances and draw the front lines from the official terms at the top of the list but from the properties below.

This is why I tried to direct the discussion by following the semiotic method. It's not by adding the word 'soul' to an agency that you will make it do something more, nor is it by calling it 'inanimate' that you will deprive it of its action and of its animation and make it do something less. Actants are acting. You may try to 'over-animate' them or, on the contrary, attempt to 'de-animate' them; all the same, they will stubbornly remain actants. Anyway, the difference between over-animated and de-animated elements is not enough of a cause for which to live, pray, die, or fight or build temples, shrines or globes. If we have to fight, let's at least do it in the name of war ends worth dying for.

By now you must have understood well enough what I am trying to achieve: there is no meaning in using the expression of 'natural religion' because it is either a redundancy or a badly assembled amalgam.

Many orators of this prestigious lecture series have started from the idea that Nature, without scare quotes, is what anthropologists call an 'unmarked category,' and that the difficulty resided more in the highly contested marked category of 'religion' — this one in scare quotes. The problem for many of those lecturers has been to 'reconcile' the two outlooks by asking Nature — by which is almost always meant 'Nature known by the natural sciences' — to please leave some room for another 'dimension,' the 'religious,' understood either in its spiritual

location inside the soul or in its cosmic extension throughout what is often called 'Creation.' What made this positioning of the problem so disappointing was not, as is often said, the difficulty of defining religion, spirituality, creation, etc., but the highly implausible and highly unexamined notion of 'Nature.'

As I have just proposed to show by invoking Owwaab and Geity, if we approach this question in the epistemological mode, there is no great difference between turning to 'Nature' — now also a coded category defined by the four attributes of exteriority, unity, inanimate agencies and indisputability — or turning to 'religion' — defined by the same attributes minus the fourth one, animated agencies. It is in that sense that the expression 'natural religion' is fully pleonastic. It has been shown many times by historians that, somewhere between the 17<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there has been a kind of *translatio imperii* between the two assembling entities: the 'nature' of epistemology having taken over all the attributes of 'religion' — including its capacity to assemble a specific people devoted to it. While 'religion,' in reaction, has retained the bizarre stance of defining its own entity in the language of epistemology by sticking to the same four attributes — one of them strangely dysfunctional under the name 'design.'

	<b><i>Natural</i></b>		<b><i>Religion</i></b>
<b><i>Entity</i></b>	OWWAAB or Nature One (epistemological)	OWWAAB or Nature Two (critical)	GEITY or Religion One
	Nature (anthropological)		
<b><i>Agency distribution</i></b>	Outside	Inside	Exteriority
	Unified	Multiple	Unified
	De-animated	Animated	Over-animated
	Undisputable	Disputable	Undisputable
<b><i>People</i></b>	Anyone	Scientists	Anyone + Church

Table 1-1

The situation — and thus the very position of the problem — shifts completely if we address those entities able to assemble their respective people in what I have called, for want of a better form, the anthropological mode. At once, 'natural religion' becomes a badly composed amalgam. So, as far as 'agency distribution' is concerned, the expression 'nature' doesn't define what is assembled in practice, nor does the expression 'religion' qualify the sort of people, rites, and attachments proper to those practices. This is the point, although so far a purely negative one, that I wanted to reach at the end of this first lecture.

For those who are assembled by 'Nature,' this conclusion should be clear from the four contradictory features I have outlined above: to follow its injunctions, one has to burrow deep inside scientific networks, to absorb the staggering multiplicity of its agents, to register the long concatenations of its surprising and animated agencies, and to swallow ever expanding controversies over multiple matters of concern. It's completely unrealistic, you will have to agree, to confuse the people assembled in the first epistemological mode and in the second anthropological one, even though both would invoke the *same* entity 'Nature,' call themselves 'naturalists' and insist on their utter separation from all the other people assembled by other entities thanks to the virtues of their sacrosanct 'reductionism.' To sum up in terms that might sound too flippant, let me say that the discussion, if we take it seriously enough, leads us to define 'Nature' in a post-epistemological way or to say that we are moving to a post-natural definition of the problem. '

'Once out of nature I shall never take  
My bodily form from any natural thing.'

The real surprise (as we shall see in the next lecture) is not that the 'agency distribution' made under the auspices of 'Nature' is so complex as to allow Sherezarade to spin many a tale — thus indefinitely delaying her execution —, but that the 'agency distribution,' the *nomos*, realized under the auspices of 'religion' captures so little of the features of what is so vitally important for the people this entity is supposed to summon. If you find it puzzling that the invocation of 'Nature' does not register any of the real attributes to which its practitioners are so passionately attached, I find it vastly more puzzling that those who are said to be gathered by the entity they often call 'God' captures, with such an invocation, nothing more than exteriority, unity, and indisputability;

that is, almost exactly the epistemology of those they take as their enemies (plus or minus the rump question of design).

Paradoxically, it might be easier to provide a more realistic portrait of the people of Nature than to detoxify those who claim to speak religiously from their attachment to a narrow epistemological rendering of their own vocation—after all, this is what my little field of 'science studies' has done for many decades. It's extremely doubtful that those who claim to be saved by Jesus and to live in His father's Creation so as to belong to the same Church and be close to those they call their neighbours, would insist on defining those entities for whom they are ready to give their life by the four features of exteriority, universality, over-animation and indisputability. They will probably insist on other features as different from those four ones as those who invoke 'nature known by natural sciences.' Hence the necessity, once again, of not being fooled by the amalgam of 'natural religion' which offers precise indications neither of nature nor of religion.

But the other reason why it's so important to do away with the very amalgam of 'natural religion' is that we are not faced, in the cosmopolitan situation I took as my departure point, with only two 'agency distributions' as could still be the case when David Hume was writing his marvellous dialogs or when Adam Lord Gifford funded this lecture series, but with as many distributions as there are entities summoning people today. When naturalists call themselves those Out-of-Which-We-Are-All-Born or when some Christians call themselves those Out-of-Whom-We-Are-All-Born, there might be fierce disputes between this 'Which' and this 'Whom,' but what I want us to remain sensitive to is the clamour of those who say: 'What is this "we"? What is this "all"? Don't count "us" in. We are not part of either of those people. Your entities are not summoning us at all. We are under instances that distribute agencies wholly differently. Don't unify the situation so prematurely! Please, don't drag us into your world wars, we don't want to play any part in your plots.' This is the reason why I choose the word 'anthropology' to define the mode in which we could pursue the conversation.

Going beyond the number two, setting up a wide enough comparison between mechanisms for 'agency distribution', and avoiding the wedge between 'nature' and 'religion' might become crucial resources for discovering the right shape of the Earth when the time comes to find a way to participate in the institution, or better, the

instauration of Gaia. It's clear that Its shape would be totally distorted if we had to choose whether It's an entity from religion or from science, whether it's a myth or a natural phenomenon. And nothing would be gained by saying that It's a bit of both, a mythical scientific amalgam, since both 'nature' and 'religion' are already amalgams! Confusion would be added to confusion. No, we need a method to discriminate the various people assembled in the name of various entities. Entities don't like to be addressed in the wrong way by the wrong procedures; and people don't like to be summoned by the wrong entities or circumscribed by the wrong *nomos*. I hope I have indicated clearly enough why such an entity could not be defined by the pleonasm of 'natural religion.'

There is no question, in that sense, that we have become divided nations, often divided inside ourselves because we are summoned by many different entities to live under very different types of Earth. As a first approximation, it's obvious that the people who are assembled under Gaia will not resemble either those who used to invoke Nature, nor those who say that they worship a deity with all the trappings of religion. None of the four main attributes we reviewed so far seem to be part of Gaia. As we shall see later in more detail, she is not outside but also inside; she is not universal but local; she is neither over-animated nor de-animated; and in addition, no question about it, she is fully controversial. Gaia is most probably another Earth, another Globe, invoked by another people, as foreign to what used to be called nature and natural scientists as from what used to be called religion. How to address It or Her respectfully? This is what we will have to discover.

# A shift in agency — with apologies to David Hume. Gifford 2. Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> February 2013

Tonight we are once again assembled in the hope of defining the conditions in which we could face Gaia, that wholly secular arrangement of wholly secular agencies, without being petrified by Gorgon's glance — or, to put things less dramatically, in the hope of sharing a common definition of the changing shape of the Earth. Yesterday, I proposed to say that if this question could not be solved in the framework of 'natural religion,' it had nonetheless to be tackled as a problem of political theology; a political theology extended to an entity and to a people who, until recently, would not have been thought to be part of the problem, namely, those gathered by nature. Before we can decide whether this inclusion of the 'children of nature' into political theology helps to solve the problem or makes it even more intractable, we have to complete the table set up yesterday with a more realistic definition of religion.

Not surprisingly, this set of features will appear just as distinct from the usual sense of religion as the set of features revealed by science studies (what we could now call Nature Two) has been shown to be distant from the usual definition of science (let's call it Nature One). Then, having filled in the table, we might better understand why reflexions starting from the amalgam of 'natural religion' could never lead very far and how we may now begin to propose an alternative path.

The following quote is from part 5 of Hume's justly famous *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* when Philo, carried along by his sceptical argument that no knowledge whatsoever of the ultimate cause could be attained (to the great scandal of Demea but, surprisingly, to Cleanthes' final satisfaction), rambles about the many equally plausible and equally meaningless scenarios for the origin of the world.

*"In a word, Cleanthes, a man, who follows your hypothesis, is able, perhaps, to assert, or conjecture, that the universe, sometime, arose from something like design: But beyond that position he cannot ascertain one single circumstance, and is left afterwards to fix every point of his theology, by the utmost license of fancy and hypothesis. This world, for aught he knows, is very faulty and imperfect, compared to a superior*

standard; and was only the first rude essay of some infant deity, who afterwards abandoned it, ashamed of his lame performance: **It is the work only of some dependent, inferior deity; and is the object of derision to his superiors: It is the production of old age and dotage in some superannuated deity; and ever since his death, has run on at adventures, from the first impulse and active force, which it received from him...**

You justly give signs of horror, Demea, at these strange suppositions: But these, and a thousand more of the same kind, are Cleanthes' suppositions, not mine. From the moment the attributes of the deity are supposed finite, all these have place. And I cannot, for my part, think, that so wild and unsettled a system of theology is, in any respect, preferable to **none** at all.

These suppositions I absolutely disown, cried Cleanthes: They strike me, however, with no horror; especially when proposed in that rambling way, in which they drop from you. On the contrary, they give me pleasure, when I see, that, by the utmost indulgence of your imagination, you **never get rid of the hypothesis of design in the universe**; but are obliged, at every turn, to have recourse to it. To this concession I adhere steadily; and this I regard as a sufficient **foundation for religion.**" p. 168-9

How I wish I had David Hume's wit and Philo's devastating irony; how I wish their graceful English had been my mother tongue. Had I had the slightest chance of borrowing a fraction of their golden style, I would not have remained stupidly idle, like poor Pamphilus, the mere auditor of a conversation that was supposed to educate him 'in the solid foundation of Natural Religion.' What a fraud in such a claim; someone should have warned his father not to let him under Cleanthes' supervision: nothing more corrupting could have touched this young and tender soul! As a young boy, I would have been so scandalized by the obsessive search of those three grown ups for a foundation of religion in the sole and unique question of 'design' that, in spite of my foreign upbringing, I would have surely interjected: 'Forgive me, Cleanthes, and you too Philo, and you very respectable Demea — pardon my barging in, my faulty accent — but why is it that at no time in your long discussion (a very enlightening one for my young ears, to be sure), have you mentioned anything having to do with religion, with what really counts for us in religion?'

'I see your surprise, Demea, and Cleanthes your frowning at my interposition. You surely object that you have talked of nothing else all along. But the only moment when the three of you have agreed is when

you have said, I quote you Philo, “that the best and indeed the only method of bringing everyone to a due sense of religion is by just representations of the misery and wickedness of men.” (p. 193). I see from my notes that you, Demea, nodded in approval and so did you, Cleanthes. I have to confess that I find this defence of religion from the wickedness of men and the misery of his life, a miserable one and, yes, horribly wicked. If the God that has assembled His Church and sent his Son and Spirit has no other claim to be worshiped than our human weakness, is He —this might be blasphemous, I know — is He worth the belief that you, Cleanthes, wish me to cherish in my heart? From your horrified gestures, I see that I should stop. Should I continue? I am sorry to spit out in this way all sorts of silly thoughts but then I get them off my chest. Tell my mentors, Philo, that this too is good for my education.’

‘I know what you are going to say, my respected teachers, that you today were not talking about what comes from the heart nor what is taught by our most holy Church about the unfathomable mysteries of our religion, but only of what is accessible by unaided reason through the mere scientific knowledge we have of the natural world. But here again, I feel ashamed to have to disagree with such eminent masters. In my view — admittedly weak and still amorphous —, you have done nothing more than pit one blind designer — a sort of ‘blind watchmaker’ — against another designer who has no other property than being non-visually challenged! But what’s the gain in terms of religion? And if I dare to say so, what’s the gain in terms of natural philosophy? At no point did you raise any other question but that of deciding upon the ultimate cause out of which or out of whom we are all born; a “what” against a “who”? Is this the only question to be raised? Is there a genuine difference between the two or only a purely verbal one?’

‘But even more troubling, you establish a foundation for natural philosophy and for religion, then base that foundation purely on knowledge. You, the great philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment, the youth of Edinburgh, the source of so much pride for all of us: you assert an already unified universe, a universe so unified through your leap of faith that the only remaining task is finding a name for the ultimate cause of this vast coherent whole. From which comfortable, distant, outside theatre seats have you witnessed the spectacle of this already completed universe? If your gaze is so vast that you can already embrace this whole, then declaring where it comes from must almost

be an afterthought. Perhaps you'll take me for some Jacobite just descended from his wild Highlands, but three things are amiss in your vast edifice: your premature unification of the world, your expectation for religion, and your attributions to natural philosophy.'

The story does not tell us whether the discussion broke down at this point. Maybe poor Pamphilus was severely reprimanded for his adolescent ramblings and sent back to his room with nothing but water, bread and a Bible. My own suspicion is that at least one of the protagonists, Philo of course, would have been sufficiently troubled by the young chap's bursts of indignation, to explore those three questions a bit further — but this time silently, in the privacy of his cabinet. He would know (as I do) that it's the great privilege of philosophy that a young untutored mouth may propose refreshing conundrums that would have escaped the mind of a number of more seasoned scholars.

There is no question that Philo, who is — even though commentators are divided on this question — Hume's barely veiled mouthpiece, holds the view that the very idea of 'natural religion' is a pleonasm. As we saw in the previous lecture, there is no way to speak of 'design' and not to bring in some sort of entity, for a very specific type of people who defined it by the four attributes of exteriority, unity, animation or universality and indisputability or non-negotiability. Once this is decided, the only remaining question is to decide whether the job of ultimate cause is better carried out by one all-seeing watchmaker — a 'Providence' that envisions things ahead — or by a blind watchmaker — for instance, 'Evolution' that pushes things haphazardly from behind but very efficaciously when provided with enough time. The third remaining solution being to decide, as Philo does, that the task is fruitless.

As Pamphilus could have said, had he learned any semiotics, the distinction between a *what* and a *who* is a question of *figuration*, two different names of actors given to the same agency. An *actant* is an *actant*, and a *watchmaker* remains a *watchmaker*, even if he is blind. Philo knows this game better than anybody else since he has proposed in the dialog a bewildering number of substitutes for the same role: architect, giant spider, superannuated deity, monsters, devils and even a big vegetable! All these roles are sometimes attributed to a single unified force, sometimes distributed through many agents, but always charged with the same function of designing garments for clothing the

ultimate cause. This is why Hume and Philo enjoyed themselves so much, destroying all of those propositions like so many clay pipes in a shooting range. Their point was exactly that: all those actors have no more value than clay pipes since you may add as many as you want at your fancy.

But what Philo would have not realized without Pamphilus' scandalized interjections is that a totally different conclusion than scepticism could be drawn from so entertaining a strategy. The whole dialog — Philo has to acquiesce — implies a placing of the problem that is satisfactory neither for him nor for Cleanthes — as to Demea, he is so disgusted by the whole conversation that he leaves before the end of the session! The reason is that the dialog starts with three arbitrary suppositions: that there is a universe already unified enough to be in need of an overall explanation; that the only way to raise the question is through the single requirement of knowledge — aided or unaided by Scriptures; and that the religion dear to the heart of Pamphilus, Cleanthes and even Demea will be abetted or destroyed only once a new and stable piece of information regarding the ultimate cause of the universe will have been secured.

Let me present Philo's three new arguments (in reverse order) by using the same tool that I have used in the previous lecture, that is, a translation table that allows our attention to shift from the label given to the entities — at the top — to their attributes —at the bottom. We know that it's easy to declare wars by focusing on the top labels but that front lines become much more entangled when the attributes are taken into account — and that such a shift might provide occasions later for opening peace negotiations.

It is certainly the case that useless wars could be avoided when resorting to the ambiguous name of 'religion.' Pamphilus is right to say that what he identifies by that name has no attribute in common with what Philo is attacking so devastatingly and Cleanthes is defending so clumsily. The front lines are completely messed up. To avoid the bizarre labels of last night, let's call them simply 'Religion One,' and 'Religion Two.'

First, the people summoned by Religion Two are clearly and unequivocally defined as members of a 'Church,' that is, as a highly specific grouping with clear boundaries marked by specific rituals and sacraments. You may have noticed that in the three assemblages we

reviewed in the previous lecture, the exact shape of the people remained very fuzzily drawn. It might not even be clear to a 'naturalist' that he or she is part of a specific people summoned by a specific entity. They were alternatively everybody ('we are all born'), comprising all reasonable humans, or, depending on the controversies, limited to an unspecified assembly of scientists, natural philosophers and members of the public. It seems that naturalists are supposed to be at once completely interchangeable, bodiless minds and also highly skilled and specialized experts. Such a confusion does not help in the exact definition of their folk. As to the people summoned by 'natural religion,' it was not clear if we had to deal with any particular historical Church or with humanity as a whole on its way to conversion. By contrast, here, for Pamphilus, it's clearly a concrete and well-delineated congregation who share the same faith, vocation and rituals.

		<b><i>Natural Religion</i></b>			
<b><i>Entity Theos</i></b>	OWWAAB or Nature One (epistemological)	OWWAAB or Nature Two (critical)	GEITY or Religion One (epistemological)	Religion Two (spiritual)	
	Nature (anthropological)				
<b><i>Agency distribution Nomos</i></b>	Outside	Inside	Exteriority	Incarnation	
	Unified	Multiple	Unified	Trinity	
	De-animated	Animated	Over-animated	Salvation	
	Undisputable	Disputable	Undisputable	Proximity	
<b><i>People Demos</i></b>	Anyone	Scientists	Anyone + Church	Church	

Table 2-1

Second, it's hard to reconcile Religion One and Two when one considers that the key feature of the narrative offered by the Christian tradition totally subverts the very distinction between the people and the entity it summons (remember that people, entity and distribution of agencies are the three concepts we needed to organize our political theology). In such a narrative, the very distinction between what is

outside and what is inside is being totally transformed since the God incarnate is at once radically outside and radically inside. Because God, according to this creed, has chosen to share human destiny, the people He assembles are called to become in turn like God. It is difficult to imagine mixing any more thoroughly the paired key notions of exteriority and interiority, of up and down, of Heaven and Earth — we will come back to this feature later when comparing with the people assembled under the paradoxical figure of Gaia. At any rate, the word ‘Incarnation’ is just as hard to reconcile with Religion One as with the two other definitions of Nature (columns 1 to 2 in the table).

Third, the entity around which the Church assembles bears no relation to the others, since it shares none of its characters of unity, universality, indisputability and immutability. On the contrary, it’s best characterized, as far as we can tell, by a chain of successive and radical metamorphoses, mutations, and conversions, of reprises, in the very definition of what any entity is. Even when this chain is artificially segmented in successive events — God, Son, Holy Spirit, Church, none of them may be defined as a stable *substance*. The label ‘Trinity’ does not help much at this point, except that it underlines how far it is from the already unified ‘God’ implied by Religion One. Most importantly, grasping each of its sequences requires a highly specific movement of appropriation and of retelling, so that the whole narrative of incarnation can be carried one step forward in time and space in a new refreshing way. While Religion Two is defined by a succession of events taken up one after the other, Religion One strives to define a distant and stable object. And it has no other way to define it except by choosing words that have to be as *independent* as possible from the distant target. By contrast, in Religion Two, the realisation of the event — in all the meanings of ‘realization’ — depends on a *logos*, that is, on how to retell the narrative, how to address and more exactly to convert the faithful, how to spread the Good News of the Gospel. Here again the discrepancies between the two meanings of religion are baffling. The thing told and the word telling it are one and the same — that is, ‘the Word’ with a capital W, this Word that stands ‘at the Beginning’ of John’s scripture.

Fourth, what is even more disturbing and what explains Pamphilus’s indignant retort is that the very way of taking up those questions cannot possibly be grasped in the quiet cool way in which ‘natural religion’ seems to be complacently debated. This is where lies the most disturbing difference between Religion Two and all the other

columns: the talk is not about carrying *information* (Is there an ultimate cause? Is it a deity, a giant spider, a benevolent Providence or a ‘blind watchmaker’?), but about *transforming*, converting, resuscitating those who are talked to. And yet, at no point in his celebrated dialog does Hume make the smallest effort to even begin to understand this gaping difference that has nonetheless occupied the best minds in Christianity for about eighteen hundred years — not to mention its saints and prophets: What it is to speak, not *about* religion, but *religiously*, that is, to welcome, to generate and to encounter again the beings proper to religion by the very way you preach them to people?

David Hume’s Scottish land of the 1750s seems just as untouched by Christianity as Cicero’s benighted Latium in the first century BC (an acronym that used to mean, for those who still remember it, ‘Before Christ’). In the mid eighteenth century of our Common Era, Hume does not seem to consider any other way to enunciate anything than by what could be called *information transfer*. That there might be another way (actually many other ways), and that there exists one aiming at transforming the person you talk to or, more precisely, that there are ways of talking that generate or produce persons, he gives no indication of even contemplating as a possibility. For him, it seems, there is just one regime of speech that he may use exactly in the same fashion to ask his butler if he should carry an umbrella to visit his friend Adam Smith; if his mistress loves him for good; if Cromwell was born the 25<sup>th</sup> of April 1599; or if God is a spider, an architect, or a giant vegetable. One size fits all. And yet rational discourse is not to treat everything in the same dispassionate tone, but to learn how to detect the different tones adjusted to the different situations so as to be able to sing all of them in the right tune.

This is, I think, why Pamphilus reacted so fiercely: ‘You Philo, the sceptic, but you also Cleanthes, and even you, pious Demea, never addressed me in a way that could count for me as a question of salvation — of life and death. You spoke in a way that offered no remedy to the distance at which we are assembled and alive. All the elements among which you offered to choose — your God, the giant spider, the superannuated deity or the big vegetable — are equally *foreign* to me, none of them produce the *proximity* that would have made us *neighbours* assembled in the same Church for the same rituals and the same destiny. You have transformed the only speech act able to generate proximity into a vain quest for accessing far away regions — a quest

which will never have the efficacy of the natural sciences. You behave as if religion was something of the past. A savage cult just good for strange folks in Africa or way back in the Highlands and that everything left in Christianity was Sunday choirs, beautiful landscapes, pretty gardens and nice morality.'

It's hard not to pity poor Pamphilus left growling in the dark, imprisoned with water and black bread. How could he have imagined, at such a young age, that the grown ups in whom he has so much confidence could teach him a view of the *supernatural* that bore no relation whatsoever with religion, and a view of the *natural* that bore even less relation with the real practice of science?

Had he had the chance to glance at our little table, he might have been prepared for this disappointing result. He would have noticed that the vague term of 'natural religion' mixes about sixteen different features that had to be distributed among four different entities summoning four different people who had no real reason to assemble in the same place. Quite an amalgam! It's really sad that the best minds of Edinburgh were able to leave this poor chap hopelessly saddled with the confusion created by a search for 'natural religion' when he was trying to live up to the several ways in which the worlds can be gathered together. How sad it is to see that the real enough difference between the far away — accessed so beautifully by the sciences — and the near at hand — accessed so efficaciously by Religion Two, has been so hopelessly reversed that Demea, when he needs to talk with a tremulous voice about the 'unfathomable mysteries of his religion,' has to point his finger to the sky whereas, when talking calmly with Philo about 'scientific knowledge,' he targets the Earth below.

And yet, there is no irrational mystery in Pamphilus' religion. Or rather, religion is transmogrified into an unfathomable mystery precisely because of this reversal in the directions of the gaze and because the various ways there are to reach the different targets are omitted. Demea, when talking about spirituality, should have directed Pamphilus' attention toward the close at hand and, when talking about science, toward the far away. But to succeed in both redirections, he should have sidestepped twice the sharp limits imposed by common sense. This famed common sense that remains just as insensitive about how to generate neighbours, as it is on how to access the far away,

persuaded as it is that there is nothing in the world but ‘middle size dry goods’ that can be talked about, as they say, ‘matter-of-factly.’

You understand why Pamphilus’ father should be warned: the net result of this famous dialog is that common sense triumphs *against* religion yes but also *against science*. It’s a poor education that misses the far away just as much as the close at hand. It’s a poor education that renders Copernicus’, Galileo’s and Newton’s long nights of labour as impossible to register as the detours the Good Samaritan has to take to transform into his *neighbour* — his *prochain* — the poor bloke left half dead on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. If that is the result of the Scottish enlightenment, then it must have cast a deep shadow over lots of other sources of light as well and marked not the beginning but rather the end of an era. I hope Demea, after having left the room, has read with tears this admonishment: ‘*If anyone causes one of those little ones to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck.*’ (Mat 18-6).

The scandal resides in the way Demea had too quickly accepted that the ordinary tools of reason could no longer follow the process of his religion in a *continuous* step by step fashion. Probably out of desperation, he resigned himself to jump headlong into the comforting murkiness of profound mysteries. If such an abandoning of rationality could not convince Philo, it did not educate poor Pamphilus either. He was left with the only solution to take a great leap of faith just at the point when renewed attention and care in following the thread of experience would have been most necessary. And yet, the young man rightly concluded that he has at his disposal one reason, and *only one*, and it relied on exactly the *same* set of cognitive abilities to follow different types of objects, different threads, different manners of speech acts. Demea had led him astray by acting as if there existed limits to Reason and that, at some point, this step by step procedure had to be abandoned for some *salto mortale* that he called (blasphemously?) Faith. As if, once the flight through the natural had been exhausted through lack of oxygen, another vehicle could trigger some post-combustion rockets and give access to the supernatural. As we are beginning to understand, the great advantage of doubting the natural is that we don’t have to keep on looking above our heads toward the supernatural. In the really secular world to come, both the natural and the supernatural might disappear at last.

Pamphilus (and maybe Philo as well) has certainly detected the origin of such confusion. Demea seems to think that information transfer and transfers of transformation require two distinct cognitive abilities —one for this world and the second for the other world. — as if we had two sets of them: one for this world and the second for the other world. The sad thing is that the canonical opposition between Faith and Reason fails equally to follow the step by step procedures that allow us to trace, with the same attention, the same mind and the same brain, the complex movement of information — Nature Two — as well as the equally complex movement that transforms, and sometimes saves those who are thus addressed — Religion Two. Such an opposition introduces a wedge between two irreconcilable domains, where must exist just a few small disparities in the tools employed by the same and only reason to follow two different threads (two, among many others). Being rational is to learn how to follow all the paths without somersault, not to be limited to one only.

If there is something clearly shocking in Demea's abandoning of rationality, there is something more forgivable in Cleanthes' attempt. To be sure, he does nothing to help his pupil register the attributes of Religion (Two). He too believes that it's necessary, when talking about religion, to look high up instead of down here. But at least, he doesn't wish to abandon the procedure of reason and does not think that a tremulous voice will help him answer his God's call in the right key. This is why he is beaten by Philo every time; he repeatedly tries to use the vehicle of information-transfer in order to access a type of truth for which it is as ill-adapted as an overstretched limousine snaking its way through the narrow country lanes — as in the first opening scene of Lars von Trier's *Melancholia*. Every time Cleanthes realizes that his expensive vehicle is in the lurch, he admits quite frankly that this is not the trip he wished to take in the first place. The problem is that, just like von Trier's heroine, Justine, he has no other place to go and no other ride to reach it anyway.

What makes his attempt so vacuous and yet so important for our undertaking tonight is that Cleanthes, as far as we understand it, refuses to believe that Religion number Two could have *no consequence* on Nature. To put it bluntly, he does not want Philo to own the whole 'real world' for himself. This too would be a flight from reason, just as dramatic as Demea's. You may criticize 'natural religion;' prove that it's

a pleonasm; show that the idea of two books — Bible and Nature — written by the same Author is a bungled metaphor; and yet still wish not to let Nature swallow Creation entirely (especially if it's Nature number One that does the swallowing). Cleanthes tries to counterbalance the dangerous drift that would restrict Religion inside the heart, limit its vocation to the salvation of only humans, and, even more narrowly, shrink the salvation of those humans solely to the souls of the few members of the Kirk.

Cleanthes knows very well that Incarnation is not simply about the self, about the human, about the soul, that it's about the world, about Creation (let's use the word *cosmos* here in order not have to choose between Nature and Creation). But he sees no entrance to this world because the closed and round shape that Philo has given it offers no hook for such a connection. When he tries to transplant Religion Two within a *cosmos*, to give it a ground, a soil, an Earth, he fails miserably because only Nature One is presented to him. This is why he is stuck with the idea of 'design': on the surface of the smoothed impregnable walls of Nature around which he has been turning in desperation, he can do nothing more than paint the vain graffiti 'God has been here!'

And yet Cleanthes' enterprise could be taken much more seriously: his aim is to hybridize through another grafting of the people assembled by Nature with the people assembled by Religion number Two. At the very least, through his misdirected obstinacy he indicates that the task of political theology is not yet completed. Maybe he believes that he is another Saint Paul, put in charge of writing another version of the Epistle to the Hebrews — except, this time, it is to the people of the 'naturalists' and not to those of the 'circumcision' that he is trying so clumsily to address his message of salvation!

If I had to poke a few holes in Hume's dialog (with many apologies to the memory of your great Scottish philosopher), it's because it allowed me to fill in the fourth column of my table and to underline some of the discordances among those differing people and entities. By doing so, we might ready ourselves to face Gaia in a slightly more promising way since now there might be an alternative to 'natural religion'; an alternative that could reopen the question not by following the usual limits of the plots but by a radical reallocation of the attributes. To speed things up, I have sketched one of those propositions by

reshuffling the previous table — even though such a doodle might not strike you as much more mature than Pamphilus' indignant retorts.

	<i>Premature unification</i>		<i>Ongoing unification</i>	
<b>Entity Theos</b>	Nature One (epistemological)	Religion One (epistemological)	Nature Two (critical)	Religion Two (spiritual)
<b>Natural Religion</b>				
<b>Agency distribution Nomos</b>	Outside	Exteriority	Inside	Incarnation
	Unified	Unified	Multiple	Trinity
	De-animated	Over-animated	Animated	Salvation
	Undisputable	Undisputable	Disputable	Proximity
<b>People Demos</b>	Anyone	Anyone + Church	Scientists	Church

Table 2-2

Quite logically, I propose to put Nature One and Religion One close together since they share the same epistemological definition, and that they differ only in the meaning of the word 'animation' (as we saw yesterday) and in the size and boundaries of the assembled people. Together, they make what is usually called 'natural religion.' Such was the canonical departure point for many meditations on how to 'reconcile' materialism and spiritualism, Science and Religion, objects and values, 'is' and 'ought' and so on. No wonder that those meditations could never extract themselves from amalgam and pleonasm since both people are summoned by an entity that could reasonably be called either God or Nature, *Deus sive Natura*. At least, they both morph into one another so easily that it's impossible to call one of them secular and the other non-secular. The history of political epistemology should account for this *translatio imperii* through which the features of Nature have been decanted into those of God, before being poured over, once again, from God to Nature, in a long chain of successive transfers, from the Greek to Christianity through the Church Fathers all the way to the various types of 'scientific revolutions.'

Since the time might have come ‘to put new wine into new wineskins,’ I propose a risky move: putting side by side the two lists of features that had apparently nothing in common except that they each differ radically, the first from Nature, the second from Religion. And it’s true they have nothing in common, since one is about information transfer (what I call *chains of reference*) while the other, as we saw above, is concerned with *transfers of transformations*. The two people assembled by those two entities are entirely distinct: one is trying, through instruments and delicate chains of reference, to access the invisible and the far away; the other, through predication and conversion, to multiply those who are near and close. So far, their only joint features are, first, to be equally ignored by common sense and, second, to be, each in its own way, the hidden agenda of one plank of the program making up ‘natural religion.’

And yet, they might share something much more essential, provided we consider the overall effect of such realignment and begin to compare our columns, this time, two by two.

When put close together, it becomes clear that Nature One and Religion One share the same basic premise: they proceed as if the task of unifying the world had been completed, and as if it were unproblematic to speak of the world as a whole. For both of them the *universe has already been fully unified* (for Philo as well as for Cleanthes unified once and for all by their inimitable model, that is, Newton’s physics and theology). This is why, to Pamphilus’ dismay, the question of the ultimate cause could be so easily raised. Philo and Demea embrace the world in *toto*, as if the ‘view from nowhere’ was a real place offering comfortable seating as well as good sighting. Both are full members of what Peter Sloterdijk calls the ‘age of the Globe,’ that is, a time when there was no difficulty whatsoever in holding the world as a globe in one’s hands just as Atlas does in Mercator’s famous frontispiece. (A topic that we will revisit in the fourth lecture.)

What is interesting is that, as soon as we render problematic this premature unification of the cosmos, by contrast a new communality appears in the two other columns on the right. Both are fully *secular* — provided you agree to designate by this somewhat capricious adjective ways of life that do not rely on the pre-existence of an overarching God slash Nature. Since, in order to reach their differing goals they can’t rely on such a deity to do the job for them, both have to pay the price of their extension to the full — a common feature that is worth underlining.

When taken as practices, scientific disciplines, launched in the hard step by step process of reaching the invisible and the far away, have to encounter, one after the other, each of the new and surprising agents composing a world that is not yet unified, not yet undisputed, and not yet outside. This is why the scientific way of life is simultaneously so slow, so diverse, so exciting — and also why it's so frustrating and often so controversial. To call something 'scientific' is not a guarantee of certain success but the warning that a risk has been taken that may thus end up in failure. My benighted little field of science studies takes great pride in following those paths, those networks, in ever more and more detail: how scientific procedures have to pay the full cost of each segment along their extension, from a new surprising agent brought to the laboratory, and then, once submitted to harsh laboratory trials, how it manages to maintain its complex systems of proofs outside of its narrow confines so as to survive in the 'real world' outside. Naturally, the people devoting their life to this mode of extension may wish that their results be already universal, incontrovertible and fully exterior to their man- and machine- made narrow procedures, but nonetheless there will be a reminder the next day to pay once again in hard currency the total bill for their extension one step further — paper after paper, citation after citation, colleague after colleague, place after place, process after process, proof after proof, patent after patent, little fact after little fact. No fact for free, always already there everywhere.

If we turn to those people assembled by entities who seem to appear and disappear, depending on how they are talked about, we find, strangely, that they, too, must follow a hard and costly, slow, step-by-step process of extending their agencies. This people can't rely on claims about their entity's premature and unsubstantiated universal completion. Naturally, you might claim that you 'believe in God' but the next day you will be reminded that 'if you lack charity you won't be better than echoing bronze, or the clash of cymbals' (I-Cor 13-1). And how would you extend charity, I beg you, without taking each detour, at each moment, for each word, each person, to reach the near and the close at hand and start every time anew? Here again, it's totally impossible to suppose that a premature unification of what is at stake could protect you from paying the full cost of the extension of the Good Message, faithful after faithful, place after place, translation after translation. And if you believe you have already done it, yesterday, for good, forever, then you

have also forever lost along the way the very content of the Message you were supposed to transfer. For a word that was supposed to transform those to whom you were preaching into persons loved and saved, you have substituted a word that is simply providing meaningless information. And to add insult to injury — or rather to sin —, that information is empty since there is not a single byte in it! Demea, Demea, don't you realize you have nothing to say if you don't say it in the right tone?

	<i>Multiverse</i>	<i>Premature unification</i>		<i>Ongoing unification</i>	
<i>Entity Theos</i>	<i>Secular</i>	Nature One	Religion One	Nature Two (critical)	Religion Two (spiritual)
<i>Agency distribution Nomos</i>	<i>Non-naturalists</i>	<i>Natural Religion</i>			
		Outside	Exteriority	Inside	Incarnation
		Unified	Unified	Multiple	Trinity
		De-animated	Over-animated	Animated	Salvation
<i>People Demos</i>	<i>Non-modern collectives</i>	Undisputable	Undisputable	Disputable	Proximity
		Anyone	Anyone + Church	Scientists	Church

Table 2-3

It's too early to check whether or not those two modes of extension — or modes of existence, as I call them, that is REF and REL — could resonate in any meaningful way and assemble their people through a more relevant political covenant. What I want to point out now is the last feature of my reallocation. If we consider that the two columns making up 'natural religion' are unifying the universe prematurely, and that the two 'secular' columns making up the hidden practice, one of Nature and the other of Religion, stand for the slow and painstaking extension of networks inside this non-unified universe, we obviously need a concept to designate *what in which* they expand. I will reuse William James's word *multiverse* for such a non-formatted space — and will locate this concept in the left column of my little chart. The word *multiverse* points to the fully secular series of surprising agents before they are unified by any global view — be it that of Nature or that of

God — and before they are assembled in many provisional compositions by the slow and costly process of extension carried out either by chains or reference or by the preaching of transformative messages.

Needless to say that which follows pertains to philosophical fiction, but I'd like to sketch, for the remainder of this lecture, what could have been settled differently and what alternative it could have offered to 'natural religion.' What would have happened to the dialog had the four protagonists benefited from the introduction of such a scheme? It seems to me that we could have secularized the sciences — against both Philo and Cleanthes ; opened a space for other trails through the multiverse than knowledge — against Philo and to the possible benefit of Pamphilus and Cleanthes; and could have put anthropology's comparative basis to much better use — against all of the four protagonists.

Let me start with the first lesson. An epistemological version of scientific disciplines is offered when the results of science are divorced from its production process so much so that any allusion to its human-made basis is taken as a debunking of its objectivity. As I have underlined earlier, if philosophers and scientists are so touchy about relativism, it's because they are so anxious about not being able to reconcile the two sets of features that we have labelled Nature One and Two. They have never publically adjusted to this bifocal vision so that their eyes could accommodate the two fields of vision at once (more of this in the fourth lecture).

The pseudo controversy over climate science is a good case in point. It's my contention that because they are so viciously attacked by colleagues who claim to defend the mantle of science against their science, climatologists offer a unique occasion to explore a post-epistemological version of their trade. Every time climatosceptics mention the word 'lobby' to describe their enemies, they point to the existence of a real enough community of scientists. By highlighting this community equipped with instruments, working with models, exchanging e-mails, going to conferences, standardizing data sets, applying for money, organizing consensus meetings, publishing policy summaries, they believe that this humble and material activity should be taken as proof that climate science is not a really good science. They seem to believe that climate could be better known independently of any scientific network or that any one of them, by the mere power of reason,

could second guess what tens of thousands of colleagues have patiently assembled. Or that there exists somewhere a ‘true knowledge of the climate,’ ready to appear mysteriously without any mediation at all to reveal the final truth about itself through clear-cut evidence —a sort of Burning Bush revelation except, this time, in plain speech.

What is so distressing in such a restricted view of scientific practice is that bona fide climatologists too seem to believe that foregrounding their humble activity will weaken their claims to certainty; that they have something to hide or at least that they should background as much as possible the complex institution, the ‘*Vast Machine*,’ as Paul Edwards calls it, that they had built to reach certainty; as if, indeed, they too could not adjust to the bifocal view of their own practice.

Such is the primal scene science studies had to witness over and over again: how come there is no legitimate way to accept the humble conception of scientific truth? Why is it so difficult, as the anthropological rendering of scientific practice invite us to do, to accept that scientists do indeed compose a people, and a very specific one? And yet, such an acceptance would offer a much more realistic picture since scientists are constantly trying to define the limits of their assemblage and the exact standing of those they represent. This might sound at first like a return to the ‘social’ dimension — and God forbid — to the ‘social construction’ of science. But I take it here as an essential part of the political philosophy of science. It’s not that Philo represents the whole human race dissenting about outside reality while Demea or Pamphilus are only concerned about their local churches. It is rather that scientists ceaselessly decide who belongs and who does not belong to their group by multiplying examinations, imposing professional standards, projecting themselves in a future where ‘everybody’ will be scientifically minded, or, on the contrary complaining about the ‘lack of vocation’ of young students for the sciences — just as pastors and priests complain about their empty seminaries.

Why don’t they confess that they are indeed a people engaged in the complex process of people building? There is nothing wrong in drawing in one single movement a type of agencies, a type of people and a type of entity summoning this people. That’s what science — anthropologically and not epistemologically defined — is all about. When climatosceptics denigrate the sciences of climatologists, they too assemble another flock, define other entry tests, police differently

spread border lines with new documentations, endow matter with other qualities, expect from politics other goals, and live under another God. So do climatologists. Who are you representing and what are you fighting for? No reason to hide yourselves behind the idea of a view from nowhere held by people who belong to no people. One is tempted to say: 'Stand on your own ground, for God's sake, instead of believing that you have to try to make your science answerable to the impossible standards of epistemology requiring you to disembody yourselves toward a place of no place.'

Of course, climatologists would be able to stake their ground more firmly if they could clarify the strange status of the agents that they are claiming to represent. They are not helped by this odd idea that they act in the name of *mute agents* that speak nonetheless about themselves in strange tongues. Here again, climatosceptics would like them to decide: 'Are you doing the speaking about the climate or is it the climate that speaks loud and clear *by itself*?' But it would be ludicrous to reply to such a demand. One could instead address them more vehemently: 'Why don't you proudly accept the extraordinarily rich anthropological repertoires that scientists have managed to build through the centuries in order to *make things speak* so that they do speak through the scientists' speech apparatuses to bear proofs, under trials, in front of the assembled *reliable witnesses* — your colleagues and your judges —, of what they would have said had they been able to speak?

If people tell you that you indulge in politics and that you are taking yourselves to be the *representatives* and the *voices* of many hidden and suppressed voices, say yes for God's sake! Yes of course, how would anyone know the first thing about the climate without you and your paraphernalia? If politics consists in representing the voices of the downtrodden and of the unknown, well then we would all be in a much better situation if, instead of pretending that "the others" are doing politics and you just "do science," you confessed that you do try to assemble a political body and to live in a coherent cosmos summoned by a different entity. It's very true that you don't speak in the name of a constituency that would overlap with national or with social boundaries and that the source of your authority is based on a very odd system of election and proofs, but that's precisely what makes your political power of representation of so many new agents in the coming conflicts about the shape of the world so very precious. Don't sell this politics for a dish of bread and lentil stew.'

The second lesson is much harder to swallow, and I doubt Philo would have accepted it, but it would clarify future debates enormously, if we could disentangle Nature from a ‘Nature known by the natural sciences’ (I have used the two terms somewhat confusedly myself until now). This is where the addition of our fifth column, that of the multiverse, is going to help. Is it possible to say that the sciences find their way through the multiverse and propose a great many transitional assemblages? I know it’s very difficult to make this argument as long as knowledge floats around without being firmly but politely brought back inside its network of production. The novelty is that what knowledge travels through, what it assembles, is not itself nature nor is it especially ‘natural.’ ‘Nature,’ in that sense, is rather what is *performed* by the natural sciences, what is generated by the extension of equipped and rectified knowledge networks able to access the far away by the slow and costly pavement of chains of reference.

Such a view does not cast any doubt on the quality, objectivity and solidity of scientific disciplines since it’s now clear that those networks end up producing outside, incontrovertible, universal, knowledge. It’s just that the networks are foregrounded. Such a highlight does not limit their extension, as if there was a possibility, outside of those networks, to know more and better; or, as if those networks were missing something of the objects they know, like the infinite recess of the most mysterious ‘things in themselves.’ No. Whatever they succeed in reaching, they fully know it since no other knowledge of the same type from any other mysterious source may beat their certainty. What would it mean to know the anthropic origin of the climate change better than climatologists? How would you do it, except by building new more sensitive instruments, putting new data within the already existing data bases, setting up new institutions, defining new computing models, testing new variables and thus, in effect joining the climatologists’ fold — and even sending them emails?

The point was harder to make, I agree, at an earlier time when the paraphernalia, the groups, the cost, the institutions and the controversies around matters of fact were not so visible. But this is no longer the case now that every matter of concern is delivered with its instruments, its assembly of disputing experts and its public, much like any GPS data point comes with its retinue of satellites. The effect of such a new vision of scientific practice is that, for appealing *against* the

results of science, there is no outside supreme court — especially not the supreme court of Nature. You cannot do as if you were knowing more and better and yet not taking part in the knowledge production machinery.

In other words, knowledge, has stopped floating mysteriously around with the strange ability to sometime disappear and sometime fuse with the thing known so completely that it couldn't be distinguished from it. As if the 'thing in itself' was made in and of 'knowability'; as if it could be known even without the equipment and networks of real life scientists, waiting quietly for them to appear and say exactly the same thing they eventually said! What it is for a thing to be known scientifically and what it is for a human mind to know something scientifically are part and parcel of the same process that extend — or fail to extend — in the same way. And, mind you, it does not follow from this argument that 'science cannot know everything' or that there are 'other sources of knowledge than scientific.' If we are talking about equipped and rectified knowledge — what is nowadays most often associated with the scientific disciplines — then the answer should be a resounding 'No!' there are no other ways of knowing and what is known in this way is grasped to the full. This is what I have called the post-epistemological and, thus, the post-natural version of the natural sciences. Although the label of 'natural science' in a post-natural situation might be in great need of readjustment — especially at the time of the anthropocene (more on this later)!

But, and it is a big 'but' which should be pronounced with great care and caution, knowing something in this way is no longer the only manner to trace paths in the multiverse. That's the third lesson to draw from our table, the most difficult and one that I have to propose rather too abruptly for now. With such a view of science, it should be plausible to entertain other paths and trails which have no ambition to compete with the sciences and no claim to knowing in the same fashion but (and that's another even more delicate 'but') which claim to have a firm grasp on the multiverse nonetheless? Once knowledge is relocated, other modes of extension may claim access to ontology provided we deploy the multiverse so as to let all of those trails cohabit and sometimes cross one another. It might take some time to familiarize ourselves with such a scheme, one that requests that equipped and rectified knowledge be made a mode of extension, a mode of existence, *among others* and no

longer the voice over ruling mysteriously from an undetectable supreme court on all the other modes.

The great interest in accepting this much earthlier definition of science — an interest that would not have been relevant at the time of Hume's dialog —, is that today we might wish to enter into conversation with many other collectives who have completely different way to collect their agents and to be assembled by their entities. If the paradox of 'naturalists' is that they did not think of themselves as a people but only as rational interchangeable humans having a world to know and no entity to summon them, the other paradox is that, in their imperial conquest, they kept encountering other collectives which they mistook for people encumbered with gods and enslaved by strange beliefs about the world. In other words, 'naturalists' encountered the other as *cultures*, that is, as so many different belief systems about one world of nature.

It took a long time for anthropologists to realise that nature was far from a universal category; that most people have never lived 'in harmony with nature'; and, which is even more enigmatic, that so-called 'naturalists' had never lived in nature either since they never managed to reconcile the apolitical, irreligious, de-animated version of Nature One with the practices of science, that is, with Nature Two. If the multiverse is reintroduced and if the natural sciences are relocated inside it, is it possible to let the other collectives stop being 'cultures' and give them full access to reality by letting them compose their cosmos, but by using other keys, other modes of extension than the one allowed by knowledge production? Such a reinterpretation is especially relevant today because, if nature is not universal, climates have always been important to all people. The reintroduction of climates and atmospheres as the new common cosmopolitan concern gives a new urgency to this communality between collectives.

The argument sounds strange, but remember that if it's understandable that scientists want to do away with spirits, souls, divinities and other occult forces, this is not because they have managed to substitute for them a 'purely material world,' it is because those agencies answer to other gods, define other entries through the pluriverse and assemble other types of people with whom scientists might not wish to enter into contact. This is what I have called a *secular* view of science and nature. It's not nature against belief, as would be required by the relativist language game, but one political theology

against other political theologies. As far as practice is concerned, 'naturalists' have never managed to live in the idealised materiality that justifies, for some of them, their 'materialism' and 'reductionism.' It's simply that there exists a style of writing about science that manages to require that the characters of the narratives be played by actors looking like inert, boring, obstinate agents. But as every actress will tell you, it takes a good deal of practice to play boredom on the stage. No scientist has ever been able to withdraw the agencies animating his or her own demonstrations. Separating action from agencies would be like killing for good the actors who are supposed to play the dead in the last scene of a play! The history of the claim to 'materialism' — and thus the spurious fight against or in favour of 'spiritualism' — is a simple confusion between the style that de-animates agencies and the style that over-animates them. Once again we should look at the actions taking place beneath and off stage.

Were I audacious enough to suggest another end to the celebrated *Dialogues on natural religion*, I would have assembled the protagonists in Hume's smoking room and asked his butler to bring cigars and Port, there to sum up our discussion in the ways it's often staged at the end of whodunits by the clever detective always so much smarter than the police inspector. In my case, unfortunately, it will be much less conclusive since we have only hapless Pamphilus to play the role of Ms Marple.

Turning to Demea he could have said: 'Why have so completely abandoned your creed that you let religion become a set of archaic rituals, moralistic tenets, and obscure mysteries? You have not only abandoned any access to the world through reason, you have left the world to science, and left the science to epistemology, relying on common sense, indignation or tradition whenever you feel cornered.'

To Cleanthes, he could have said: 'My respectable preceptor, I understand that you want our religion to have some bearing on an outside reality and some hope of sitting proudly among the sciences without relying on Demea's crass ignorance to prove religion's full force, but why did you imagine that you would have to compete with Philo in some trip toward the invisible and the far away given that you are neither competent nor interested in paving your way there with instruments and inscriptions? Either you do establish those reference chains and you become a respected scientist, or you don't and you will

succeed in doing nothing more than drawing ridicule to our religion not having advanced it one iota by one single act of conversion. Is there really no other way to access the world than either to capitulate to an inflated notion of science or to add a postiche clock maker on top of it all?’

‘And you, Philo, ridiculing Demea is fine and fun but why give Cleanthes such a hard time? Is he not after something that you should be interested in achieving too? As you yourself have so often shown, we should be extremely suspicious of establishing any *spurious continuity* throughout the concatenations of causes and consequences. You too should be interested in a solution that re-establishes some distinction between knowledge and the world. Not, as your alias David Hume proposed, by introducing the human mind and its associative power into the picture, but by considering that the multiverse itself might be discontinuous. This conclusion would not have weakened objective science, but insured that it’s cared for and equipped and that no one else can feed on its “limits.” This would have led scepticism in a totally different direction and would have saved future generations a lot of time spent in useless discussions by permitting a certain scholar from Konigsberg to keep snoring all the way through his “dogmatic slumber”.

I think that Pamphilus, had he read more anthropology, would have concluded by stating again his surprise that his mentors would be so uninterested in putting to good use all the trails that other collectives have drawn through the multiverse to cope with their varied climates. Like him, I suspect that there is not much hope of drawing the changing face of Gaia as long as we haven’t brought the sciences back to Earth and as long as we have not refreshed the meaning of what could be called Incarnation. I share his surprise that, for two of the most important enterprises of our own culture, namely Science and Religion, being from this Earth appears to be so strangely impossible.

# The puzzling face of a secular Gaia.

## Gifford 3. Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> February 2013

It is likely that very soon, in the history of science as well as in the popular imagination, the scene I am about to describe will gain the same status as that of Galileo, when, during the crisp nights of November and December 1609, he turned his telescope to the Moon and it dawned on him that every planet, including the Earth, was just like the others. Except that, this time, positions have been reversed and the discovery turns out to be that the Earth is a planet like none of the others! Unfortunately, what is missing at this point is a play written by some new Bertolt Brecht to retell the two stories in reverse order: not from the narrow space of Venice outwards to the whole universe, but from the whole of the cosmos back inward to the narrow confines of the Blue Planet.

It is the Fall of 1965, at the Jet Propulsion Lab, in Pasadena, in the offices of the Biosciences Division, where James Lovelock, a somewhat eccentric engineer qua physiologist — not to say at the time a maverick — is drafting a paper with Dian Hitchcock (no relation with the film director!) on how to detect life on planet Mars. The two authors are somewhat embarrassed to confess to their colleagues from the *Voyager* mission—who are busy devising complex and expensive robots to be landed on the Martian soil with the aid of giant rockets—that in order to answer such a question the best solution is to stay where they are, in Pasadena, and to turn a cheap infrared instrument from the Earth toward the Red Planet to check whether or not the atmosphere is chemically at the equilibrium state or not. According to the two scientists, this simple measurement is enough to provide the answer: Mars is as dead as the dodo. No need to fly there at great expense to prove the obvious.

It's hard not to be struck by the reverse symmetry between Galileo's and Lovelock's gestures of turning cheap instruments to the skies to make radically opposite discoveries.

When Galileo, out of the fuzzy iridescent and distorted images that his toy telescope extracted from the Moon, decided, thanks to his extended knowledge of perspective drawing, to conjure up the shadows

of mountains, of ridges and valleys, he hurried to establish between the Earth and its satellite a new sort of commonality — not to say a new fraternity. Both were planets. Both had the same dignity. Both turned around another centre. Now, at last, the world could vastly expand. No longer was the Earth demoted to the filthy basement of a corrupted sublunar world ringed by circles ordered in ranks of higher and higher quality, from the super lunar loftiness of the planets all the way to the supreme perfection of fixed stars, just one step removed from that of God Himself. The Earth now possessed the same importance as all the other heavenly bodies without any hierarchy among them; as to God, He could be encountered everywhere in the vast expanses of the world.

Astronomers, writers, polemists, priests and parsons as well as libertines, could now send throughout those new Earths a large population of fictional characters who could meet all sort of creatures inhabiting those other bodies and who were allowed to witness all sort of strange phenomena. New narratives by Kepler, Cyrano, Descartes, Fontenelle and Newton were made possible about a world that constantly expanded because it turned out to be remarkably similar everywhere. It is at this point that ‘a view from nowhere’ could gain some likelihood since interchangeable disembodied spirits could now write the laws of a cosmos that were everywhere the same since they extracted from planets no other property than being just like billiard balls. After all, falling bodies are falling bodies; when you have seen one, you have seen them all! Extension is thus possible since every single where is literally the same as any other: *res extensa* may be indeed be extensively expanded. To use Alexandre Koyré’s turn of phrase, Galileo helped his readers to move ‘from the closed world to the infinite universe.’

What is called in English ‘the view from nowhere’ is a tad more localized in French since we call it ‘le point de vue de Sirius.’ It is from one of those fictional locations that Lovelock situates a little green Martian astronomer who would not need to travel at all in any sort of flying saucer to decide, thanks to the mere reading of his equally fictional instrument, that the Earth is a planet fully alive because its atmosphere is far away from chemical equilibrium. If this is so, then, Lovelock concludes in a flash of intuition, something must keep this state of affairs in place, some agency that has not been conjured up before, which is absent on Mars as well as Venus or the Moon, a power of action so combined as to always maintain — or to recover — over billions of years

a state of affairs steady enough to counter the perturbations introduced by many outside events — a more energetic sun, asteroids impacts, pollution by oxygen and so on.

While Galileo, by looking up beyond the horizon to the sky, was expanding the similarity between this Earth and all the other falling bodies, Lovelock, by looking down on us from one of those heavenly bodies, is actually decreasing the similarity among all the planets and this highly peculiar Earth of ours. From his tiny office in Pasadena, like someone slowly sliding the roof of a convertible car tightly shut, Lovelock brings his reader back to what should be taken, once again, as a sublunar world. Not because the Earth lacks perfection, quite the opposite; not because it hides in its interior the dark site of Hell; but because it has — and it alone has — the privilege of being alive in a certain fashion — which also means, in a certain fashion, being corruptible — that is, animated and also, thus, simultaneously in equilibrium yet brittle. In a word: actively maintaining a difference between inside and outside. Even stranger, the Blue Planet suddenly stands out as what is made of a long concatenation of historical, local, hazardous, specific and contingent events as if it were the temporary outcome of a 'geohistory' as attached to specific places and dates as the Biblical narrative, that is, exactly what was not to be taken into account when considered simply as a falling body among all the others.

Is not the reverse symmetry really admirable? Take the cliché of three 'narcissistic wounds' celebrated by Freud: first Copernicus, then Darwin and then — somewhat narcissistically — Freud himself? Human arrogance was supposed to have been deeply hurt by the Copernican revolution that had chased the human out of the centre of the cosmos (and hurt deeper still by the discovery, secondly of Darwin, and, thirdly, of the Unconscious that had kicked the human subject out of its privileged position). But in order to invent such a series of wounds, Freud had to forget the enthusiasm with which the so-called 'Copernican revolution' had been embraced by all those who had suffered so much for being stuck in the dark centre of a cosmos out of which they had no other escape but the super lunar regions, the only place where incorruptible truths could be found. Out of the hole at last! Brecht celebrated this access to the large open sea in the first version of his play.

Although it is highly doubtful that Freud was right in calling those successive decentrings a 'wound' to our human dignity, it is hard to

deny that it is indeed a narcissistic injury, and a deep one, that Lovelock, after many others, is inflicting on all those who dreamt of moving out everywhere in the vast expanse of space. This time, we humans are not shocked to learn that the Earth is no longer at the centre and that it whirls aimlessly around the Sun; no, if we are so deeply shocked it is, to the contrary, because the Earth should indeed be at the centre of the universe, and because we are imprisoned in its tiny local atmosphere. Suddenly, as if a brake had been applied to all forward movements, Galileo's expanding universe is interrupted and Koyré's motto should now be read in reverse: '*from the infinite universe back to the limited closed cosmos.*' Recall all the fictional characters you have sent away! Tell spaceship *Enterprise* to come back home. '*There's nothing else like us out there; we're our only story.*' As to planet *Pandora*, this is not where the next Frontier against the barbarian *Navis* will ever be expanding! You may still spend huge budgets on what used to be called, ironically, the 'conquest of space,' but it will be to transport, at best, half a dozen encapsulated astronauts from a live planet across inconceivable distances to a few dead ones. Where things will happen is down here and now. Don't dream any more, you mortals. You won't escape to outer space. You have no other abode than down here, the shrinking planet. You can't compare it with any other. Earth is what in Greek is called an *apax* — a name used once — and that's the name that your species, Earthlings, deserves as well — or if you prefer a word with the same etymology: *idiot*.

Yes, quite a first narcissistic injury from which we have to recover quickly, to be cured before the second one strikes us, that of the anthropocene. Not only should the Earth be the centre of our exclusive attention, but we should also feel responsible for what happens! No escape, twice. (We will return to this next week). Back to Earth, anyway. And we can escape 'out of nature,' certainly, if by nature we have meant the expanse of *res extensa*. A lock has been turned tight two turns in a row. Suspicious name this Lovelock has.

We have all read *Lord of the Flies*, a story about young boys stranded by accident on an island from which they could not escape either and where they glide down the slippery slope to barbarity. It is not casting aspersions on William Golding's reputation to surmise that—when after quite a few beers in the Wiltshire village of Bowerchalke's little pub, he suggested that Lovelock should call his theory 'Gaia'—he

certainly had not reread his Hesiod for a long time. If he had, he would have known that he was placing on his friend an ominous curse from which his theory might never recover. And the same is certainly true of the many New Age rituals where people assemble to celebrate Gaia as a benevolent, caring, maternal whole.

No, she is not maternal, or else you should change entirely what you mean by 'Mother!' In *Theogony*, far from being a figure of harmony, Gaia, the mythological character, emerges in great effusions of blood, steam and terror together with Chaos and Eros. In Hesiod's admittedly biased narrative, she is an earthly, black, brown, dark skinned and scheming monster, a feminine power that three times in a row tricks her progeny into murdering her loved ones... She first pushes her son Kronos to cut with a 'jagged teeth iron sickle' her husband Ouranos' sexual parts — showering blood all around, every drop begetting a horrible monster. Then, together with Rheia, Gaia convinces Zeus to fight against his own father and to defeat him. But then, never at rest, she plots to mobilise her last child, Typhon — a hundred snakeheads monster —, to destroy the empire of her son Zeus. The Olympian fortunately wins, but the poor humans are now victims of Typhon's irresistible winds, tempests and cyclones. And only then did Gaia stop scheming (according at least to Hesiod's story). Sorry to say, but Gaia, at least viewed from the later point of view of the Olympian gods, is a dangerous figure.

Yes, no doubt, there is a curse attached to Gaia theory. How often have I been warned not to use the term and not to confess that I was interested in Lovelock's books — to the point of writing a play about them and, most of all, to concentrate this prestigious lecture series on his favourite character! 'You can't possibly take seriously, I was told, those pseudo-scientific ramblings of an old self-employed inventor who claims quietly on television that seven out of eight humans will be soon wiped out because, as a new Malthus, he pretends to have calculated the "carrying capacity" of planet Earth — 300 million or so — and that he does not really care, anyway, since he will die high above the Earth, in a rocket, during a space trip, thanks to a free ticket offered to him as a bonus by no less a sponsor than Richard Branson! Come on, this mixture of science and vaguely religious insights cannot be the centre of a new view of science, politics and religion. How silly you are to compare him with our great Galileo.'

One of the many reasons why I have resisted those warnings is that I am not quite certain what my dissuaders would have said, in 1610, about Galileo, when reading his *Sidereus Nuncius*. After all, an engineer rambling about God, the Earth, the Moon, the Church, the Bible and human destiny, comparing the Earth and the Moon to billiard balls, while dedicating his work to *Cosmos Medices Magno Haetruiae* Ducci, might not have been met by them, at the time, with a much more favourable welcome. To be sure, Richard Branson is not duke Medici, but there is still a fearful symmetry between the two opposing cosmologies I wish to explore with you tonight. In both cases, it's the fate and the face of the Earth that is in question, and that is enough to take both seriously.

So, if there is a curse over Gaia's theory, I feel that it is more than fair to try to lift it by putting Lovelock's Gaia in the most charitable light. Clearly, I'm not going to evaluate his discoveries the way an Earth systems specialist could do, but only in terms of the political theology presented in the two other talks. Remember that our task in those lectures was to detect three elements so as to render collectives comparable enough: What sort of people are they? What are the entities under which they assemble? And how do they distribute the agencies making up their cosmos? This is why it is so important to understand how Lovelock composes the assemblage called Gaia and what difference it makes for humans. Or, to put it more bluntly: what sort of political animals do humans become when their bodies are to be coupled with an animated Gaia? As we go on, it will become clear that the 'people of Gaia' are not the same as the 'people of nature.'

If there is one thing we have learned earlier it is that any accusation of 'mixing up science and religion' should not worry us too much since, in most cases, what passes for science as well as for religion is already a mixture that no distillation may purify. As we now know, what is more important in order to weigh the novelty of a figure such as Gaia, is to detect which type of agency its name sums up and what sort of unity it is allowed to have. We've seen that just because your entity is named after a god it doesn't have to act like one, and even though you claim that your entity isn't a god, it doesn't mean you don't belong to a religion.

Surprisingly, on both of those counts, even if you factor in the many ambiguities in Lovelock's prose, Gaia plays much less religious a

role than the notion of nature that classical scientists used to defend and that those who claim to be religious wish to supersede. Hence the double misunderstanding over Lovelock's argument that has come from both scientific and religious circles. What I am going to show is that if the adjective 'secular' means 'involving no outside cause or spiritual basis,' and thus fully 'of this world' then Lovelock's intuition can be called *fully secular*. The paradox of the figure we are trying to encounter tonight is that the name of a primitive, shapeless and shameless goddess has been given to what is probably the *most secular* entity ever produced by Western science.

Two of Gaia's surprising features are, first, that it is composed of agents that are neither *de-animated* nor *over-animated* and that, secondly, contrary to what is often claimed in criticism of Lovelock, it is made of agents that are not *prematurely unified* in a single acting whole.

The best way to grasp the first feature might be to explore the parallel between Lovelock and another famous scientist, not this time Galileo, but rather Louis Pasteur. What makes the parallel with Pasteur so tempting is not only the role given to microorganisms but the consequences they both drew for medicine. Is Lovelock not the author of a book called ***The Practical Science of Planetary Medicine***? In the same way as Pasteur, soon after giving shape to his microbes, tried to convince surgeons that they were unwittingly killing their patients through their scalpels, Lovelock, as soon as he has drawn Gaia's face, tries to persuade humans that they have the strange role of being unwittingly no more than Gaia's disease... 'The people's plague'! As if the challenge, this time, was not to protect humans against microbes, but to protect Gaia against those tiny microbes that are called humans! As I have shown elsewhere, if Pasteur's microbes have deeply modified every definition of friends and enemies in a given collective, we can brace ourselves for a similar change when we deal with an active Gaia. Just as in Pasteur's time, at stake is nothing less than war and peace.

But first, let us see how the parallel could work. If you remember the long battles that the nascent field of microbiology had to fight against eminent chemists such as Liebig, you will recognize a situation very similar to the one where Lovelock tries to move from geochemistry to what he calls 'geophysiology.' In both cases, attempts to introduce some hitherto unknown agency in spite of scientific disciplines intent on dis-animating the world are accused of being a

return to vitalism, that is, of over-animating agents. In both cases, the intuition that, in a given set of chemical reactions, something *more* is at work than the usual suspects known at the time is met with deep suspicion — a suspicion fully justified by earlier fights against other hard to defeat paradigms.

This was certainly the case for Justus von Liebig, Pasteur's nemesis at the time. After a century of battles against mysterious agents and vital forces, chemists had finally established their paradigms by learning to account for all the reactions they could put their hand on through 'strictly chemical pathways.' This is why they had, initially, no patience for Pasteur, even if he was himself a chemist, when he claimed to show that sugar could not be transformed into alcohol without the addition of an unknown agent, yeast, whose presence was indispensable for triggering chemical fermentations. They had still less patience when Pasteur accused the chemists who refused to believe in his demonstrations that they had unwittingly 'contaminated' their broth with those invisible agents.

As is well known, scientific agents, when considered in their nascent stage, are first a list of *actions* before being given a name — usually in a language, ancient Greek, that no scientist speaks any more — that sums up those actions. To use a semiotic notion that we have already encountered in the translation tables for the names of gods, agents have performances long before they are granted competences. What an agent is able to do is deduced from what it has done — a pragmatist tenet if any. In Liebig's hands, 'yeast' was the mere by product of fermentation. In Pasteur's laboratory, the same character is called to a more glorious destiny.

If in a few pages of Pasteur's beautiful set of memoirs on fermentation written from his bench in the city of Lille, the reader moves from (I quote) 'Until now minute researches have been unable to discover the development of organized beings' to 'It is nevertheless it that plays the principal role,' it is because Pasteur has extracted this 'principal role' from a set of scenes where the emerging character is first revealed through a series of very humble actions: it is nothing more than 'spots of a grey substance', it 'looks exactly like ordinary pressed yeast,' it 'is slightly viscous and grey in colour,' it 'can be collected and transported for great distances without losing its activity,' it is 'weakened when the material is dried or when it is boiled in water,' 'very little of this yeast is necessary to transform a considerable weight of sugar' and so on and so forth. What is this mysterious 'it'? Answer: all

those performances. It is through this process of condensation that performances are later summarized into competences, much like a profile on Facebook ends up zooming in on the owner of the page; or, to use a more respectable idiom, in the same way that attributes end up being the substance of which they are said — but only later — to be the attributes.

If other chemists gradually changed their minds, it was not only because of Pasteur's impeccable experimental ingenuity but also because he had very quickly directed the same argument this time against vitalists and demonstrated that those who, like Félix-*Archimède Pouchet*, believed in spontaneous generations, had also 'contaminated' their broth by surreptitiously introducing what was soon to be called 'microbes.' In Pasteur's clever hands the anti-Liebig agent was also anti-Pouchet. Through this two-front attack, Pasteur, in less than a decade, had woven his way through the Charybdis of reductionism and the Scylla of vitalism thus establishing the totally original existence of a new agent that could neither be reduced to 'strict chemistry' nor to any of the mysterious 'miasma' that had confused medicine for centuries. The list of agencies acting in the world had been extended by one new item the envelop of which had been carefully designed to add a new form of life.

The case of Pasteur proves, once again, that science does not proceed by the mere *expansion* of an already existing 'scientific world view' valid everywhere, but by the revision of the list of furniture present in the world, what is normally called by philosophers, and rightly so, a *metaphysics* — next to physics, yes, there is *meta physics*. But what is peculiar to scientists' *metaphysics* is that a set of actions revealed by laboratory trials in the presence of virtual witnesses always precedes the name that is given to the actants. In other words, reductionism does not consist in limiting oneself to a few well-known characters so as to tell the story of everything, but in giving names to characters that have first proven their mettle through trials and tribulations. This is why the word 'metaphysics' should not be shocking to any practicing scientists but only to those who believe that the task of furnishing the world has already been completed. And, of course, as soon as you have decided who and what plays 'the principal role,' politics follows in tow.

I think that Pasteur's case helps to throw a more favourable light on Lovelock's introduction of other 'organized agents' to which he attributes the 'principal role' in a series of actions that his contradic-

see as nothing more than coincidences or mere superimpositions. This time it is not the indispensable presence of 'spots of grey substance' to trigger a 'lively fermentation,' but a series of chemical instabilities that are begging for the introduction of another agency to fill in the balance sheet. When Lovelock puzzles over the role played by the strange ratio of oxygen and carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, he introduces those actors on stage in much the same way as Pasteur:

'Many biologists today seem to think that [the balance of nature] alone explains the level of the two great metabolic gases — carbon dioxide and oxygen — in the air. **This view is wrong.** The picture it gives of the world is like that of a ship with the pumps connected merely to recirculate the bilge water within it, rather than to pump it out. As the water leaks in, the ship would soon sink (...) So what is this "leak" that thus determines the level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere? In short it is rock weathering (...) Until the 1990s, geochemists maintained that the presence of life has had no effect on this set of reactions. It is **simple chemistry** that determines the level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. But I disagreed. (...) **By their growth**, plants pump carbon dioxide from the air into the soil, proof being the observed 10- to 40- fold enrichment of carbon dioxide in the air space of the soil.' p. 108

Lovelock's prose has the flavour of a whodunit, except that the enigma that the detective has to solve is not triggered by the discovery of a corpse, but, on the contrary, by the mystery that at least one (falling) body has *not* been murdered — at least, not yet! So the drama always unfolds in much the same way: the Earth should be dead, just like Mars. It is not. What force is able to keep saving it from assassination? Let's stage a trial to test whether the normal laws of geochemistry are up to the task of protecting it. Every time the trial is lost by standard chemistry, you have to add a little *je ne sais quoi* that counterbalances the forces rushing to equilibrium. Then find a name for the invisible protector, of the agent that is responsible for this absence of death. Carbon dioxide should be in a much higher quantity in the air? Where does it sink? In the soil. Through which agent? Through the action of microorganisms and vegetation. Now test to see if they are up to the new role given for them.

Then, repeat this forensic test for all the successive ingredients that are supposed to populate the Earth. Nitrogen is not where it supposed to be, in the sea where it would have increased the salinity so much that no organisms could have kept their cell walls protected

against the poison of salt. Thus, the question should be raised about which forces are propping it up in the atmosphere.

*'If there were no life on Earth the continued action of lightning would eventually remove most of the nitrogen from the air and leave it as nitrate ions dissolved in the ocean (...) On a lifeless Earth it seems probable that these inorganic forces would partition nitrogen so that most was in the sea and only a little was in the air' p.119*

Then take water. Once again, it should have escaped long ago just as it did on Venus or Mars. How come it is still there? A challenge is launched against geochemists: 'Try to explain this situation through the normal laws of chemistry, you the proponents of a "balance of nature"!'

*'The Earth has abundant oceans because it has evolved, not by geophysics and geochemistry alone, but as a system in which the organisms are an integral part' p. 128*

What is so literally moving in Lovelock's (and Lynn Margulis's) prose, is that every item we used to consider as parts of a background scenery on the stage of which the majestic cycles of nature were supposed to unfold, is interrupted, and rendered active and mobile thanks to the introduction of a new invisible character able to reverse the order and hierarchy of agencies. Cloud cover? Amplified in part by the projection of algae. Mountains? Almost all of them produced over eons of time by the rain of tests and shells coming from dead organisms. Even the slow crawling of plate tectonics is said to have been triggered by the sheer weight of sedimentary rocks.

There is something almost cartoonish in such an opera, as if every time Lovelock touched a part of the décor with his magic wand, suddenly, just like in a Disney version of *Sleeping Beauty*, every inert passive agent of her Palace began to yawn, to awaken from its slumber and became fiercely busy, from the dwarfs to the clock, from the door knobs to the chimneys. The humblest props now play a role, as if there were no distinction any more between main characters and the environment drawn around them. Except for deep molten rocks inside the Earth and deep space beyond the thermosphere, every single element of the background is brought to play its part in the foreground. Every thing that was a mere intermediary for transporting a strict concatenation of causes and consequences becomes a mediator adding its grain of salt to the narrative. In Lovelock's terms, life and climate evolve together and function as two sides of the same phenomenon.

Looked at from above, the Earth, taken as one big broth, is unexplainable without the addition of the work done by living organisms, just as fermentation, for Pasteur, cannot be triggered without yeast. The same movement of animation that, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, had transformed beer, wine, vinegar, epizooties and epidemics into the work of microbes, is now carried over to the point of churning air, water, fire and soil out of the relentless actions of living organisms. Everything is made to move in this merry-go-round — enough to make you dizzy. Much more dizzy than when Galileo launched the Earth around the Sun since no one could detect from ordinary experience the difference between helio- and geo-centrism — that was exactly Galileo's relativist principle. This time, however, people are going to feel how much difference this new form of geo-centrism makes!

Fine, you could say, the picture of the Earth is now animated well enough; indeed, it has been turned into a true 'moving picture.' But has it not been over-animated? Such is the second feature of the scenography I wish to review tonight. How has Lovelock fared in weaving his way between the two reefs of reductionism and vitalism?

On the face of it, fairly badly, since the main critique levelled against Gaia theory is that it is made to act too quickly as one single coordinating agent. Witness one of the many definition offered of Gaia:

"Gaia is the planetary life **system** that includes everything influenced by and influencing the biota. The Gaia system shares with all living organisms the capacity for **homeostasis** — the regulation of the physical and chemical environment at a level that is favourable for life." p. 56

It's true that it's not easy for the charitable reader to find one's way through the many versions proposed by Lovelock himself. How should we understand sentences such as the following where he states that it simultaneously is and is not a unified whole:

"When I talk of Gaia as a **super organism**, I do not for a moment have in mind a **goddess** or some **sentient being**. I am expressing my **intuition** that the Earth behaves as a self regulating system, and that the proper science for its study is **physiology**" p. 57

Puzzling sentence indeed. If it is not a 'goddess' why call it Gaia? And what difference does it make for a 'super-organism' to be a 'sentient being' or a 'self-regulating system'? This is putting too much weight on the poor little adverb 'as.' But before we accuse Lovelock of expressing through those fuzzy terms what he confesses to be an 'intuition,' we should not

forget that Pasteur hesitated just as much on how to envelop the new agency of his ferments when, at the end of his famous paper on lactic acid, he had to confess also:

‘All through this memoir, I have reasoned **on the basis of the hypothesis** that the new yeast is organized, that it is **a living organism**, and that its chemical action on sugar corresponds to its development and organization. If someone were to tell me that in these conclusions **I am going beyond** that which the facts prove, I would answer that it is **quite true**.’

If I contend that Lovelock is on to something as original as Pasteur anti-Liebig anti-Pouchet microbe, it is because, as is well known, the philosophy of biology has never stopped borrowing its metaphors from the social realm. It is haunted by the spectre of an ‘organism’ which is always, in sociology as well as in politics or economics, a ‘super-organism,’ that is, an actor to which is delegated the task — or rather the mystery — of coordination. The puzzle of composing a body raises exactly the same difficulty whether it is made of cells, of humans, of ants, of bees or in the case of a watch, made of cogs, springs and wheels. If we wish not to lose sight of the problem of coordination, we should stick to one level only and see what scientists really mean by a ‘whole superior to the parts.’ Biology and sociology are in exactly the same quandary. Through my work on social theory, I have learned to be very quick at detecting when people shift from one research program — understanding how coordination is obtained — to another one — getting rid of the problem by jumping to another level, be it that of ‘society,’ market, Leviathan, corporate body, system, structure, or any emergent kind of a ‘whole.’ The stakes are very high for us because, as soon as a super-organism is taken for granted, it’s not only science but politics as well as theology that may disappear. This is why it is so crucial to understand whether the figure of Gaia is unified and through which channels.

It is true that when Lovelock compares Gaia to a cybernetic machine, what inevitably comes back is the idea of a great dispatcher, a Providential engineer lording over the ‘system’ so as to keep the thermostat (a frequent metaphor of his) at some optimum level. Here, a sudden switch to a second level, superior to the first, hides the difficulties of coordination in the absence of any engineer planning his or her self-regulating system in advance. And it is also true that, if such had been Lovelock’s main argument, the payoff in moving out of Nature to Gaia would be a great disappointment. We would move from

Providence — the laws of nature which all agents simply ‘obey’ — to one local Providence, Gaia, that makes everything on the planet act as a whole by distributing roles and functions to its ‘parts’ and connecting them with feedback loops. In the terms introduced in the two first lectures, Lovelock would be a sectary of Nature One (or Religion One) because he would have embraced a premature unification of the whole.

But the nice thing about Lovelock’s prose is that he makes no effort to sustain his cybernetic metaphors for very long. They are quickly swamped with contradictions as if the historicity of Gaia was much too strong to conjure the idea of a governor in command. As he often writes: ‘The *anatomy of Gaia is forever changing*’ (p. 56). Which is exactly what is impossible with the metaphor of ‘spaceship Earth’ the technical simile against which he never tires of fighting. In opposition to Neurath’s famed raft (or rather Jason’s *Argo*), a spaceship does not change all its parts as it goes along. Gaia does.

Contrary to the three characters of Hume’s dialog, contrary to James Hutton and his mechanical metaphor, Lovelock is not struck by the carefully designed nature of Gaia. His problem is not to burnish the copper plaque where the name of the designer — God, chance or natural selection — has been stamped. What is so striking for him is, on the contrary, that there is no design whatsoever — and yet that Gaia is alive. Having a history is not the same thing as having been designed. It is because there is no engineer at work, no watchmaker — whether blind or not —, that no holistic view of Gaia could be sustained. It is because Gaia has a history that it cannot be compared to a machine and why it cannot be reengineered either (a point of great importance when the dreams of geo-engineering will soon begin to threaten the planet even more than before). We are not cosmonauts ensconced in a spaceship — and there is no Houston anywhere to call on in case of a problem. It is in that sense that the figure of Gaia is such a secular one. Don’t even try to think of retro-controlling it.

So what are the real specifications of the agents making Gaia act ‘as’ a super-organism if it is not a system designed by an engineer or a governor to function as a whole? I am under the impression that the question cannot be answered before we understand what Lovelock takes as its main intuition — the intuition according to which everything that used to be in the background has been sucked in the foreground.

If, as a physiologist, he fights against geochemists, he fights just as well against evolutionary biologists who consider that organisms *adapt* to their environment without realizing enough that they also *adjust* their environment to them. For Lovelock, every organism that is taken as the point of departure of a biochemical reaction should be seen not as thriving 'in' an environment, but as *curbing* the environment to accommodate its need to thrive better into it. In that sense, every organism intentionally manipulates its surroundings to its own benefit. No agent on Earth is merely superimposed on any other as a brick juxtaposed on another brick as would be the case on a dead planet. Each of them acts to modify its neighbours, no matter how slightly, to render its own survival slightly less improbable. This is where the difference lies between geochemistry and geophysiology. It is not that Gaia is some 'sentient being' but that the concept of 'Gaia' captures the distributed intentionality of all the agents that are modifying their surroundings to suit themselves better.

So far nothing is really out of the ordinary. Things get more interesting when this argument is used to extract the notion of cybernetic feedback out of its technological repertoire. Every evolutionist admits that humans have adjusted their environment to suit their needs. It is just that Lovelock extends this technical ingenuity to every single agent, no matter how small. This is not only the case for beavers, birds and termites, but for trees, mushrooms, algae, bacteria and viruses as well. To be sure, this is somewhat anthropomorphic but, as we have seen earlier, what begs for an explanation is not the extension of intentionality to non-humans but rather how it is that some humans have withdrawn intentionality from the living world imagining that they were playing on the planks of an inanimate stage. The enigma is not that there are people still believe in animism, but the persistance of belief in inanimism. Being alive means not only adapting to but also modifying one's surroundings, or, to use Julius Von Uexküll's famous expression, there exists no general *Umwelt* (a term to which we will have to return) that could encompass the *Umwelt* of each organism.

The point however is not about whether to grant intentionality or not, but about what happens to such an intention once every agent has been endowed with one. Paradoxically, such an extension quickly erases all traces of anthropomorphism and introduces at every scale the possibility of unintentional feedbacks. The reason is that we are not

asked to believe in one Providence, but in as many *providences* as there are organisms on Earth. The sheer result of such a generous distribution of final causes is not the emergence of one overall Final Cause, but a mess, since, by definition, what is true for each actor is also true of all its neighbours. If A modifies B, C, D and X to suit its survival, it is also the case that B, C, D and X modify A in return. It seems that moralists have never looked very seriously at the consequences of the Golden Rule: if ‘everyone does to others what they would like others to do to them,’ the result is neither cooperation nor selfishness, but the chaotic history we are used to, since we live in it. What could be the meaning of a final cause if it is no longer ‘final’ but interrupted at every point by the interposition of other organisms’ intentions? You can follow the ripples of one stone on a pond but not the waves made by hundreds of cormorants diving at once in order to catch fish. By generalizing providence to every agent, Lovelock insures that the providential plans of every actor will be thwarted by many other plans. The more you generalize the notion of intentionality to all actors, the less you will detect intentionality in the whole, even though you might observe more and more negative or positive feedbacks.

Here again, the parallel with Pasteur holds in an interesting way since his discovery was not so much the existence of microbes but the complex coupling of microbes with the ‘terrain’ they influenced and that influenced their development in return. It is only because he managed to show that he could vary the virulence of diseases by passing the microbes through different species — rabbits, hens, dogs and horses — that Pasteur could finally convince physicians that they had to give microbes a role in the development of epidemics. Here again, reductionism is not defined by the de-animated nature of the agent but by the number of other agents made to participate in the course of action.

So far, Lovelock’s argument is completely compatible with Darwinian narratives since every agent is working for itself without being asked to stop following its own interest ‘for the sake of some superior good,’ which would be the case if there were any dispatcher. But where it adds something to them is in the definition of what it really means for any agent to be ‘for itself.’ For Lovelock and Margulis, taking things literally, there is no environment any more. Since all living agents follow their intentions all the way by modifying their own neighbours as much as possible, it is quite impossible to tell apart what

is the environment to which an organism adapts and what is the point where action starts. As Timothy Lenton writes in one of his review articles:

*'Gaia theory aims to be consistent with evolutionary biology and views the evolution of organisms and their material environment as so closely coupled that they form a single, indivisible, process. Organisms possess environment altering traits because the benefit that these traits confer (to the fitness of the organism) outweigh the cost in energy to the individual.'* P. 440

Such is the origin of the peculiar beauty of reading Lovelock's or Lynn Margulis' prose. The inside and outside of all boundaries are subverted. Not because everything is connected in a 'great chain of being'; not because there exists somewhere an overall plan ordering the whole concatenation of agents; but because this coupling of one neighbour actively manipulating its neighbours and being manipulated by all the others defines *waves of action* that do not respect any traditional borderlines and, more importantly, that are not happening at a fixed scale. Those waves — Tarde would call them overlapping 'monads' — are the real actors which should be followed *all the way*, wherever they lead, without sticking to the internal boundary of an isolated agent considered as an individual inside an environment. Those waves are, if I may say so, the real brush strokes with which Lovelock hopes to paint Gaia's face.

Such dissolution of the environment has several important consequences: first it purges Darwinism of its remnant of Providence; but more importantly, it modifies the scale at which evolution occurs; and finally, it redefines deeply what we could mean by natural history. Let me end this lecture with a brief look at those three features.

In the early days of Gaia theory — before the introduction of the Daisy model —, evolutionists complained that it could not be Darwinian because there is no population of planets competing for survival. But such a criticism revealed a telling limit in the way these biologists understood adaptation — a limit deriving from the economic theory they employed to model their biology. In this theory, you have to choose either the self-interested individual or the integrated system — a quandary biologists borrowed from the social sciences. But what is totally implausible in the idea of 'selfish gene' is not that genes are selfish — every actor pursues its interest all the way to the bitter end —, but that you could calculate its 'fit' by externalizing all the other actors

into what would constitute, for a given actor, its 'environment.' This does not mean that you have to wheel in a super-organism to which the actors will be requested to sacrifice their goals. It simply means that life is much messier than economists and neo-darwinians want it to be, and that any selfish goal will be swamped by the selfish goals of all the others, making the calculation of an optimum simply impossible. The reason why Darwin's secular intuition has been so often degraded in a barely disguised version of Providence, is because neo-Darwinians had forgotten that if such a calculation works in *human* economics it is because of the continuous imposition of calculating devices in order to operate, to enforce, the technical term is to *perform* the distinction between what a given agent should count and what he should decide not to count. Without those devices, profit would be impossible to calculate and even more to extract from the so-called 'environment.' As soon as you extend Darwinism to what every agent does to all the others on which it depends, the calculation of optimization is simply impossible. What you get instead are occasions, chances, noise and, yes, history. What used to be the environment of an individual actor vanishes.

But the main mistake of evolutionists in their critique of Gaia theory was the wrong idea of how it was supposed to act 'as' a whole. We recognize here the same alternation between actors and system that renders human as well as biological societies impossible to grasp. As soon as you abandon the boundaries between the inside and the outside of an agent, you begin to *modify* the scale of the phenomena you consider. It is not that you shift levels and suddenly move from the individual to 'the system,' it is that you *abandon* both points of view as being equally implausible. This is what happens, as Lovelock and Margulis have shown, when you follow waves of action beyond the boundaries of the cell walls.

One example of such a wave has taken an iconic character in Lovelock's saga: the sudden appearance of oxygen at the end of the Archean. In this opera, oxygen is a relative newcomer, an event that has destroyed masses of earlier living forms feeding on methane, a massive case of pollution that has been seized by new forms of life as a golden opportunity.

'Oxygen is poisonous, it is mutagenic and probably carcinogenic, and it thus sets a limit to lifespan. But its presence also opens abundant new

**opportunities** for organisms. At the end of the Archean, the appearance of a little free oxygen would have **worked wonders** for those early ecosystems. (...) Oxygen would have **changed** the environmental chemistry. The oxidation of atmospheric nitrogen to nitrates would have increased, as would the weathering of many rocks, particularly on land surfaces. This would have **made available nutrients** that were previously scarce, and so **allowed an increase in the abundance of life**' p. 114.

If we now live in an oxygen-dominated atmosphere, it is not because there is a preordained feedback loop. It is because organisms that have turned this deadly poison into a formidable accelerator of their metabolisms **have spread**. Oxygen is not there simply as part of the environment but as the extended consequence of an event continued to this day by the proliferation of organisms. In the same way, it is only since the invention of photosynthesis that the Sun has been brought to bear on the development of life. Both are consequences of historical events that will last no longer than the creatures sustaining them. And as the citation shows, each event creates for other creatures, later on, novel opportunities.

The crucial point here, it seems to me, is that scale does not intervene because we would have suddenly shifted to a higher point of view. If oxygen had not spread, it would have remained a dangerous pollutant in the vicinity of archeo-bacteria. Scale is what has been generated by the success of living forms. If there is a climate for life, it's not because there exists a *res extensa* inside which all creatures would passively reside. Climate is the historical result of reciprocal, mutually interfering connections among all growing creatures. It expands, it diminishes or it dies with them. The Nature of olden days had levels, layers and a well ordered zoom; Gaia subverts levels. There is nothing inert, nothing benevolent, nothing external in it. If climate and life have evolved together, space is not a frame, nor even a context: space is time's child. This is what makes Lovelock's Gaia so totally secular: all effects of scale are the result of the expansion of one particular opportunist agent seizing occasions to develop on the fly. If it is an opera, it is one that is constantly improvised and has no end, no rehearsal and no score. This is the polar opposite of James Hutton's view when he famously said at the end of his *Theory of the Earth*:

*'We have the satisfaction to find that in nature there is wisdom, system and consistency. (...) The result, therefore, of our present inquiry is, that we find no vestige of a beginning, — no prospect of an end.'*

No prospect of an end, really? For the rocky Earth maybe, for Gaia this is doubtful, for some of its participants, it is far from sure.

If there is no frame, no goal, no direction, we have to take Gaia as the name of the process by which varying contingent occasions have been offered a chance to render later events more probable. Gaia is neither a creature of chance nor of necessity. Which means that it looks a lot like what we have come to take as history itself. Such is the last trait I wish to emphasize.

When we say that Gaia is a ‘historical figure’ we offer the same ambiguity as when we say, for instance, that the Act of Union or Pasteur’s discoveries of microbes are ‘historical.’ The adjective designates simultaneously the event and the narrative of the event. It is well known that historians have a complex relation with the objectivity of their findings that the word ‘narrative’ could either weaken — ‘We are just telling stories’ — or strengthen — ‘We are branching narratives onto what is in itself also a narrative.’ I use the word ‘narrative’ to designate the specific ontology of events that might have unfolded otherwise, events that had no plan, that are not lead by any Providence, journeys that succeed or fail depending on constant retelling and continual re-evaluation that modifies, once again, their contingent meaning. With this definition, we see how we could move from a narrative of Pasteur’s discovery of microbes — he has a history, they don’t —, to the history of microbes — they have a history too. This is why, when Stephen Jay Gould took such pains to tell the story of the Burgess Shale fossils so as to avoid any teleology — even the one coming from their neo-Darwinist version —, he alluded to Frank Capra’s film with his book title *Wonderful Life* to suggest how things could have been different for so many lives along the way. You need fiction to tell a somewhat realistic story of what live forms have to pass through. Similarly, if Gaia is to be told through narratives, it is because it is also, in its very fabric, a narrative.

In a piece of work that, by its sheer size, bursts the limit of a scholarly book, Martin Rudwick has shown that when geohistory began to ‘Burst the limits of time’ it was not to escape from the narrow prison of the Church’s teachings. It was, on the contrary, because it began to merge the tools of exegesis and hermeneutics, with the newly developed disciplines of archaeology, digs, historiographical archives and expeditions.

“This book has traced how this novel geohistorical approach has derived from transposition from the human world into the natural both from the profoundly historical perspective of Judeo-Christian religion and from its secular counterpart in erudite human history an antiquarian research. The former, far from being an obstacle to the perception of the immense timescale of geohistory, facilitated the extension of historicity back into the vastness of deep time. And the latter provided the new practice of geohistory with its crucial conceptual metaphors of nature’

As Rudwick shows beautifully, the revolution — and it was a revolution — came once geologists convinced themselves that the planet was not the result of the eternal laws of nature (their ideal vision of Newton’s achievements) but of highly specific places and dates — something that they could begin to realize by digging, for instance, through the older layers of Mount Vesuvius’s eruption, but that they could also read about in the gospel. To be able to read cosmic events out of minuscule disruptions in the orderly layers of life was something common to the emerging science of geohistory as well as to the deciphering of Incarnation and its complex web of textual emendations. Once intentionality and interpretation are granted to all living creatures, we may understand in a very different manner how ‘the lily could sing the Glory of God’ in more ways than one. ‘Nature Two and Religion Two might not be that far apart. ‘Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?’ (Jn-1-46).

Is it possible at last to imagine a secularized science talking about secularized phenomena? How to name this new form of narration? Of course, we could use ‘natural history’ and ‘natural philosophy’ in their old 19<sup>th</sup> century meaning, but it is hard to extract from the adjective ‘natural’ the poison that Nature — capital N — has injected in it. Feminists have punned on the venerable term of history to create ‘herstory,’ so as to insist on the hitherto unrecognized presence of women’s role in male history. If it is very true that the distribution of agency by male historians about male historical figures ignored most of the feminine actors, it is also true that there has been a great inequality in the distribution of active forces when having human — males and females — strutting on a stage made of what had no history. If we don’t want to use ‘Gaiastory,’ we could use the word ‘geostory’ — better than geohistory — to capture what ‘geostorians’ such as Lovelock are talking about, that is, a form of narration inside which all the former props and

passive agents have become active without, for that, being part of a giant plot written by some overseeing entity.

Have we finally drawn the face of Gaia? No, obviously not. At least, I hope I have said enough to convince you that finding the ‘place of Man in Nature’ — to use an old expression — is not at all the same thing as to narrate the geostory of the planet. By bringing into the foreground everything that used to remain in the background, we don’t expect to live at last in ‘harmony with nature.’ There is no harmony in this contingent cascade of unforeseen events and there is no nature either — at least not in this sublunary realm of ours. But to learn how to situate human action into this geostory is not — such is the crucial lesson — to ‘naturalise’ humans either. No unity, no universality, no indisputability, no indefeasibility is to be invoked when humans are thrown in the turmoil of geostory. You could say, of course, that this rendering is much too anthropomorphic. I hope it is and fortunately so, but not in the old sense of imputing human values to an inert world of mute objects, but, on the contrary in the sense of giving humans — yes *morphing* them into — a more realistic shape. Anyway, what a strange thing it would be to complain about the pitfalls of anthropomorphism at the time of the anthropocene!

## The Anthropocene and the destruction of the image of the Globe. Gifford 4. Monday 25<sup>th</sup> February 2013

I am surely not the only one in this room who waited with great anticipation, during the six first months of 2012, for the conclusions of the **34th International Geological Congress** that was to be held in Brisbane during the summer. I have to confess that until recently I was not in the habit of following the work of this eminent academic body — even though their somewhat Nietzschean motto: ‘*Mente et malleo*,’ ‘*By Thought and Hammer*,’ would have fitted fairly well my own profession! But if this year I did, it was because I, along with the whole world, was waiting for the outcome of the International Commission on Stratigraphy, or, to be more precise, of its Sub-commission on Quaternary Stratigraphy presided over by Dr Zalasiewicz from Leicester University. Would they officially declare that the Earth had entered a new epoch, the Anthropocene, or not — and if so, at which precise date? For the first time in geostory, humans were to be officially declared the most powerful force shaping the face of the Earth. It would come as no surprise to you that such a decision would have been counted as a true ‘epochal change’ for the geostorians with whom, in these lectures, we are trying to get acquainted.

Here is a quote from the report of the sub-commission:

‘The ‘Anthropocene’ is currently being considered by the Working Group as a potential geological epoch, i.e. at the same hierarchical level as the Pleistocene and Holocene epochs, with the implication that it is within the Quaternary Period, but that the Holocene has terminated. (...)

Broadly, to be accepted as a formal term the ‘Anthropocene’ needs to be (a) scientifically justified (i.e. the ‘geological signal’ currently being produced in strata now forming must be **sufficiently large, clear and distinctive**) and (b) **useful as a formal term to the scientific community**. In terms of (b), the currently informal term ‘Anthropocene’ has already proven to be very useful to the **global change research community** and thus will continue to be used, but it remains to be determined whether **formalisation** within the Geological Time Scale would make it more useful or broaden its usefulness to other scientific communities, such as the geological community.

The beginning of the 'Anthropocene' is most generally considered to be at c. 1800 CE, around the beginning of the Industrial Revolution in Europe (Crutzen's original suggestion); other potential candidates for time boundaries have been suggested, at both earlier dates (within or even before the Holocene) or later (e.g. at the start of the nuclear age). A formal 'Anthropocene' might be defined either with reference to a particular point within a stratal section, that is, a Global Stratigraphic Section and Point (GSSP), colloquially known as a 'golden spike; or, by a designated time boundary (a Global Standard Stratigraphic Age) (...)

So far so good. Unfortunately, I had forgotten that geologists are used to taking their time — indeed they usually deal with millions and billions of years. So, indifferent to the pressure exerted by laymen like me who eagerly needed to know if the news was official or not, they quietly stated in their conclusion, that they had to delay their final vote for at least four more years! Their decision was anti-climactic (a strange expression in our present climate...).

*'The Working Group has applied for funding to allow further discussion and networking, and is working to reach a consensus regarding formalisation by, it is hoped, the 2016 International Geological Congress.'*

Note the leisurely and rather infuriating 'it is hoped' — as well as the usual reaction to apply 'for more funding.' As if they had so much time and so little money! Of course, geologists need time to find enough tell-tale signs of the vastly enlarged role of this 'anthropos' whose civilization is already powered by around 12 terawatts ( $10^{12}$  watts), and which is heading toward 100 terawatts if the rest of the world develops at the level of the US, a stunning figure if one considers that plate tectonic forces are said to develop no more than 40 terawatts of energy. And every sub-commission adds its own sudden change of scale: having modified the flows of all the rivers, the 'anthropos' is now the most important agent of change for all the catchment areas of the world; it is already the main agent in the production and distribution of the nitrogen cycle; through deforestation, it has become one of the main factors in accelerated erosion; and of course, its role in the carbon cycle becomes enormous as does the degree of its complicity in the disappearance of species — to the point of being responsible for what is often called the 'sixth global extinction.' What is so depressing in reading the documents of the sub-commission on stratigraphy, is that it runs through exactly the same items you could have read in any 20<sup>th</sup> century listing of all the glorious things that humans have done in

‘mastering nature,’ except that today the glory is gone, and both the master and the slave — that is, humans as well as nature — have been melted together and morphed into strange new geological — I mean geostorical — forces.

What would make the situation amusing if it were not so dramatic is the mix up of time scales this working group has to deal with. Do you remember how at school we were asked to be very impressed by the slow pace of geological time lines? While we could not even imagine how we would ever reach the age of twenty, our professors were at pains to find enough pedagogical tricks to burn in our young minds the infinite distance separating us from the era of dinosaurs or from that of *Australopithecus*. And here, suddenly, in a complete reversal, we find geologists flabbergasted by the quick pace of human history; a pace that forces them to try lodging a ‘golden spike’ in a span of two hundred or even of sixty years (depending on whether you prefer a short or very short temporal boundary demarcating the emergence of Anthropocene). The phrase ‘geological time’ is now used for an event that has passed more quickly than the existence of the Soviet Union! As if the distinction between history and geostory had suddenly vanished, the carbon and the nitrogen cycles taking on as much cosmic significance as the last glaciations or the Manhattan project. Let the adepts of stratigraphy take their time and wait patiently for 2016. Given the importance of what is at stake, we cannot blame them for demanding some time to adjust to this acceleration of time by falling back on the somewhat slower senatorial pace of academic bureaucracy!

What makes the Anthropocene a clearly detectable golden spike way beyond the boundary of stratigraphy is that it is the most decisive philosophical, religious, anthropological and, as we shall see, political concept yet produced as an alternative to the very notions of ‘Modern’ and ‘modernity.’ But what is even more extraordinary is that it’s the brainchild of stern, earnest and sun-tanned geologists who, until recently, had been wholly unconcerned by the tours and detours of the humanities. No postmodern philosopher, no reflexive anthropologist, no liberal theologian, no political thinker would have dared to weigh the influence of humans on the same historical scale as rivers, floods, erosion, and biochemistry. Which ‘social constructivist,’ intent on showing that scientific facts, social relations, gender inequalities are ‘nothing but’ historical human-made episodes, would have dared

saying that the same is true of the chemical composition of the atmosphere? Who is the literary critic who would have extended his or her deconstructionist exegesis to the layers of sediments revealing in all of the planet's deltas the unmistakable traces of man-made erosion? Just at the time when it became fashionable to speak of a 'post-human era' with the blasé mood of those who know the time of the human is 'passé,' the 'anthropos' is back — and back with a vengeance — through the hard empirical work of those who used to be called 'natural scientists.' What the various fields of humanities with all their sophistication could not detect, obsessed as they were with defending the 'human dimension' against the 'unfair encroachment' of science and the risks of an excessive 'naturalization,' the natural historians were left to ferret out. By giving an entirely new dimension to the notion of a 'human dimension,' it was they who devised the most radical term that would simultaneously put an end to anthropocentrism as well as (at least, this is my claim) to older forms of naturalism by suddenly foregrounding the human agent under another shape.

Because of such a conceptual feat, before going on, I think it's fair to respectfully bow to Paul Crutzen, the atmospheric scientist, and his colleagues, the geoscientists. They all deserve the motto '*Mente et malleo*' since it is thanks to the intelligent handling of their hammer that we have come to realize that all our most cherished values, when they were gently struck, rendered a rather hollow sound.

Let me further introduce this second set of lectures by pointing out what I find so original in this concept of the Anthropocene and also use the occasion to review what we achieved last week in preparation for the much harder task that lies ahead, that is, the question of war and cosmopolitics and maybe, if we manage to go that far, the question of the rituals of peace that will have to be invented to encounter Gaia properly.

The first advantage of living in the time of the Anthropocene is that it directs our attention toward much more than a 'reconciliation' of nature and society as one larger system that would be unified in terms of either one or the other. To operate such a dialectical reconciliation you would have to accept the Great Divide of the social and of the natural — the Mr Hyde and Dr Jekyll of modernist history (I will let you decide which one is Hyde and which one is Jekyll). But the Anthropocene does not overcome this Divide: it bypasses it entirely.

Geostorical forces are no longer the same as geological forces. Wherever you deal with a 'natural' phenomenon you encounter the 'anthropos' — at least in this sublunary domain of ours — and wherever you tackle the human you discover types of attachments that had been lodged before as the purview of nature. In following the nitrogen cycle, where would you situate the biography of Franz Haber and where the chemistry of plant bacteria? In drawing the carbon cycle, who would be able to tell when Joseph Black enters and when chemists leave this merry go round? Cycles such as those look much more like a Möbius strip that would require us to think through a rather puzzling form of continuity provided you entirely redistribute what used to be called natural and what could be called social or symbolic. The divide between the natural and the social sciences — remember the gap between 'physical' and 'human' geography, or the one between 'physical' and 'cultural' anthropology? — has become moot. Neither nature nor society can enter the Anthropocene intact, waiting to be quietly 'reconciled.' In the same movement, the Anthropocene brings the human back on stage and dissolves for ever the idea that it is a unified giant agent of history.

This is why, in what follows, I will use the word 'anthropos' to designate what is no longer the 'human-in-nature' nor the 'human-out-of-nature,' but something else entirely, another animal, another beast or, more politely put, a new political body yet to emerge. Such is the main topic of this lecture series: to define the scale, scope, scope and goal of these new people taken severally who have unwillingly become the new agents of geostory. One thing is sure: this actor making its debut on the stage of this New Globe Theatre has never before played a role in such a thick enigmatic plot.

Our second advantage is that the concept of Anthropocene underlines the strident urgency of the preparations we are busy making for facing Gaia. Only recently have the two related figures of Gaia and the Anthropocene been superimposed. If, as I said on Thursday, Gaia inflicts upon humans a narcissistic wound by bringing them back from an infinite universe to a tiny cosmos, it is only after entering the Anthropocene that humans have begun to really feel the pain. As long as they were humans-in-nature, they could ignore Gaia's limits that lay far away in the background. Now that humans have become the *anthropos* of the Anthropocene, they bump into those new limits at

every turn, banging into them with screams of surprise and disbelief—even trying to deny that limits exist at all.

What is even more infuriating for them is that humans are themselves responsible for having met those limits so quickly, in the space of a few generations, maybe two. (Yes, incredibly enough, all of that has happened in *my own life span*; that's the true golden spike: my own carefree, careless generation starting as a baby boom and ending in a grandpa bang!) Whereas Gaia could be taken as having a somewhat leisurely pace, to the point of being considered as some sort of homeostatic system maintaining equilibrium over immensely long geological time spans, it has taken on—because of this sudden change in 'human dimension—a feverish form of palsy, falling catastrophically from tipping point to tipping point, from one positive feedback to the next, in a rhythm that frightens climatologists even more with the publication of each new data set. So much so that, in Lovelock's own terms, Gaia reveals Itself as something that is 'at war' and that is even ready to takes Its 'revenge'.

It seems to me that the real reason why we are assembled tonight for this series of exercises in political theology, is because we are all painfully aware that in order to confront this new urgency there is literally *nobody*. Why? Because there is no way to *unify* the *anthropos* as a generic character to the point of burdening it with everything that will happen on this new global stage. If we learned anything last week, it is that such an actor is unified neither by nature — Nature One — nor by religion — Religion One.

It makes no sense to talk about the 'anthropic origin' of global climate warming, if by 'anthropic' you mean something like the 'human race.' Hundreds of different people will at once raise their voice and say that they feel no responsibility whatsoever for those deeds at a geological scale — and they will be right. Indian nations in the middle of the Amazonian forest have nothing to do with the 'anthropic origin' of climate change — at least so long as politicians have not been distributing chainsaws at election times. Nor do the poor blokes in the slums of Mumbai, who can only dream of having a bigger carbon footprint than the black soot belching out of their makeshift ovens. Nor does the worker who is forced to drive long commutes because she has not been able to find an affordable house near the factory where she works. This is why the Anthropocene, in spite of its name, is not a fantastic extension of anthropocentrism, as if we could pride ourselves in

having been transformed for good into some sort of flying red and blue Superman. Rather, it is the human as a unified agency, as one virtual political entity, as a universal concept that has to be broken down into many different people with contradictory interests, opposing cosmoses and who are summoned under the auspices of warring entities — not to say warring divinities. The *anthropos* of the Anthropocene? It is Babel after the fall of the giant Tower.

And it is probably useless to claim that the scale of the threat is so great and its expansion so ‘global’ that it will act mysteriously as a unifying magnet to turn all the scattered people of the Earth into one political actor busy rebuilding the Tower of Nature. As we saw last week, Gaia is anything but unified and unifying. There is no way to think of Gaia globally since it is not a cybernetic system designed by any engineer. It is ‘Nature’ that used to be universal, stratified, undisputable, systematic, de-animated and indifferent to our fate. Not Gaia, which is, as we learned, the name offered as a shorthand for all the intertwined unpredictable consequences of the dispersion of agents, each of them pursuing its own interest by manipulating its own environment for its own comfort —some agents happening to act as a negative and unforeseen feedback on the development of others.

Oxygen-producing multicellular organisms and carbon-dioxide emitting humans will expand or not depending on their success and will gain exactly the dimension they are able to capture. No more, no less. Don’t count on any preordained overarching feedback system to bring them back to order. It is totally impossible to appeal to the ‘balance of nature,’ to the ‘wisdom of Gaia’ or even to its ancient, relatively stable history as a police force whenever politics has divided those scattered people too much. In the period of the Anthropocene, gone are all the dreams entertained by deep ecologists that humans can be cured of their political strivings if only they could be convinced to turn their attention to Nature. We have permanently entered a post-natural epoch. Ecological questions are not there to assemble stakeholders peacefully; they divide more surely than any issue of the past — they always have. If Gaia could speak, It would say like Jesus: ‘Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword’ (Matt: 10, 34). Or even more violently as in the apocryphal Gospel of Thomas: ‘I have cast fire upon the world, and look, I’m guarding it until it blazes.’(10)

But what about science? Surely here at least we could find a unifying principle of last resort that would bring everyone into agreement and that could direct crowds of humans towards undisputable programs of action. Let's us all be scientists — or at least let's spread science everywhere through education — and we will get our act together. 'Facts of all countries unite.' This will never happen. It is prevented not only by the spurious 'controversy' waged by climato-sceptics, climato-deniers or climato-negationists (whatever you care to call them), but also by the very oddity of all those disciplines that depend so much on a highly complex distribution of instruments, modelling, international agreement, bureaucracy, standardization and institutions, the machinery of which has never been presented in a positive light to public consciousness — what I earlier called Nature Two (more on this in a few minutes). Climate scientists have been dragged into a post-epistemological situation that is as surprising to them as it is to the general public —both finding themselves thrown 'out of nature.'

If there is unity neither in nature nor in politics, it means that whatever universality we are looking for has to be composed. It is to render such a composition at least thinkable that last week I introduced the little scheme by which every collective will present itself to the others as a people summoned by an entity and make explicit the way it distributes agencies. Thanks to such a scheme, collectives are rendered not exactly comparable, but at least 'assemblable' — if there is such an expression. Not because they would all be treated like so many cultures — as was the case with traditional anthropology; nor because they are forcibly unified by being, after all, 'children of Nature,' —as was the case with the former natural sciences; nor, of course, because they would be a little of both — as in the impossible dreams of reconciliation or dialectic. If they are rendered translatable to one another, it is because they agree to state explicitly who they are, what friends and foes they have and on which conditions they could enter into some cosmopolitics without any Providence atop them all to distribute their roles and their fates.

Such is the fully secular assemblage I propose. It is the one that gathers collectives without dividing them first by using the one-Nature/multiple-cultures scheme; this famous mono-naturalism slash multi-culturalism that would play the same role as the 'Mosaic division' with which I began the first lecture. In my sort of assemblage, we do not

start by saying that one of them is true and that all the others are so many (interesting and even respectable) forms of falsehood. Not because we abandon the quest for truth, but because the assembly is to be made under the auspices of geopolitics and not under those of knowledge only. If we did abandon the quest, we would have to say that some collectives have a ‘religious,’ ‘spiritual’ or ‘symbolic’ view of Nature, while one other — but one that does not even take itself as a real actual people — does not have simply a ‘view of Nature’ but has Nature, so to speak, all to itself. By abandoning the quest we would be deprived of any chance of mobilizing other collectives to face Gaia. More tragically, the ‘people of nature’ would be left alone and would convince nobody to join them in the task ahead. Confronted with such an unprecedented situation, they would play the old character of ‘man-in-nature.’ Which is another way of saying that they would keep insisting on being modern — or keep trying to save modernization once again. But if I am right, the modernizers have little chance of surviving in the Anthropocene, no more than a camel to pass through the eye of a needle.

Instead, what I propose to say is that, in this new cosmopolitan situation, those who wish to present themselves to other collectives have a) to specify what sort of people they are, b) to state what is the entity or divinity that they hold as their supreme guarantee and c) to identify the principles by which they distribute agencies throughout their cosmos. Of course, conflicts will ensue — but then also, later, some chance of being able to negotiate peace settlements. It is precisely these peace conditions that are not even going to be looked for as long as we believe that the world has already been unified once and for all — by Nature, by Society or by God, it doesn’t matter which. This might be a mad pursuit, but that’s the one I propose to outline in the course of this second week.

Let us start this potential work of assembly with an imaginary collective whose members would proudly present themselves to others by saying ‘we pertain to the people of Gaia.’ That others are shocked at the introduction of a ‘goddess’ into what should remain ‘a strictly naturalist description,’ can no longer embarrass us. With our translation tables in hand, there is no longer any difficulty in granting a proper name to the entity under which such a people is happy to be summoned. If anything, as I argued last Thursday, Gaia is much less a

religious figure than Nature. If you remember the invocation of 'Owwaab' in the first lecture, there is no longer any need to hide the personification that deserves a capital letter and a gender. This is why, to emphasize the contrast even more, I will use for Gaia the capitalized 'It,' so as to underline its secular properties, while reserving for 'Nature' the capitalized 'She.' Gaia ends the hypocrisy of invoking Nature while hiding the fact that She was the name of a divinity; while not telling anybody which right of entry She would use to enroll the people She summoned; and failing to mention through which right of entry She would enrol the people She was able to summon; while failing to mention the highly peculiar de-animated way in which She distributed its series of causes and consequences.

This is where our usual semiotic trick of always shifting from names to agencies will come in so handy. 'Nature' possessed the strange ability to be at once 'outside' and 'inside.' She had the fascinating ability to be mute and simultaneously to speak by Herself through facts — with the added benefit that you never knew, when naturalists spoke, who was doing the speaking. More surprisingly, She was organized by successive levels, from atoms, molecules, and living organisms, to ecosystems and social systems, in a well-ordered procession that allowed those who invoked Her to always know where they were and what provided the best foundation for what was to follow. This architectonic quality allowed Her (or them) to dismiss at will (or, as they say, to 'explain') a particular level in the name of the level just below it, according to the implausible 'reductionism' we have encountered earlier. Even more surprisingly, it allowed them to dictate what things in the world ought to be, while claiming never to mix ought with what simply is. A cute but hypocritical modesty, as if it was more risky to say what something should be, than to define what the essence of something is.

In the vast repertoire of religious studies, it is hard to find a divinity whose authority has been less contested than the laws through which Nature could force everything into obeying Her. No wonder that politicians, moralists, preachers, legists, economists and popes still long for such an indisputable fountain of authority. Ah! If only we could profit from the templates offered by natural laws! Another source of authority, I am sorry to suggest, that global warming appears to have dried up.

So, if you now loyally compare the attributes with which Nature and Gaia are endowed, I think it's much more secular (I was going to say 'more natural'!) to claim 'I belong to Gaia' than 'I belong to Nature.' At least, you know that the person who salutes you with such an invocation belongs to a specific people that is frankly assembled under the auspices of a personified entity whose properties he or she can list — just as in Antiquity with the translation tables for the names of Zeus or Isis, or in Brazil for establishing a concordance between the names of Christian saints and those of the *orishas*. When you meet someone who is from Gaia, you may be confident that you are not going to be sold a totally implausible speaking mechanism, as well an already built architectonic so well ordered that it will tell you what you should do under the cover of what simply is. Freed from the fact/value divide and extirpated from the stultifying architectonic of levels from A, as in Atoms, to Z, as in *Zeitgeist*, you may clearly state your goals, describe your cosmos and tell at last your friends from your enemies.

What are the other virtues we could grant the people of Gaia? (I hope you understand that I am drawing here the picture of a completely *imaginary* collective, one that would be able to equip itself to survive in the Anthropocene by taking seriously what it means to be post-natural as well as post-epistemological.) Another great quality of such a people is that they may escape from the *bifocal* vision that we have recognized in the first two lectures. What was so strange about the 'people of Nature' is that their residence was totally implausible; they seemed to hover in outer space without having a body, or even a mouth; at times completely fused with the things objectively known; at other times a totally detached spectator contemplating Nature from the view from nowhere — '*la vue de Sirius*.' But scientists cannot survive in such a vacuum, no more than astronauts without a spacesuit.

So, whenever they actually have to do something, through a sudden change of repertoire that is never clearly accounted for, the same scientists are brought back to flesh and blood earthly bodies and local places. When, for instance, physicists celebrate the great heroes of Cambridge science, they don't hesitate to fasten a plaque like this one, in Free School Lane (just next to the department of History and Philosophy of Science, the Kaaba of our field of science studies).

*'Here in 1897 at the old Cavendish laboratory J.J. THOMSON discovered the electron subsequently recognized as the first fundamental*

particle of physics and the basis of chemical bonding electronics and computing.'

It is hard to point out a more situated knowledge than this one: from this very local place on Free School Lane, in the hands of a great scientist, electrons are supposed to have spread successfully to populate all chemical bonding and all computers! But in the next minute, the same physicists will have no qualms about admiring how Steven Hawkings' mind roams through the whole cosmos in intimate dialog with the Creator, wishfully ignoring that Hawking's mind benefits not only from a brain but also from a 'corporate body' described by Hélène Mialet in her book **Hawking incorporated**, as composed of a vast network of computers, chairs, instruments, nurses, helpers and synthesizers that are necessary for the step by step flow of his equations. With such a bifocal view of science, it is hard to reconcile the view from nowhere with the highly localised classrooms, office spaces, laboratory benches, computer centres, meeting rooms, expeditionary treks and field stations, where scientists have to locate themselves when they begin to really talk about their findings or to really write their papers.

The two views are just as irreconcilable as are the many advertisements that hype the uploading of our data into the cold, ethereal 'Cloud' while carefully hiding the arrays of power stations that must be built down on Earth to cool the vast arrays of server farms always at risk of overheating. No doubt it is such a discrepancy that has made Science, since at least the 17<sup>th</sup> century, so difficult to assimilate inside the general culture and that has rendered so many scientists morally naïve as well as politically impotent. As Stevenson has shown in his famous parable, you cannot simultaneously be Jekyll and Hyde: the mad scientist — that is, remember, Dr Jekyll — cannot cope with such a split personality for long. Scientists who play the split personality game may also run the risk of hitting a similar breaking point.

If, for the people of 'Nature,' the two views seem irreconcilable, for the 'people of Gaia' this is not the case. Here again, climate science has introduced an epochal change, offering us, in science studies, a pretty clear cut golden spike. When, for instance, Charles D. Keeling has to defend his long-term data series on the daily, monthly, yearly rhythm of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, it would make no sense at all for him not to foreground the instrumentation with which he has worked for forty years on the Mauna Loa volcano in Hawaii. If he had to fight so

long against government agencies, against the National Science Foundation itself, against the oil lobbies, it was to save his instruments and the data they produced. Without them, it would have been impossible, for the rest of his community, to detect the fast pace with which carbon dioxide was accumulating. To talk about the climate objectively and to deploy what Paul Edwards calls the *Vast Machine* activating the *Politics of Global Warming* are one and the same thing, or, to use his terms, it is the same movement that creates an ‘epistemic culture’ and the ‘knowledge infrastructure’ that goes with it. The more climate sceptics insist on the old idea of a Science floating everywhere at no cost, the more climatologists are in turn forced to insist on this foregrounding and the more they see themselves as a specific people with specific interests locked in conflict with other people for the production of relevant data series.

Am I right in thinking that for the first time in the history of science, the very visibility of their network may at last make scientists wholly credible? Precisely because they are viciously attacked in the name of epistemology, they must, for the first time, fall back on the concrete institutions of science as their own way to access objective truth. Perhaps they will accept at last that the more situated their knowledge is, the sturdier it becomes? Instead of alternating wildly between an impossible universality and the narrow confines of their limited ‘standpoint,’ it is because they extend their data sets, instrument after instrument, pixel after pixel, data point after data point, that they might have a chance to compose universality — and to pay its price tag in full. As a set of interlocking disciplines, climate sciences are much closer to what I have called Nature Two. If this compositionist point is so crucial, it is because we might find in climatology, not ‘*la gaya scienza*’ anticipated by Nietzsche, but a *Gaia* science that would at last be compatible with the anthropology, the politics — and maybe the theology — we are striving for.

Is it not extraordinary to learn from natural sciences that we seem to have moved backward, through some sort of counter-Copernican revolution, to a sublunar world whose functioning are largely disconnected from the rest of Nature? But the reason why we are not dragged back to a time before Copernicus is because another image of the world has also been smashed, an image that had remained intact through the whole of philosophy, the idea of a *Sphere* that could allow

anyone to ‘think globally’ and to carry over one’s shoulder the whole weight of the *Globe* — this strange Western obsession, the true ‘White Man’s burden.’ In other words, we have to lift what could be called ‘Atlas’ malediction.’ Atlas, we have to be reminded, is one of the Titans, one of the many monsters that were generated from the blood of those whom the mythological Gaia had schemed to assassinate (in Hesiod’s unfair portrait of the old primeval goddess).

To lift this extra weight from our shoulders we have to indulge in a little bit of ‘spherology,’ this fascinating discipline invented from scratch by Peter Sloterdijk in his massive three volume study of the envelopes indispensable for the furthering of life. Sloterdijk has generalized Von Uexküll’s *Umwelt* to all the bubbles that agencies have generated to make a difference between their inside and their outside. To accept such an extension, one has to consider all the philosophical as well as the scientific questions thus raised as being part of a vastly expanded definition of *immunology*, understood here not as a human nor as a natural science, but rather as the first *anthropocenic* discipline.

Sloterdijk is the thinker that takes metaphors seriously and fully probes their real weight—for hundreds of pages if necessary. His immunological problem is to detect how any agency protects itself from destruction by building a sort of well-controlled atmosphere. He asks this question at every scale with a dogged obstinacy. Including when he mischievously takes his master Heidegger to task for having failed to answer the following question: ‘When you say that the *Dasein* is “thrown in the world?” What is this “in” made of? What is the air you breathe there? How is the temperature controlled? What sorts of materials make up the walls that protect you from suffocation? In brief, what is the climate of such an *atmospheric condition*? Those are exactly the base and basic questions which philosophers and scientists of all hues and descriptions have never agreed to answer with any precision.

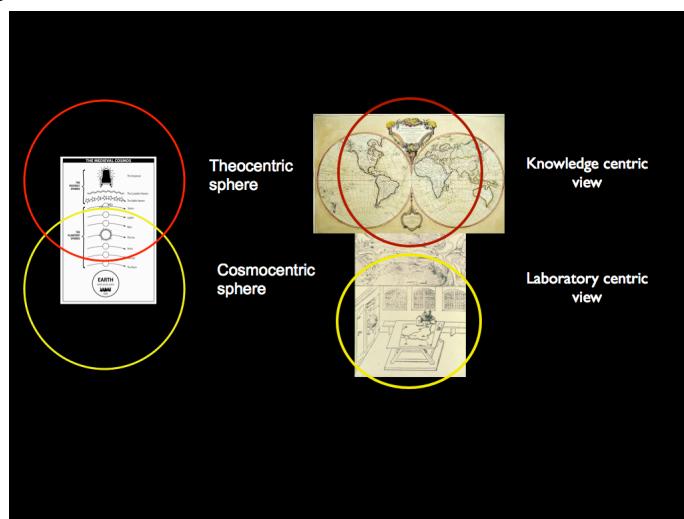
According to Sloterdijk, the complete oddity of Western philosophy, science, theology and politics is to have invested all its virtues in the figure of a *Globe* — with a capital G — without paying the slightest attention to how it could be built, sustained, maintained and inhabited. The *Globe* is supposed to capture everything that is true and beautiful, even though it is an architectonic impossibility that will crumble as soon as you look seriously at how and where it stands. Sloterdijk asks a very simple, humble architectural question, one that is just as material as the geologists with their inquisitive hammer: where

do you reside when you say that you have a 'global view' of the universe? How are you protected from annihilation? What do you see? Which air do you breathe? How are you warmed, clothed and fed? And if you can't fulfil those basic requirements of life, how is it that you still claim to talk about anything that is true and beautiful or that you occupy some higher moral ground? Without specifying their climatology, the values you try to defend are probably long dead already, like plants that have been kept inside a greenhouse overexposed to the sun. In Sloterdijk's, even more than in Lovelock's hands, the notions of homeostasis and of climate control take on an even more metaphysical dimension.

When you begin to ask such elementary questions, you realize the total implausibility of seeing anything at all from Sirius. No one has ever lived in the infinite universe. More telling, no one has ever lived 'in Nature.' Those who frighten themselves by imagining that they are roaming through the infinite universe are always looking at a small globe with a surface area of only two or three square meters while inside the warmth of their earthly cabinet under the comfortable lighting of a lamp. Instead of '*le silence de ces espaces infinis m'effraie*,' Pascal should have said 'the hum of the machinery of those confined spaces soothes my mind.' When epistemologists claim that we could live 'in Nature,' what they really do is to carry out what for Sloterdijk amounts to a criminal act of destruction, tearing down all the protective envelopes necessary for the immunological function of life (and life, for him, does not distinguish between biology, sociology and politics).

Any thought, any concept, any project that ends up ignoring the necessity of the fragile envelopes that make existence possible is a *contradictio in terminis*. Or, rather, a contradiction in architecture and in design: it is unsustainable; it does not have the atmospheric, the climatic conditions that could make it liveable. Trying to live in such a place would be like trying to save all your precious data to the Cloud without investing in computer farms and cooling towers. If you still wish to use the words 'rational' and 'rationalism,' fine, but then also do the work of designing the fully furnished spaces where those who are supposed to inhabit them may breathe, survive and reproduce. Materialism without climate controls is another form of idealism. Page after page, Sloterdijk rematerializes in a completely new way what it is to be in space, *on this Earth*, offering us what is probably the first philosophy resonant with the Anthropocene.

Regretfully, tonight I will make use of only one of the results of his marvellous inquiry, a result, however, that goes to the heart of our political theology of nature. In the middle of his second volume (soon to be accessible in English), Sloterdijk devotes a hundred pages to a meditation that he titles ‘*Deus sive Sphaera*,’ ‘God, that is, the Sphere.’ Although it could seem to be just a tiny technical fault in design, it is one that destabilizes the whole architectonic of Western cosmology and that is most clearly detectable in visual imageries such as these. (see the images)



As you can see, the little chink that he is the first, as I see it, to point out results from the unresolved bifocalism of a Christian imagery that tries to superimpose its incoherent theo- and geo-centric globes. It just so happens that when you place God in the centre, the Earth is rejected at the periphery. This is fine, since it gives our planet a humble and, well, a peripheral role. But the problem is that when you place the Earth at the centre, with Hell located smack in the middle, beneath the sublunar world, it is God that is forced to occupy the periphery. That move is harder to swallow. God is not supposed to be ‘peripheral.’ How could you build a whole cosmology with two contradictory centres, one turning around God while the other is circling around the Earth?

But the really fascinating thing, is that for about two millennia this little architectonic fault made no difference whatsoever to theologians, artists and mystics. As Sloterdijk sums up:

‘The bifocalism of the ‘image of the world’ had to be kept latent, without the possibility of having any explicit dialog about the complete contradiction between the geocentric site and the theocentric site of the projection inside the

illusory bubble of *philosophia perennis*' PS II p. 418 (my translation from French).

So powerful is the 'illusory bubble of the *philosophia perennis*', the malediction of the Globe, that theologians have drawn a cosmic God in the form of two wobbling spheres without ever being alerted to its technical implausibility. From Dante to Nicolas de Cues, from Robert Fludd to Anathasius Kircher, all the way to modern illustrators such as Gustave Doré, the discrepancy was simultaneously obvious and constantly denied. Although it was visually impossible, the smooth emanation from God's grace to human Earth was never put into question even though no one could literally draw its mystical rays in continuous lines through the yawning gap dividing the two systems.

You could object, I am sure, by asking why we should pay any attention to this discrepancy in Christian theology? Coherence is not the forte of religious souls, anyway, and one more kink in their operation should be hardly detectable. But what fascinates me in this discovery is that exactly the same incoherence applies to the architectonic with which rationality has been built. The two images of the world in Christian theology are just as irreconcilable as the images that would represent, for instance, the physics of the electron as simultaneously everywhere in the world and safely located inside J. J. Thomson's Cavendish laboratory. And you find exactly the same denial of such an impossibility, not this time among theologians and mystics, but among scientists and philosophers. The 'illusory bubble of *philosophia perennis*' keeps 'latent' the 'complete contradiction' between 'Nature One'—cosmos-centric—and 'Nature Two'—laboratory-centric—making any 'explicit dialog' between the two just as impossible as the reconciliation of geo- and theocentric 'images of the world' in medieval cosmology.

What Sloterdijk has detected in Christian imagery, science studies has detected just as clearly in scientific writings. No wonder; it's the same problem twice—one in the history of religion, the other in the history of science, thanks to the *translatio imperii* of which we have seen so many examples already. It is impossible to locate the Earth or to stabilize the centre around which the other entity is supposed to turn. Witness the bungled metaphor of the 'Copernican revolution' that Kant claims to have introduced in philosophy: it makes everything turn around the Subject while simultaneously abandoning the old human centred cosmology. To come back to the first meaning of the word

‘revolution,’ everything looks as if there was no stable centre around which to make the Earth revolve — a problem that we will tackle in the next lecture.

Following Sloterdijk’s probing of the architecture of Reason, we realize that the globe is not what the world is made of, but a Platonic obsession transported into Christian theology and then loaded into political epistemology to provide a figure — but an impossible one — for the dream of total and complete knowledge. There is a strange fatality at work here. Whenever you think of knowledge in a zero gravity space — and this is where epistemologists dream of residing — inevitably it takes the shape of a transparent sphere that could be inspected from a place of no place by a body of no body. Just like Captain Haddock’s whisky, on board the space ship designed by professor Calculus in Hergé’s *Explorers on the Moon*, takes on a golden spherical shape as soon as Thomson and Thompson stupidly cut its artificial gravity. But once you restore the gravitational field, knowledge immediately loses this mystical spherical shape inherited from Platonist philosophy and Christian theology. Data flow again in their original form of historical narratives.

Because of this bifocalism, the two portraits of Atlas are equally implausible, the Atlas who is supposed to hold the world on his shoulder (without being able to gaze at it, as Sloterdijk points out) but also the one invented by Mercator, the very emblem of the scientific revolution — an Atlas who is supposed to hold the entire cosmos in his hands as if it were a football. Mercator, having fused the male scientist with the much older metaphor of God’s hand, morphed him into a giant, a real Superman able to keep everything in his palm. But if the globe is indeed held for good in the hand of some average size human, then, inevitably it is a map, a model, a globe in the very humble and local sense of the little instrument of *papier maché* that many of you, I am sure, love to make whirl around with a movement of your fingers. Or, else it is one of those contraptions that Patrick Geddes and Elisée Reclus invented so as to give a popular shape to the encyclopaedic knowledge they had accumulated. But then it is a panorama, a geodesic dome cinema, an amusement park, maybe the Globe Theatre, but it is not that in which the cosmos itself is lodged.

To lift the fatality of the Globe — what I have called Atlas’s malediction —, one has to stick to good old science studies or to Sloterdijk’s spherology and point out that ‘global’ is an adjective that

might describe the shape of a local contraption to be inspected by a group of humans gazing at it, but never the cosmos itself inside which everything is supposed to be enclosed. No matter how large it is, the array of the clusters of galaxies dispersed since the Big Bang is not bigger than the screen on which the streams of data from the Hubble telescope are being pixelized and coloured. As the saying goes, 'thinking globally is always acting locally' because no one has ever thought globally — especially not about Nature and Gaia.

This is a useful tenet in social theory as well as in cosmology. I have often noticed that when my colleagues talk of the 'whole society,' of 'social context,' or of 'globalization,' they use their hands to form a shape that was never much bigger than a reasonably sized pumpkin! We should apply the same humble localization to all the talk about 'globalization.' You are never more provincial than when you claim to have a global vision — 'so much globaloney.' If there is one lesson to be retained from actor-network theory, it is that there is no reason to confuse a well-connected locality with the utopia of the Globe. Once again, in spite of the illusion provided by the intoxicating manipulation of Google Earth™, scale is the result of the number of connections between localities not the circulation through any preordained zoom from the very big to the very small.

The reason why this relocalization of the global has become so important is because the Earth itself might not be a globe after all. When we unify it as the terraqueous sphere, we are forcing geostory inside the older format of medieval theology and 19<sup>th</sup> century epistemology of Nature. Even the famous view of the 'blue planet' might end up being a composite image, that is, an image composed of the old shape given to the Christian god and of the complex network of data acquisition from NASA, that was in turn projected inside the distributed panorama of the media. Here is actually the source of the fascination that the image of the sphere has exerted from Plato to NATO: the spherical shape smoothes down knowledge into one continuous, complete, transparent, ubiquitous volume that hides the extraordinarily difficult task of assembling controversial data points coming from many different instruments and disciplines. A sphere has no history, no beginning, no end, no hole, no discontinuity of any sort. It is not only an idea, but the very ideal of ideas. It is what you wish to passively contemplate when you are tired of history. And thus, it is precisely that inside which you don't want to be imprisoned to tell any

geostory. For this, as we saw yesterday, you need data in their original form of *narratives* — what can be articulated in a geostory.

No political theology of Nature is possible, as long as we don't extract ourselves from Atlas' malediction: *Orbis terrarum sive Sphaera sive Deus sive Natura*. Such is the last point I want to make as this lecture nears its end: the notion of a globe and any global thinking entails the immense danger of unifying too fast what should be composed instead. The spherical globe hides the activity needed to draw its shape since, in order to design a circle, you need to come back to your departure point by following some sort of a loop. The concept of a loop should take precedence over that of the sphere. It is the only way to become secular in science as well as in theology.

This point is at first simply geometrical — you need to draw a circle before being able to generate a sphere; it is of course also historical — it is only because Magellan's ship returned that his contemporaries could engrave deeper in their mind the image of a spherical Earth; but it is also moral — it is only when you feel that your action is coming back to you that you sense that you are made responsible for it. Thus the loop that is necessary to draw any sphere, is pragmatic in John Dewey's sense of the word: you need to feel the consequences of your action before being able to represent yourself as having taken an action and realized what the world is like that resisted it. As Sloterdijk points out, it is only once humans see pollution coming back at them, that they begin to really feel that the Earth is indeed round. Or rather, this roundedness of the Earth known from oldest antiquity — but superficially known —, gains more and more plausibility as there is a growing number of loops by which it is possible to slowly encircle it.

This is the reason why it is so crucial to shift from the Globe to the loops that slowly draw it. Without Charles Keeling's Mauna Loa observatory and the instruments to detect the carbon dioxide cycle, we would know less, I mean we would feel less strongly, that the Earth might be rounded by our own action. And before that, we had to feel the hole in the ozone layer, thanks to Dobson's instrument; to feel the possibility of the nuclear winter thanks to the new models of atmospheric circulation promoted by Carl Sagan and his colleagues. That's what the Anthropocene is all about. It is not that, suddenly, the tiny human mind should be transported into a global sphere that would, anyway, be much too big for his or her tiny scale. It is instead

that we have to weave ourselves, to cocoon ourselves within a great many loops so that progressively, thread after thread, the knowledge of where we reside and on what we depend for our atmospheric condition can gain greater relevance and feel more urgent. This slow operation of being wrapped in successive looping strips is what it means to be 'of this Earth.' And it has nothing to do with being human-in-nature or human-on-a-globe. It is rather a slow and painful progressive merging of cognitive, emotional and aesthetic virtues because of the ways the loops are rendered more and more visible through instruments and art forms of all sorts. Through each loop we becomes more sensitive and more responsive to the fragile envelopes we inhabit.

How many more loops do we have to circle around the Earth before the 'knowledge' gains enough of a trenchant feel for this shapeless *anthropos* to become a real agency and a plausible political actor? How many loops had to encircle some of you before you stopped smoking? You might have 'known' all along that cigarettes cause lung cancer, but this is a very long way from actually quitting smoking. You have to feel the pain in your back, as in those shocking advertisements on top of cigar boxes, before you measure up what it is to know something. Here too you need complex institutions and well-endowed bureaucracies to feel the consequences of your actions upon yourself. How many loops do you need to feel the rotundity of the Earth for good? How many more institutions, how many more bureaucracies do you need, you personally, you here, tonight, to feel that you are really responsible for something so far away as the chemical composition of the atmosphere? (By the way, it is not fortuitous that the same lobbies who feed the climate-sceptics have been at work for so long to break the connection between cigarettes and your lungs.) As the line attributed to Lao Tzu says: 'to know and not to act, is not to know.' It is the connection mechanisms that count, not any jump to any global knowledge.

But there is another final and a more cogent reason why we should be so extremely suspicious of any global view, a point we have rehearsed often enough: Gaia is not a Sphere at all. If anything, Gaia is a tiny membrane, no more than a few kilometres thick. So, It is not global in the sense of being run, as a system, from any control room by some overarching and overpowering Super Dispatcher. As we saw last Thursday, Gaia is not made of loops in the cybernetic sense of the metaphor, but in the sense of historical events expanding further or not

depending on what the other agencies are doing with their own ‘final’ causes. This means that to understand the entanglement of the contradictory and conflicting connections amongst events is not a job that can be done by jumping to a higher ‘global’ level to see them all acting as one single whole; it can only be accomplished by crisscrossing their potential paths with as many instruments as possible to have a chance of detecting in what ways they are connected. Once again, the global, the universal and the natural, act as so many dangerous poisons, that obscure the difficulty and the cost of laying down the networks of equipment that render the consequences of action visible to all the various agencies that do the acting — not only, for instance, the actions of the former humans, but also those of nitrogen releasing algae or that of rock weathering roots and nodules.

This seems to me the real meaning of what it is to live in the Anthropocene: ‘sensitivity’ is a term that applies to all the agencies able to spread their loops further and to feel the consequences of what they do come back to haunt them. When the dictionary defines ‘sensitive’ as being ‘quick to detect or respond to slight changes, signals or influences’ this adjective applies to Gaia as well as to the *anthropos* — but only as long and as far that it is fully equipped with enough sensors to feel the feedbacks. Of Gaia, Isabelle Stengers often says that It has become ticklish. Nature, the Nature of olden days, might have been indifferent, overpowering, a cruel stepmother, but for sure it was not ticklish! Its complete lack of sensitivity was on the contrary the source of thousands of poems and what allowed Her to trigger by contrast the feeling of the sublime: we, humans, were sensitive, responsible and highly moral: not Her. Gaia, however, seems to be overly sensitive to our action, and It appears to react incredibly fast to what It feels and detects. This is why we should become cautious, careful, yes, sensitive in return. No immunology is possible, without high sensitivity to those multiple, controversial, entangled loops. Those who are not ‘quick to detect or respond to slight changes’ are doomed. And those who, for some reason, interrupt, erase, background, diminish, weaken, deny, obscure, underfund, or disconnect any of those loops are not only insensitive and unresponsive — they are simply criminal. This is why there is some reason to call ‘negationists’ those who, having denied Gaia’s sensitivity, listen to the call of the Devil, that Faustian character who says: ‘I am the Spirit of always saying No.’ No doubt that this is one of the sources from which evil has come.

I will conclude with one possible reading of the crashing planets at the end of Lars Von Trier's *Melancholia*. It might not be the Earth that is being destroyed in one last sublime flash of apocalypse by an errant planet: it is our *Globe*, our ideal idea of the *Globe* that *should be* destroyed for any work of art, any *aesthetic* to emerge — if you agree to hear in the word *aesthetic* its old meaning of being able to 'perceive' and to be 'concerned,' that is, a capacity to render oneself sensitive, a capacity that *precedes* any distinction between the instruments of science, of art and of politics. In one of his many linguistic innovations, Sloterdijk has proposed to say that we should shift from *monotheism*, with its old obsession with the shape of the *Globe*, to *monogeism*. *Monogeists* (not to be confused with *monogenists*) are those who have no spare planet, who have only one Earth, but who don't know Its shape better than they knew the face of their God of old — and who are thus confronted with what could be called a totally new kind of geopolitical theology.

# War of the Worlds: Humans against Earthbound. Gifford 5. 26<sup>th</sup> of February 2013.

I don't know if you have noticed the strange ways in which we reassure ourselves, nowadays, when confronted with the constant flood of bad news coming from the scientific literature on the state of the Anthropocene. We have reached a point where we might take comfort in reading, for instance, the following quote:

*'We have today a chance to play a new role in warning people of the apocalypse, the role of prophylactic messengers. If we differ from the classical Judeo-Christian announcers of the apocalypse, it is not only because we are afraid of the end (whereas they longed for it) but more because our apocalyptic passion has no other goal than to avoid the apocalypse. We warn of the apocalypse only to be proven wrong. Only to enjoy every morning again the chance to still be around, ridiculous maybe, but standing here nonetheless'* (my translation from French p. 30)

This is a passage from Günther Anders, a prolific and neglected writer who was also Hannah Arendt's first husband, in a 1960 book aptly called *The Time of the End*, a comment on what political theology had become under the atomic mushroom cloud. If I find some solace in this description of Cassandra's character, it is because it was written fifty years ago, and was not alluding to global warming at all, but to this earlier terrifying threat that used to be called the 'nuclear holocaust' or the 'nuclear suicide' — a global warning if any. (A threat, by the way, which is still pending, even though no one mentions it with the same stridency anymore.)

Don't you find such a quote somewhat reassuring? It proves that we have been there already. We are still standing around, 'ridiculous' may be, but here nonetheless. We have survived. People of my generation have lived under the shadow of MAD — Mutually Assured Destruction — for most of their life, some since August 1945, others since the missile crisis in October 1962 (my own recollection of the pending Apocalypse — a close call if there ever was one). And yet, in the horizon of this virtual holocaust, we seem to have lived fairly well, thank you. Catastrophe mongers delight in imagining (to borrow from the title of a popular book) '**The World without us**,' but, surely, such

prognostications should not be taken more seriously than those of the Mayan calendar. So what else is new? Is this not one more proof that those whom the sceptics call ‘catastrophists’ have been wrong all along, that things are never that bad and that ingenious humans, in the end, always learn how to cope and to get by?

Or is it because, in this case, the prophylactic message of apocalypse has worked and the very horror of things-to-come has indeed modified the vision of those who were ready to wage a mad nuclear war — no holds barred? If Cassandra has been ‘proven wrong,’ it’s because everyone agreed she might be right after all, and that the Trojans, after heeding her call, took the necessary steps to avoid in the end the inevitable: the wooden Horse remained on the beach outside the walls of Troy with the Achaeans uselessly tucked inside — Ulysses’ cunning being of no avail.

I feel very fidgety to have to talk tonight about war and peace, revolution and revelation (the etymology, as you know, of the word ‘apocalypse’). But if it might be too flippant to brandish the theme of the end of the world, it would be even more bizarre not to take the theme seriously in a lecture series on the political theology of nature. Politics, theology and nature — or at least the Earth — are all pointing to, if not the End, at least to a radical change of horizon. Those who don’t feel in their bones that they might lose the world, must have difficulty feeling alive. Not only in the old banal way — every one of us will have to quit it at some point, but also in the new unexpected manner: it’s the world that might forfeit us. We have entered, or we have never left, or we should never leave ‘the Time of the End.’ In his foreword, the French translator of Anders’ remarkable little book wryly modifies Marx’s 11<sup>th</sup> thesis: ‘*Philosophers have only interpreted or changed the world in various ways. From now on, the point is to conserve it.*’

I am well aware that it is somewhat nauseating to hear academics rant on about doom, blood and war when they have not the slightest experience of conflicts, living, as they most often do, in the comfort of their well-heated cabinets. But I am also aware that no amount of warm feelings will ever be up to the task of making us able to ‘conserve the Earth.’ So, I find equally nauseating the well meaning expectation that as soon as we talk about ‘God’s grace in His Creation,’ or ‘Nature’s beauty,’ or the ‘objective knowledge of natural laws,’ or ‘our

responsibility to the planet' we — we, the puny striving humans —, will immediately come to agree and take the necessary decision to heed the warning and avoid, in the end, the inevitable. As we have learned earlier, Nature does not unify all the people of the Earth any better than religion or objective knowledge. The appeal to nature is not more potent than Cassandra's wail.

We cannot even count on catastrophes to raise our awareness: quite the opposite. In one of the many terrifying books I have read in preparing those lectures, *The End. The Defiance and Destruction of Hitler's Germany 1944-1945*, the historian Ian Kershaw showed that Germany lost more soldiers and civilians in the final year of the war, when they had lost any hope of winning, than in the four years before. He demonstrates that in the most cataclysmic of situations, when the Reich is doomed, the war clearly lost and everyone, from marshals to house maids, knows it, nonetheless, *for want of an alternative*, the fight goes on, with the dictatorial criminal system almost intact, all the way until the final collapse.

It is because we cannot console ourselves with an appeal to human wisdom, to warm spiritual feelings, to the harmony of Nature, to the obvious character of the threat, nor to the immensity of impending doom, that I have to drag you, I am afraid, into this meditation on war and peace. If there is nothing nice, harmonious, or soothing in dealing with ecological issues; if Lovelock could describe Gaia as being 'at war' and 'taking Its revenge' on the humans whom he compares to the British Army, in June 1940, stranded on the dunes of Dunkirk, in full retreat, forced to abandon their weaponry lying useless on the beach; it is because the Anthropocene might be conceived, not as the great irruption of Nature finally able to pacify all our conflicts, but as a generalized state of war.

No matter how horrendous history has been, geostory will no doubt be worse since what, until now, had remained safely in the background — the landscape that had framed all human conflicts — has now joined in the battle. 'Faites donner la Garde!' Something that neither the Trojans, nor the Germans, nor even Dr Strangelove (in spite of nuclear winter), would have expected. What had been metaphorical until now — that even the stones are screaming in pain at the misery humans have caused them —, has become literal. The expression 'a climate' or 'an atmosphere of war' has taken on another meaning now that another historian, Harald Welzer, has been moved to quietly write

a most disquieting book, *Climate Wars*, with the terrifying sub-title *Why People Will be Killed in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*.

Clive Hamilton, in another of those many books that made me lose quite a lot of sleep, *Requiem for a Species - Why we Resist the Truth about Climate Change* (sorry, I can't help sharing with you some of my most frightening readings — how I wish I could quote from more cheerful titles!), claims that the enemy of action is hope, this unquenchable hope that things will get better and that the worst is not always for sure. Hamilton argues that, before anything can be done, we have to uproot hope from our desperately optimistic frame of mind. So, it is with many qualms that, at the beginning of this lecture, I post the sombre Dantesque warning: 'Abandon all hope,' or in a less dark gothic style 'Abandon all hype ye who enter here.'

To understand why this state of war has been generalized, it is best to turn to the writer who has defined this situation as being one, as he calls it, of exception: the toxic and unavoidable Carl Schmitt, the main expositor of 'political theology.' His key notion of the political, as is well known, is deduced through the definition of the enemy — *hostis* not *inimicus* — a concept that should not be confused with any moral, religious, commercial or aesthetic attitude toward fellow humans (nor, in spite of Schmitt's adherence to Nazism, with any militaristic appetite for the gore of battlefields).

*'The political enemy need not be morally evil or aesthetically ugly; he need not appear as an economic competitor, and it may even be advantageous to engage with him in business transactions. But he is, nonetheless, the other, the stranger; and it is sufficient for his nature that he is, in a specially intense way, existentially something different and alien, so that in the extreme case conflicts with him are possible. These can neither be decided by a previously determined general norm nor by the judgement of a disinterested and therefore neutral third party.'* p. 27

The crucial point for now is the last sentence: as long as there is a 'third party' that is able to apply a 'previously determined norm' to judge in a 'disinterested' way who is wrong and who is right, there is no enemy, thus there is not a state of war, nor is there, according to Schmitt, any politics. As long as there is a referee, an arbiter, a Providence, a Super-dispatcher, that is, for him, a State, the thousands of inevitable struggles among fractious humans are nothing more than internal strife that can be solved through mere management or through police operations. They

can be judged, they can be calculated; they don't need to be decided. There is no war where management and accounting are sufficient; there is no war when conflicts can be solved by sending in the police, when those who dissent agree that the State has the right to define the situation. War begins when there is no sovereign arbiter, when there exist no 'general norms' that may be applied to pass judgment: such is the extreme 'state of exception.'

'The friend, enemy, and combat concepts receive their real meaning precisely because they refer to the real possibility of physical killing. War follows from enmity. War is the existential negation of the enemy. It is the most extreme consequence of enmity. It does not have to be common, normal, something ideal, or desirable. But it must nevertheless remain a real possibility for as long as the concept of the enemy remains valid.' p. 33

So, to understand what follows, we have to keep in mind the link between politics, enmity, war and the absence of a third party and see what happens when we introduce unexpected non-human agencies into the disputes.

The key concept here is the presence or absence of a 'third party.' Although, on first reading, the 'other,' the 'stranger,' 'what is existentially something different and alien' cannot be thought to refer to any other agencies than anthropomorphic ones, eighty years later, the range of aliens that have joined in the fray has dramatically expanded. What Schmitt could see only vaguely, we, contemporaries of the Anthropocene, are forced to consider: the appeal to Nature known by the natural sciences no longer consists in 'a previously determined general norm' to which we could rely for 'judgement by a disinterested and neutral third party.' Thus the question of enmity is vastly expanded.

If I have been even marginally right in the previous lectures, you will have gathered that Gaia is unfortunately no longer 'disinterested' in what we do. It has interests in our actions. The complex set of natural sciences that compose climatology will no longer be able to play the role of indisputable and final referee — not because of the spurious 'controversy' over the anthropic origin of climate change, but because of the number of loops they have to establish, one after the other, to make us sensitive to Gaia's sensitivity. This is what I have called their post-natural, post-epistemological situation. Strangely enough, Nature, at least the sublunar Earth, has been placed into a 'state of exception,' that is, in a situation that obliges everyone to make decisions because of the 'extremes' of life and death. Gaia and the Earth system sciences are

fully engaged in a geostory that will turn out to be just as 'full of sound and fury' as the history of olden days — and, yes, probably 'told by an idiot' as well! This is the argument I wish to pursue, no matter how slippery it is.

When in earlier epochs, before the Anthropocene, we talked about Nature, we were in effect quietly and unwittingly talking as if there existed a *State of Nature* — a State with a capital S, that is, a monstrous Leviathan, half of which was made of politics, the other of Science. That it had been built through the strangest type of social contract and thanks to the most bizarre use of Science, we have known that since the publication of *Leviathan and the Air-Pump*, Steve Shapin and Simon Schaffer's master book about the dispute between Boyle and Hobbes. The composite body of such a monster holds the sword in one hand and the air pump in the other, thus providing a telling emblem for three centuries of political epistemology.

But since then, because of the many controversies in science as well as in ecology, what we have been witnessing is the progressive dissolution of this division between Politics and Science, or, to use my terms, the end of the Modernist Constitution. Nature cannot provide the safety of a State — capital S; while Science — also capital S — no longer serves as the supreme court of appeals projecting its vast protective shadow over politics. In an unexpected and unprecedented twist on Hobbes's most famous concept, we have entered instead a completely new state of nature, this time written with a small 's' and a small 'n.' That is, a war of all against all, in which the protagonists may now be not only wolf and sheep, but also tuna fish as well as CO<sup>2</sup>, sea levels, plant nodules or algae, in addition to the many different factions of fighting humans. The problem is that this state of nature is not situated, as with Hobbes, in the mythical past before the social compact: it is coming at us; it is our present. Worse: if we are not inventive enough, it might be our future as well. No wonder that we are terrified at having lost the safety of the State: there is nothing reassuring in the dissolution of the Great Leviathan and in the demise of our most cherished constitutional arrangements. As Hobbes wrote: 'It may seem strange to some man that has not well weighed these things that Nature should thus dissociate and render men apt to invade and destroy one another.' Strange indeed that nature does not pacify more the 'political animal'!

If it is too early to panic, it is because the safety provided by the State of Nature — capital S, capital N — has never been delivered for good anyway, and because we have not abandoned the task of looking

for safety and protection, peace and certainty. It's just that we realize that we can not obtain a civilized collective without composing it, bit by bit, agency by agency, thus searching for a new Leviathan that would come to grasp with Gaia. In other words, the task of building the Republic, the true *res publica*, is still way ahead of us. It is not that ecological disputes are destroying the social compact and that we should lament the lack of respect for scientific authority: it's just that, thanks to Gaia's irruption, we realize that we had have not even started to draft a realistic contract, at least not one that could hold together in this sublunary Earth of ours.

Is this not what assembles us tonight? Now that the capital 'S' capital 'N' State of Nature has been dissolved, how can we get out of the small 's' small 'n' state of nature — the war of all against all? Renewing politics at the end of religious wars sounds much like renewing it in the midst of scientific controversies. We are still facing Hobbes' old question — how to put an end to civil wars —, except that he wished to rebuild civil society after the guarantee of one really *catholic* Religion had vanished, while we have to do the same now that the authority of a really *catholic* Nature (capital N) known by the unified Sciences (capital S) has crumbled as well. In the new Leviathan, the careful exegesis of scientific literature replaces that of religious scriptures. I agree that raising such a vision is not an easy task because the situation is not as it is in Hans Blumenberg's book — a *Shipwreck with a Spectator*. It is a shipwreck alright but there is no spectator left; rather, it's just like in the *Story of Pi*: in the lifeboat, there is a Bengali tiger! The poor young castaway has no solid shore from which to enjoy the spectacle of how to survive alongside an untameable wild beast for which he is simultaneously the tamer and the meal!

To sketch such a Leviathan, in spite of all appearances, we should not look to our modernist past with too much regret, because no good would ensue were we to deny that such a generalized state of war is indeed the case. If we were to do so, we would simply suck politics out of the landscape and replace it by either education, management or police operations. As Schmitt writes:

'A world in which the possibility of war is utterly eliminated, a completely *pacified* globe, would be a world without the *distinction* of friend and enemy and hence a world *without politics*' p. 35

Well, the good news, to say the least, is that 'a completely *pacified* globe,' is not what we are facing. Such a dream has existed to be sure: it has been

the ideal of naturalists — the utopia of deep, superficial or mid-depth ecologists; and it is still the horizon of those who hope to manage, engineer or re-engineer the planet; of those who wish to get by with ‘sustainable development’; and of those who claim to be the good intendant, the earnest butler, the clever gardener or the careful steward of the Earth. In brief it is the dream of those who would prefer to do ‘without politics’ altogether.

The great virtue of dangerous and reactionary thinkers like Schmitt is to force us to make a choice much starker than that of so many wishy-washy ecologists still swayed by unremitting hope. Schmitt’s choice is terribly clear: either you agree to tell foes from friends, and then you engage in politics, sharply defining the borderlines of real enough wars — ‘wars about what the world is made of’ —; or you shy away from waging wars and having enemies, but then you do away with politics, which means that you are giving yourself over to the protection of an all-encompassing State of Nature that has already unified the world into one whole, a State that should thus be able to resolve all conflicts from its disinterested, neutral, over-arching third party view — *sub specie aeternitatis, sub specie Dei, sive Naturae, sive Sphaerae*.

The second solution would of course be better, I agree — I am not a bellicose person myself — but only providing that such a State exists. If there is none, then, what passes for common sense is simply criminal since you accept to place your safety and that of others in the care of an entity that does not exist. You would put those who are confident in your solution smack in the middle of a situation similar to the one described by Jan Kershaw, one with no way out: it won’t be just Dunkirk (in June 1940, there was still hope); it will be Germany May 1945: unconditional surrender. It’s a stark choice, I agree: either Nature extinguishes politics, or politics resuscitates nature —that is, finally agrees to face Gaia. Remember the gospel I quoted yesterday, a phrase that Schmitt would have understood all too well: ‘Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword’ (Matt: 10, 34). Without meeting such a challenge, there will only be police operations that would inevitably and miserably fail, but no plausible politics of nature.

How I wished I could entertain you with soothing words about the splendour of natural parks, the beauty of God’s Creation, or the stunning new discoveries of the Earth system sciences! But the hard

dark job of politics has to be done first. For this, we have to define a) what is the threat, b) who are the enemies and c) which sort of geopolitics we will end up with. Let me broach each of those topics one after the other.

To cope with the threat, we first have to understand why we feel it is coming towards us, and why is it so difficult to face it head on. As long as I have been trying to encounter Gaia, I have pictured in my mind the movement of a dancer, first fleeing backward, as if she was escaping faster and faster from something truly horrible, indifferent to the destruction she left behind by moving blindly backward — much like Benjamin's 'angel of history' —, and then, glancing behind her more and more often, she finally begins to turn around, slowed down as if she was penetrating a thorny bush, looking to the full horror of the shape of things she has to face, and, at last, suddenly coming to a complete stop, eyes and hands wide open in disbelief before beginning to withdraw in panic from what is coming at her.



Contrary to what they often say of themselves, Modernists are not forward-looking, but almost exclusively backward-looking creatures. This is why the irruption of Gaia surprises them so much. Since they have no eyes in the back of their head, they deny it is coming at them at all, as if they were too busy fleeing the horrors of the times of old. It seems that their vision of the future had blinded them to where they were going; or rather, as if what they meant by the future was entirely made of their rejected past without any realistic content about 'things to come.' (French usefully distinguishes between 'le futur' and 'l'avenir.)

Children of the Enlightenment are used to defining with great relish the threatening past from which they were courageous enough to escape; they are largely silent on the shape of things to come. Modernizers

are extraordinarily good at freeing themselves from the shackles of their archaic, provincial, stuffy, local, territorial past, but when the time comes to designate the new localities, the new territories, the new provinces, the new narrow networks towards which they are migrating, they content themselves with utopia, with hype and great movements of the chest as if they were preparing themselves to breathe the thin intoxicating air of globalisation. No wonder: they never paid any attention to where they headed, obsessed as they were to escape from attachments to the old land. Good at detachment, they seem quite naïve when the question is how to reattach themselves to a new abode, how to delineate a new *nomos*. They sound like astronauts making plans to head out into empty space without space suits.

As Sloterdijk has taught us: you cannot move from an inside to an outside, from a place to a place of nowhere, but only from a carefully controlled inside to another even better controlled inside. As he demonstrates, the move is not only from slavery to freedom, but also from implicit conditions of existence to fully explicitated conditions of existence. That's the meaning of climatology: without an atmosphere to breathe, you suffocate. What Gaia has done, is to have forced every one of us to render explicit the breathing conditions we require: out of the suffocating archaic past, running toward an otherwise suffocating future!

Funnily enough, the more progress-oriented modernizers are, the more they are ready to deny that ecology could even be an issue; the more rabid is their contempt for those they call 'prophets of doom,' 'apocalypse mongers.' If you push them a bit more, they will even tell you that all the talk about the End of Time or the Irruption of Gaia is nothing but so many schemes to exploit the poor developing countries even more — if the modernizers are from the Left — or, if they are from the Right, that it's nothing but a plot to impose communism on the rich developed nations. It's as if they were all saying: 'Progress-minded of all nations and of all parties, let's unite in the denial of climatology as our new horizon. We need neither a territory nor a soil. There is no limit! Only reactionaries insist on limits; they don't want us to be emancipated; they want to drag us back to the land, to an era of restrictions and misery from which we have finally so successfully migrated. Yes, it's not a joke, they do want us back living in caves — back in Plato's Cave.'

How surprising it is to find oneself in such a situation with two entirely opposite views of what it is to progress forwards because Gaia is simultaneously what was there and has been forgotten and left behind — Gè, the old goddess —, and what is coming to us, our future. Thus any worry for the climate and the soil could mean moving backward and forward simultaneously. If the word ‘human’ come from ‘humus,’ that is, the soil, we change the direction of the arrow of time entirely, as soon as we replace ‘soil’ by ‘Earth’; we shift from being reactionary to progress-minded. To insist on the soil is to be reactionary in the old way — appealing to ‘Blut und Boden.’ Reactionaries of all hues and colours have always insisted on how criminal it was to attempt to leave the ancient land, to abandon the old soil, to forget the limits of the old *nomos*, to be emancipated and cosmopolitan. Against those calls for remaining ‘backward,’ how right the revolutionaries were in calling for emancipation. And yet what they could not imagine was that there might be another meaning to being attached to the old soil, this time to the Earth. As soon as you say this, things turns around, and the land that used to be what you should leave to undergo modernization, becomes the new Earth that is coming at you. (It works better in French: le ‘*retour à la terre*’ is not ‘*le retour de la Terre*’!).

At the epoch of the Anthropocene, the Great Narrative of Emancipation has made us totally helpless at finding our way to where we belong. As if the very notion of ‘belonging’ smacked of reaction! And yet, you would think that after several centuries of the critique of religion, we would have no difficulty whatsoever in recognizing that we are ‘of this Earth.’ How strange that, after having heard so many clarion calls for embracing materialism, we find ourselves totally unprepared to deal with the *material conditions* of our atmospheric existence? After so much fun made of those who wish to escape to the ‘rear world’ of Heaven so as to flee from the harsh conditions of this world of toil and soil down below, here we are, nonetheless, dumbfounded that there might be limits to our prospects, totally unable to state what it is to behave in a worldly, earthly, incarnated fashion. How much we have enjoyed learning about the ‘death of God’ that was supposed to return us to a human, too human condition, and yet we find ourselves hesitant, fumbling in the dark in the ‘valley of tears’ wondering what it is like to feel the ground under our feet. The surprise is that we are so surprised at being *of here*, no exactly humans, but rather Earth bound.

What progress-minded people could not anticipate was that the revolution they longed for *had already happened*. However, it had come not from any massive change in the ‘property of means of production’ but had occurred full speed in the movement of the carbon cycle! At a time when so many people lament the ‘lack of revolutionary spirit’ and the ‘demise of emancipatory ideals,’ it is left to natural historians to reveal that the revolution has already occurred, that the events we have to cope with do not lie in the future, but largely in the past: this is what they call ‘The Great Acceleration,’ the beginning of which marks the golden spike for dating the Anthropocene. Revolutionary minded activists are taken on the wrong foot when they realize that whatever we do now, the threat will remain with us for centuries, for millennia, because the baton of so many irreversible revolutionary actions by humans has been taken over by the inertial warming of the sea, the changes in the albedo of the poles, by the growing acidity of the oceans and is visible in the tipping points reached by the slow creep of Himalayan glaciers. So here is another unanticipated twist in the arrow of time; the revolution has already ended, or it has to be done all over again; this is enough to make everyone of us totally disoriented. I am convinced that at the root of climate scepticism, there is this amazing reversal in the direction of progress, in the definition of what is the future and what it means to belong to a territory.

So that you don’t believe I am trying to exclude myself from this argument, let’s confess that *we are all climato-sceptics*. I certainly am. And so is the climatologist I was interviewing a few months back, a remarkably sad scientist who, as he ended the description of his beautiful discipline, had to sigh: ‘But in practice, I am a sceptic nonetheless, since, from the fully objective knowledge I contribute to producing, I do nothing to protect my two kids from what is coming.’ This is the terrible quandary in which we find ourselves: being either one of those who deny that there is a threat, or one of those who, knowing full well the extent of the threat, do nothing to meet it. Nothing, at least, that could be at the right scale. I am not sure what is worse: to be a denier or to be impotent? What is sure is that we behave like divided souls, changing light bulbs one day, sorting refuse another, while reading with tears in our eyes that Artic glaciers are calving icebergs at an unprecedented speed — and being able to do nothing about it. Nothing at the right scale.

Even the Engels of *Dialectics of Nature* did not wish to be so right that we would witness every one of the agencies of the planet being mobilized in the dizzying frenzy of historical action. Even the Hegel of *Phenomenology of Spirit* could not envision that the advent of the Anthropocene would so radically reverse the direction of his project that humans would be dialectically immersed in the geostorical adventures of carbon, oxygen and methane. Think of that: the whole breath of the Spirit is now sublated, *aufheben*, overcome, intoxicated by carbon dioxide! What a situation to be in! It would be exhilarating to live at such a time, if only we could witness its drama from the safe shore of something that had no history. But it is only now, when geostory unfolds, that we realize how cosy it was to preach the 'death of God,' to frighten ourselves with the 'absurdity' of life, and to delight in the happy task of critique and deconstruction: those who used to enjoy those games remained like epicurean tourists comfortably seated on the shore, safely protected by the ultimate certainty that Nature at least will always be there, offering them a totally indifferent but also a solid, eternal ground. '*Suave mari magno turbantibus aequora ventis.*' This time: 'Shipwreck with spectators!'

'Tis sweet, when, down the mighty main, the winds  
 Roll up its waste of waters, from the land  
 To watch another's labouring anguish far,  
 Not that we joyously delight that man  
 Should thus be smitten, but because 'tis sweet  
 To mark what evils we ourselves be spared;' (Lucretius Book 2 line 1-6)

But now there is no spectator because there is no shore that has not been mobilized in the drama of geostory so that no tourist can be 'spared' the 'labouring anguish.' If it has become impossible to escape from the theme of the end of the world, in spite of the theme's apparent flippancy, it is because we need to exert an enormous violence on ourselves to practice this turn, this *metanoia*, this conversion, and to force the backward-looking Modernist to finally look forward; to consider a state of affairs that is not a future — something comprising the vague hope that things will take care of themselves ('*Après moi le déluge!*') — but a state of affairs that comes as a threat and that does not bring hope. To talk about the end of the world, to accept living in

apocalyptic times, is not to delight in the spectacular special effects of John's vision in Patmos, but simply to encode the difference between moving out of a horrible past and encountering something that comes towards you.

What is coming should appear as a threat, because it is the only way to make you sensitive at last to mortality, to the very difficulty of being of this Earth, to make you tragically aware, as Sloterdijk would say, of the immense difficulty of explicating your immunology, your air condition. The fireworks of the Apocalypse are not there to prepare you for a rapturous upload to Heaven, but on the contrary, to make you ready to avoid being chased off the Earth by Earth's own reaction to your presence. It is a harsh solution, but it seems the only way to oblige us to turn our attention around after so many years of neglecting what happened behind our back. To morph Benjamin's simile, we could say that the 'angel of geostory' looks forward in disbelief, realizing fully well that there is a threat and that there is a war! This is what I mean by facing Gaia.

And this is exactly what Hans Jonas, building on his knowledge of Christian eschatology, called the 'imperative of responsibility.' Without making the threat visible artificially, there is no way to make us spring into action. This is what Günther Anders called a 'prophylactic' use of the Apocalypse, or what Jean-Pierre Dupuy defines as the necessity of 'enlightened catastrophism,' a somewhat tame oxymoron that has the same content as Clive Hamilton's argument that we should first abandon hope — projecting ourselves from the present to the future — in order to turn around — being reoriented by some powerful figure from the virtual future to transform the present. The fusion of eschatology and ecology is not a fall into irrationality, a loss of nerve or some mystical adherence to an out dated religious myth; rather it is a necessity if we want to cope with the threat and stop playing the appeasers who always delay, once again, putting themselves on a war footing in time.

*Apocalypse is the call for being rational, at last — that is, for being on our toes.* Cassandra's warnings will be heard only if she addresses people who are attuned to the din of eschatological trumpets.

Interestingly, Jonas himself makes the connection with Hobbes' state of nature. As Jonas points out, there is an added difficulty with ecology that Hobbes did not have to consider. Every one of us is directly concerned with the threat of civil war, enough to be kept constantly aware of the danger of losing the safe ground of peace and that's why we

are ready to engage in a social compact and to build that 'mortal god' of the Leviathan.

*The psychology of the matter is not as simple as it was for Hobbes, who also, instead of love for a sumnum bonus, made fear of a sumnum malum, namely the fear of violent death, the starting point of morality. (...) The imagined fate of future men, let alone that of the planet, which affects neither me nor anyone else still connected with me by the bonds of love or just of coexistence, does not of itself have this influence upon our feeling. And yet it 'ought' to have it — that is, we should allow this influence by purposely making room for it in our disposition.' p. 28.*

Everyone understands what is meant by such a danger: 'Call the police!' 'Prepare for war, the enemy is coming!' However, there is no equivalent for ecology because the threat seems too distant. (It is actually frightening to realize that, in 1979, Jonas still thought that the menace was so far away that he had to appeal to the welfare of 'future generations' — how fast things have changed now that we are talking of 2050, maybe as soon as 2020 that the dangers will be most visibly felt — have you noticed that no one talks of future generations any more?).

Even if it is not distant, the threat is at least of such an immense scale that it is totally disconnected from our own personal, individual destiny, from our own emotional frame and cognitive make up. Since we cannot rely on a real and direct fright, Jonas argues, we have to make up for that with the resources of imagination, art and culture:

*'Such an attitude must be cultivated; we must educate our soul to a willingness to let itself be affected by the mere thought of possible fortunes and calamities of future generations, so that the projections of futurology will not remain mere fad for idle curiosity or equally idle pessimism. Therefore, bringing ourselves to this emotional readiness, developing an attitude open to the stirrings of fear in the face of the merely conjectural and distant forecasts concerning man's destiny - a new kind of éducation sentimentale - is the second, preliminary duty of the ethic we are seeking.' p 28*

Extraordinary sentence, as if the *anthropos* of the Anthropocene had to go through a Bildungsroman just like the bourgeois of the 19<sup>th</sup> century confronted with the time of revolutions. To become sensitive, that is, to feel responsible, and thus to make the loops feedback on our own action, we need, by a set of totally artificial operations, to place ourselves as if we were at the End of Time, thus giving a completely new meaning to Paul's admonition:

*'And they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and*

*they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away.' (Cor 7, 30-31).*

Now that we begin to realize how we could turn around so as to face the danger instead of fleeing from it, we have to deal with the second even more difficult topic: that of how to tell friends from foes, which is the condition, as we saw earlier, for keeping politics alive — at least if you accept to follow me in this expanded use of Carl Schmitt's definitions of enmity and *nomos* (definitions whose dosage should be watched as carefully as we would do with a powerful poison).

That there is a huge difference in responding to a threat under the auspices of politics or under that of knowledge may be clearly seen when you compare the quick, panicked pace of the weapons race triggered by the Cold War and the slow leisurely evolution of negotiations over climate. Hundreds of billions of dollars have been poured into atomic armaments to respond to a threat for which the information obtained by spies was slim at best, while the menace caused by the anthropic origin of 'climate weirding' is probably the best documented, most objectively produced piece of knowledge anyone would ever be able to possess in advance of taking action. And yet, in the first case, all the traditional emotions of war-like politics led, in the name of precaution, to the build up of a baroquely oversized arsenal; while in the other, much energy is still spent to delay, deny, or water down the knowledge necessary to trigger ridiculously undersized sums of money. Just compare the sensitivity of the public to the reception of Georges Kennan's secret 'long telegram' of 1946 about Soviet strategy, to that of Sir Nicolas Stern's fully open review, in 2006, on the small monies that should be spent by industrial nations to avoid most of the deleterious effects of climate changes. In one case, the clear presence of enmity, war and politics gave to the word 'precaution' the meaning of quick action; while in the other, the uncertainty over enmity, war and politics gives to precaution the appeasing connotation of 'wait and see' — and, above all, to delay. Panic strikes in one situation — mobilization ensues — while, in the other, demobilization follows even though it deals with the great Pan himself.

Confronted with such a discrepancy in the speed of reaction, it is tempting for ecologically-minded activists to turn to what is unanimous, universal, necessary and undisputable, in order to spur the masses into taking measures at last: namely, the objective knowledge

we have of the situation; the global responsibility of humanity; and the indefeasible laws of an indifferent Nature. No question, such a an appeal makes a lot of tactical sense to win specific battles, just like what feminists call 'strategic essentialism.' But it does not go to the heart of the question. If ecologists never had the clout necessary to meet the threats they were so good at revealing, it is because they hoped to bypass politics for good.

As I have shown in *Politics of Nature*, too often ecologists have simply repainted in green the same grey Nature that had been devised, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, to render politics, if not powerless, at least subservient to Science; this Nature that has been given the role of the 'disinterested third party' able, in the last instance, to referee all other disputes; this Nature inside which so many scientists believe still they have to take refuge so as to protect themselves from the dirty business of politics; this Nature which has inherited all the functions of the overseeing and all-encompassing God of olden days, and that is just as unable to bring Her Providence to bear down on Earth! Ecology is not the taking into account of Nature by politics, but the end of Nature as providing the Republic with half of its politics. Thus one has to choose between a Nature that hides its Politics and a Politics that makes its Nature explicit.

I know this is a dangerous argument, but I will propose to you that we have to suspend those unanimous, universal and global visions in order to resist the urge to empty ecology of its politics. Without first recognizing that people are divided into so many warring parties, no peace will be possible; no Republic will ever be built. I beseech you not to conclude that I am smashing the ideal of universality; I recognize, I share, I cherish such an ideal: I am just trying to find a realistic way to realize it. And for this, first, we have to make sure that we don't think it's realized already. Just as Hobbes needed the state of nature to get to the social contract, we might need to accept a new state of war to envision the State of peace. This is why it was so important, in the earlier lectures, to fight against Atlas' malediction and to introduce the scheme of multiple dispersed people assembled under an entity and deploying agencies in their own specific ways, according to their own specific *nomos*. So let us for a brief moment agree to raise the question in the following form: instead of fancying that you have no enemy because you live under the protection of (politicized) Nature, designate your enemies and delineate the soil you are ready to defend.

And first what about Gaia? Even if we might be shocked by Lovelock's militaristic metaphors, Gaia is a potential enemy, at least for Humans. The old Nature could be wholly indifferent to our destiny; She could have been a cruel stepmother; or She might have been 'red in tooth and claw' as in the rationalizing dreams of social Darwinism. But in none of those three representations, could Mother Nature really be 'at war with Humans' since the fight was settled in advance: She would win; She was the *ultima ratio*. As the saying goes: 'You cannot fool—nor beat—Mother Nature!' Able to play the role of the third party, what She did for or against humans was never more menacing than a police operation—and the best that humans could do was to play the role of the good child, of the reasonable steward, of the respectful gardener. But Gaia is different because It is no longer indifferent to our action; our relation with It is not that of a mother to a child; we are both adults in a fully secular world; the cruelty is equally shared between the two protagonists; the balance of force, calculated nowadays in terawatts, is still uncertain; and both parties share the same fragility. Even though Gaia has a much greater chance to going on than does civilization, according to geologists Humans have become strong enough to push It into such a different state that It would become another being altogether. That's what it means to live in the Anthropocene: we are locked in a *world war* — the Two Hundred Years World War.

But what makes the designation of the enemy even more urgent is that there is of course no sense in speaking, as I have just done, of the 'human race' as being a party in a conflict of just two. The front line divides not only every one of our souls, but it also divides all the collectives with respect to every single one of the cosmopolitan issues we face. The *anthropos* of the Anthropocene is nothing but the dangerous fiction of a universalized agent able to act as one single people. Such a supposition would imply that the State to be built is already there. The Human, capital H, as the giant Atlas-like agent of history, as in so many 19<sup>th</sup> century myths, is precisely what the Anthropocene has broken down and totally dispersed. The Anthropocene does not only put an end to anthropocentrism but also to any premature unification of the human race.

Whether you take the world dispute over genetically modified organisms (GMOs), the calculation of fish stocks, the development of wind turbines, the redesign of coast lines, the making of clothes, of food, of drugs, of cars, the redesign of cities, the transformation of

agricultural practices, the protection of wild life, the change in carbon cycle, the role of water vapour or sun spots, or the monitoring of ice packs — in each case you find matters of concern that gather within their many contradictory folds varied groups of folks that are in disagreement and vast amounts of knowledge that are always necessarily in dispute not because they are not objective but because they transform everybody's world. It would have been amazingly naïve to think that such revolutionary changes in the daily make-up of billions of people might have been triggered simply by producing more accurate data! This is why, from the beginning of this series, I proposed to take as positive the existence of controversies over climate science. Those controversies prove that the amazing consequences of this knowledge are finally being taken seriously since they are denied so adamantly by so many people: climate deniers have clearly realized that it is indeed an end of their world. And, quite reasonably, they resist it.

And that's good because now, at last, we can see everyone operating under their own flag, defining the shape, dimension, limits, content and composition of their cosmologies. Now that there is a recognized state of war, it is possible for every one of the warring parties to be explicit about their *war aims*. Except for tactical reasons, there is no need to hide behind any appeal to the objectivity of Knowledge, to the undisputable values of human development, to the Public Good. Rather, tell us who you are, who are your friends and foes, and who else you want to destroy — and, yes, tell us clearly by which divinity you feel summoned and protected. Even though this argument sounds cruel, we have not lost anything (yes of course we have lost hope) by no longer being able to rely on any third disinterested party since, for every one of the ecological issues, such an appeal to a final arbiter made no difference anyway and could not settle the disputes. That's the state of exception. We have to decide. That's why we need politics.

I tremble here to propose something that could be so easily misunderstood, but I have to draw the consequences of the five last talks without flinching: if we wish to have a political ecology, we first have to accept the division of a prematurely unified human race into collectives in conflicts with one another. We have to put into question not only the idea of a Nature as indifferent to our plight — unfortunately, She has become amazingly ticklish — but also the notion of prematurely pacified humans. Remember that war is the state in which

we find ourselves when we are forced — by the presence of an enemy who wants our destruction — to decide how we will survive when there is no State, no God, no Nature, no Knowledge to protect us. Thus, it might be better to say, in the end, that 'People of Gaia' meet, assemble, behave in a manner that is not easily reconcilable, for instance, with those who call themselves 'People of Nature' or with those who pride themselves in being just simply 'Humans.' Those various people might assemble in the future, but only after conflicts, after diplomacy, after makeshift peace settlements. Not at the beginning. There are too many matters of concern, too many issues dividing 'us' — an 'us,' to begin with, whose boundary is unspecified.

In the geostorical situation we have entered with the Anthropocene, we might even have to say that Humans are now at war not with Nature, but with, with whom? I am at loss to find a name. Science fiction often uses the name 'Earthlings,' but that was the whole of the human race viewed from another planet and in a 'close encounter of the third kind' with little green men. No, we might need label that divides former humans; that pits them against one another instead of lumping all of them into one vague 'anthropic' shapeless mass. 'Gaians'? 'Terrestrials'? I have chosen *Earthbound* — 'bound' as if bound by a spell, as well as 'bound' in the sense of heading somewhere, thereby designating the joint attempt to reach the Earth while being unable to escape from it, a moving testimony to the frenetic immobility of those who live on Gaia. I know that it's terribly dangerous to state the matter this starkly, but we might have to say that at the epoch of the Anthropocene the Humans and the Earthbound should be at war.

Béla Tarr's film, *The Turin Horse*, offers what is probably the best (and also the most depressing!) definition of what it is to have shifted from humanity to Earthboundedness. In the final tempest of the last days of Earth, father and daughter decide to flee their miserable shack isolated in the middle of a desperately parched landscape. With a sigh of relief, the spectator sees them finally going away, expecting that they have at least a chance of escaping their diet of one potato a day. But then, through a reversal that is the most damning sign of our time, a reversal that I don't think any other film has dared show, instead of moving forward to another land, one of opportunity, full of great expectations, full of hopes (remember *America America*), we see with horror that they come back, exhausted, despondent, bound to their shack, resuming their old even more miserable life until eventually

darkness envelops them in its shroud. Those two are Earthbound. They have ceased to be Humans any longer.

To bring this lecture to a close, I want to deal with the last and third topic I had planned to develop, by asking the question of geopolitics, that is, the sort of soil that is to be defended in those 'wars of the world.' And once again, we should appeal to Schmitt and to his most extraordinary book, *The Nomos of the Earth*. While the concept of *nomos* could have sounded, in an earlier period, utterly reactionary, it takes a totally new resonance now that we begin to feel the Earth slipping under our feet. With Gaia in the back of your mind, listen to the end of Schmitt's foreword:

'Human thinking again must be directed to the **elemental orders** of its **terrestrial being here and now**. We seek to understand the **normative order of the earth**. That is the hazardous undertaking of this book and the fervent hope of our work. The earth has been promised to the **artisans of peace**. The idea of a new nomos of the earth belongs **only to them**.' p. 38.

Is this not exactly what we are trying to do? Understand the 'normative order of the Earth' and fulfil the promise that has been given, in the Sermon on the Mount, to the 'artisans of peace'? Schmitt, without of course any interest in ecology, but because of this definition of politics, might have established the connection between law, land, people and the science of geography that is best suited to establish Gaia, if I dare say, on a solid ground.

In mythical language, the earth became known as **the mother of law**. (...) In this way, the **earth is bound to law** in three ways. She contains law within herself, as a reward of labor; she manifests law upon herself, as fixed boundaries; and she sustains law above herself, as a public sign of order. **Law is bound to the earth and related to the earth**. This is what the poet means when he speaks of the infinitely just earth: **justissima tellus**. p. 42

Contrary to the Earthbound, Humans are not to be completely trusted because you never know where they are heading nor what is the principle that delineates the boundaries of their people. It is thus impossible to draw an accurate map of their geopolitical conflicts. Either they tell you that they belong to nowhere in particular, defined only by the fact that, thanks to their spiritual and moral quality, they have been able to free themselves from the harsh necessities of Nature; or they tell you that they fully belong to Nature and its realm of material necessity, but what they mean by materiality bears so little relation with the agencies they have previously de-animated, that the realm of

necessity looks just as out-of-Earth as the realm of freedom. In both cases, they seem unable to belong to any cosmos, to trace any *nomos*. Because of this lack of localization, they seem to remain indifferent to the consequences of their actions, pushing everything forward, indifferent to where the feedback loops that could render them sensitive and responsible will end up falling. They pride themselves in being rational but they are wilfully not reflexive. Paradoxically, that's what they call being future-oriented.

The Earthbound, on the other hand, are bound to a specific *nomos* of the Earth and delineated by lines of space and highly peculiar land-appropriations.

*'Nomos comes from nemein - a [Greek] word that means both "to divide" and "to pasture." Thus, nomos is the immediate form in which the political and social order of a people becomes spatially visible - the initial measure and division of pastureland, i.e., the land-appropriation as well as the concrete order contained in it and following from it. (...) Nomos is the measure by which the land in a particular order is divided and situated; it is also the form of political, social, and religious order determined by this process. Here, measure, order, and form constitute a spatially concrete unity. The nomos by which a tribe, a retinue, or a people becomes settled, i.e., by which it becomes historically situated and turns a part of the earth's surface into the force-field of a particular order, becomes visible in the appropriation of land and in the founding of a city or a colony. p. 70*

What would have sounded scandalous in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century takes a rather different tone at the time of the Anthropocene. It is in that sense that the Earthbound may appear sensitive and responsible, not because they possess any supernatural qualities, but because they belong to a territory and because the delineation of their people is made explicit by the state of exception in which they accept being placed by those they dare calling their enemies. Of course the territory does not resemble the nicely coloured geographical maps of our classrooms. It is not made of nation states — the only actors that Schmitt was ready to consider — but of interlocking, conflicting, entangled, contradictory networks that no harmony, no system, no 'third party,' no overall Providence may unify in advance. Ecological conflicts do not bear on the nationalistic *Lebensraum* of the past but they do deal with 'space' and 'life.' The territory of an agent is the series of other agents that are necessary for it to survive on the long run, its *Umwelt*, its protective envelope.

Of course, such a divide between inside and outside is highly fragile and variable since the series of agents on which any one of us

depends and to which we belong, cannot be summed up without establishing instruments and sensors able to capture data, without many scientific disciplines that are able to draw the loops that make any one of our actions feed back on its consequences. Any weakening of the sensors, any limit in the bandwidth of the instruments, and, at once, the agent becomes less sensible, less responsive, less responsible, losing its territory, unable to define to what it belongs. Territories expand or shrink depending on the controversies that are raging over what is or what is not an item of the series and what is or what it is not an accepted way of distributing agencies. That is what makes this geopolitical map so difficult to stabilize.

If Humans and Earthbound are in conflict, it might also be the case of 'their' conflicting scientists. The naturalist scientist — those who proudly say they are 'from Nature,' is an unhappy impossible figure, forced simultaneously to disappear as a body into his or her Knowledge, or to have a soul, a voice and a place, but then to run the risk of losing his or her authority. When attacked, they whirl endlessly from the Nature-centric view of a knowledge from nowhere to a laboratory-centric view that seems no longer able to reach closure and certainty. Their only solution is to damn the irrationality and the 'relativism' of their fellow Humans and to wait eagerly for the coming back of the days of yesterday when 'everyone' was, at least potentially, a member of their fold.

By contrast, Earthbound scientists are fully incarnated creatures. They are a people. They have enemies. They belong to the soil drawn through their instruments. Their knowledge extends as far as their ability to expand, to finance, to survey, to maintain the sensors that render visible the consequences of their actions. They have no qualms confessing the tragic existential drama in which they are engaged. They dare saying how afraid they are, and in their view such a fright increases rather than diminishes the quality of their science. They appear clearly as a new form of non-national power having a stake in geopolitical conflicts. If their territory knows no national boundary, it's not because they have access to the universal, but because they keep bringing in new agents to be part and parcel of the subsistence of other agents. Their authority is fully political since they represent agents that have no other voice and who intervene in the life of many others. They are allowed to have interests and to disclose them to the full. They don't hesitate to draw the shape of the world, the *nomos*, the cosmos in which they prefer to

live and with what sorts of other agencies they are ready to ally themselves. For them to have allies is not shameful. They no longer try to be the third party lording over all disputes. They are a party, and they sometimes win, sometimes lose. They are of this world. They don't shy from waging battle over, what Schmitt calls in his terse and toxic language *Raumordnungskriege*, wars for the ordering of space. Freed from the damning obligation of being priests of a divinity they don't believe in, they might even proudly say 'we are from Gaia.' Not because they entrust themselves to the final wisdom of a super entity, but because, at last, they have abandoned the dream of living under the shadow of any super entity. Secular. Fully secular. What for most people could be seen as a catastrophe—that the scientists are now fully engaged into geopolitics—is what I could see as the small, the tiny source of hope—if only hope was still what we need to cling to.

I have tried in the three last evenings to sketch for you the face of Gaia, to draw the consequences of what it means to live in the period called by geologists the Anthropocene and, finally, I have had reluctantly to explore the Time of the End. How I wish I could say that all of this is metaphorical; that when appealing to Nature we don't need to deal with questions of war and peace; that these are so many figures of speech.

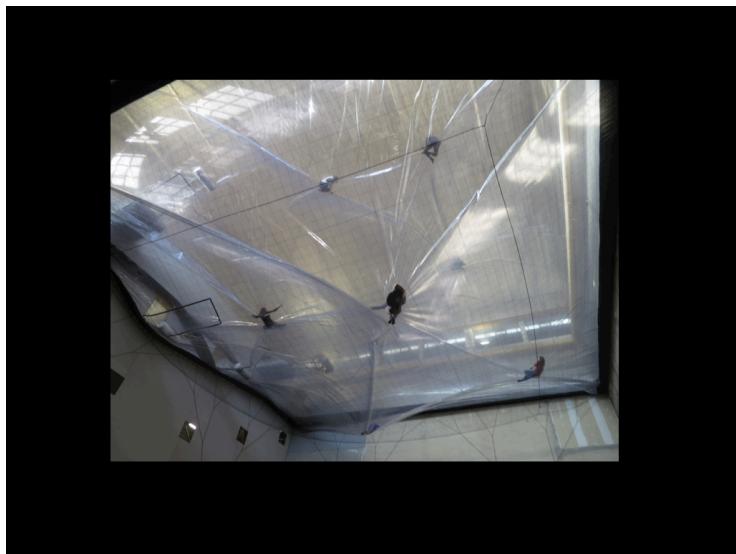
I have been told that when, in 1498, Durer launched the costly process of engraving, printing and selling his magnificent series of views of the Apocalypse, he was simultaneously, as a devout Christian, preparing his soul for the coming of Christ in 1500, but also, as a shrewd artist *qua* investor, betting that he would make a great deal of profit in case he would live to see the dawn of 1501. What a relief it would be to find ourselves prey to such an easy contradiction, hedging our bets. And yet how much worse it would be if, this time, the End of the World as we have known it was for good and that the absurdity was not in believing it's coming, but in snuggly reassuring our selves that it's not coming.

The only thing I like in the damning arguments I had to present tonight, is the marvellous irony that what might be foreshadowed by Hölderlin's overly commented verse—'Only a God can save us'—is not the Last Coming of any Great God, but instead a return to the oldest, humblest, most primitive, shapeless and secular goddess of Gaia, thus bringing geostory full circle. If Humans are at war with It, what about

those whom I have proposed to call the Earthbound? Can they be 'artisans of peace'?

## Inside the 'planetary boundaries': Gaia's Estate. Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> February 2013

The first time I closed behind me the door that kept the pressurized air inside the twenty-six meter high white cube on top of which the artists Tomas Saraceno had inserted three superimposed transparent plastic envelops where visitors appeared to be moving with great enjoyment, I made the mistake of believing that they could jump or even fly; I believed that this work of art inside the vast expanse of Hangar Biccoca in Milan was a sort of vertiginous trampoline! But I soon realized that visitors were more like insects about to be stuck on flypaper: they could crawl, turn around, roll on one another, but, no, they could *neither* jump, *nor* fly. Saraceno had managed to figure a way of rendering fully concrete the experience of shifting from history to geostory by making the *décor* itself become a recalcitrant and unexpected participant in every movement of those who were literally embedded in it.



Not only was it the case that every visitor influenced all the others by changing the air pressure or by forcing the plastic envelop to take a different shape, but when you yourselves tried to crawl on all fours it was the sudden and powerful reactions of the thin plastic sheet that took on a suffocating presence. In fact, to use the expression I introduced last Tuesday, visitors were learning to lose the feeling of what it is to be a Human jumping on solid ground or flying freely above it; they were experiencing what it is to be Earthbound to a land that moves just as much as them. By finding a way to fuse the visitors' agitations with the reactions of the plastic sheets, the artist had given a

direct and sensitive way to prefigure living in the Anthropocene where every move is a fusion of social relations, abrupt atmospheric change and chemistry — the whole *theatrum mundi* taking place in a highly artificial and controlled technical space. I wondered why visitors seemed to enjoy themselves at being totally fused with climate and milieu: what could be so entertaining in getting into the skin of an Earthbound?

What made the experience in Milan fascinating was that, the space just to the side of Saraceno's piece in the gigantic hall of the former factory Biccoca was occupied by a set of ruins, the work of the German artist Anselm Kiefer—'Seven celestial towers.' Made of half destroyed concrete cubes moulded out of shipping containers, the towers were anything but 'celestial,' looming in the cold and dark hangar, vaguely resembling the forgotten divinities of Easter Island, like ruins of a past religion inside the black restored ruin of a long past industrial revolution. At the foot of those towers, visitors had no difficulty encountering the classic forms of nostalgia, tragedy, destruction and loss. While the old tragic grip of Kiefer was easily felt by visitors in all its grandeur the public as yet had no warning of the future tragic of Saraceno and took it as so much fun. Clearly, the modernist 20<sup>th</sup> century tragedy is much easier to grasp than non-modern 21<sup>st</sup> century future tragedy. And yet, the very Sloterdijkian title of the latter's work — 'On space time foam' — should have warned visitors of impending doom more than 'Seven celestial towers.' In the ruins of Hangar Biccoca, much like in those of Babel, people were looking helplessly for a land on which to rest.

So are we all. There is no sense in engaging an audience in the political theology of Nature, as I have done for two weeks, if at the end a collective does not emerge that belongs to a clearly delineated territory; a people who are endowed with a specific mode through which all the agencies of their cosmos are being distributed and arrayed; who possess a precise touchstone to tell friends from foes; a diplomatic reach wide enough to engage in parleys with potential allies; and, who are summoned by an entity — a divinity, a God, a set of gods, a god function — through specific rituals that would make such a people conscious of their existence. What I have been doing in this lecture series, is thus a sort of thought experiment in 'demogenesis': an attempt at creating artificially a people out of those who suffer under the universal

bondage of naturalism. A people able to liberate themselves from a cult of Nature, not to reach the promised Land 'of milk and honey,' but, more prosaically, to settle on the Earth they had fled because they had mistaken It for some wholly imaginary pagan divinity.

In this last lecture, I want to bring together the various threads I have assembled and, if possible, to spark life into them. I have to confess that I feel a bit like Mary Shelley's character trying to enliven a creature made from a range of disjointed parts snatched from morgues and cemeteries. But contrary to Viktor Frankenstein, I know that failure is a necessary ingredient of such an attempt and that the inventor should not flee in horror and abandon his creature simply because its birth starts so monstrously.

So far, everything happens as if it was impossible to enjoy the simultaneous presence of a people, a soil or an Earth, and a science. We find people without science nor soil; science without soil nor people; people with soil but no science! How to get the three together: such is the puzzle that we have to solve.

First the soil. As we have seen earlier, everything that was part of the background has now melted into the foreground. There is no environment any more, and thus no longer a need for environmentalism. We are post-natural for good. With the end of the political epistemology of the past that insured the presence of an indisputable outside arbiter — namely, Nature known by Science — we are left without a land and without a body politic. I remember that many years ago, when I began my research, sociologists and historians were scandalized because Actor-Network-Theory claimed to follow associations between humans and 'non-humans' in a continuous way! What at the time seemed a deviation close to bestiality is now taken for granted: who would be foolish enough not to include non-humans into the definition of what is a human? Remember the accusation that such a social theory was a case of deranged 'anthropomorphism'? And now, as we have seen earlier, it is geologists who see everywhere the indisputable shape of humans quickly morphed into the very cycles of non-humans. How timid our anthropomorphism looks at the time of the Anthropocene! Remember when there was a modernizing frontier that was supposed to move forward by separating science from politics, the hard domain of facts from the disputable domain of values? How difficult it is today to recognize an arrow of time that would distinguish

for good what is from what ought to be when it is what is that obstinately requests its due. If you can still dispute whether 'we have never been modern' or not, who now disputes that 'we' will never be able to modernize the Earth for lack of the five planets (according to calculations by 'global hectares') that would be needed to push our endless Frontier to the same level of development as North America?

Things have changed so fast that it is hard to keep track. Remember when Hans Jonas had to appeal to the welfare of future generations to bring their virtual ancestors into virtual motion? Now, it is our own generation or that of our children whose fate is staring us in the face. Remember how people laughed derisively when Michel Serres offered to enter into a *Natural contract* on an equal footing with Nature as if humans could entangle Her in the ropes of law? Now we would be happy to still have such a tame partner in front of us when it has become the 'angry beast that we are poking with a stick'— the Bengali tiger in the lifeboat of the *Story of Pi*. Remember when people believed that at least they existed Indians, deep in the Amazonian forests, or Aborigines in the central Australian desert, or Highlanders in the mountains of New Guinea who knew how to live peacefully 'in touch' or even 'in harmony' with Nature? Now every ethnographer has learned that Nature is a narrow historical and contingent concept that no traditional people has ever shared, except when they have to seduce NGOs and pop stars into defending their cause against a new dam or a new mine. Remember how many intellectuals used to shake in excitement at the term 'de-territorialisation,' as if nomadic existence was the new ideal of too comfortably rooted city dwellers? Now, the same people look desperately for a land, for a *terra firma* where they may re-territorialize again without being accused of being reactionary. Remember how centuries of Christian cults, images, metaphors, and prayers sent believers away to Heaven, eyes turned upward, wishing to upload themselves, away finally from this base mortal Earth below? Now, they realize, so terribly late, that they had misread the Gospel and that instead of: 'What good would it be to possess the world, if you forfeit your soul?' they should have heeded this other sterner injunction: 'What use is it to save your soul, if you forfeit the Earth?'

What has happened is that there has been a confusion between, on the one hand, Nature and, on the other, this local, historical, sublunar *oikos* of Gaia. In earlier times, when we were mentioning the presence of a 'natural phenomenon,' as soon as you had passed the mythical

threshold of society, culture or subjectivity, it was as if everything else, from the bowels of your body to the Big Bang, from the soil beneath your feet all the way to the infinite expanses of galaxies, was made out of the *same stuff*, belonged to the same domain and obeyed the same intangible laws. Suddenly, we find ourselves thrown into a completely different space: Gaia is not Nature. Gaia is the localized, historical and secularized avatar of Nature. Or rather, Nature appears retrospectively as the epistemological, politicized, religious, fabulous extension of Gaia. Hence a surprising inversion that results in the modernizers being totally lost. Transcendence has been misplaced. If Nature could have provided us the hope of unifying and pacifying politics, or at least providing a stable background for the vagaries of human history, it is not the case with Gaia. Gaia makes no promise of peace and provides no stable decor.

So much for the soil: what about the people? As we saw Tuesday, it seems that 'Humans' are pretty bad candidates to play the role of the *anthropos* of the Anthropocene. Just when we need politics to replace the older covenant of political epistemology, we don't even know how to *name* the citizens able to compose such a limited and expanded body: limited because it can no longer count on infinite Nature; expanded because it has to absorb the presence of Gaia. Either those human characters are understood as neo-Darwinian bodies fused with *Homo oeconomicus* and there is no example of such calculating robots ever being able to take their limited abode into account—they are selfish and irrational for good; or, they are taken as 'subjects' whose entire occupation consists in trying to escape from what they take to be the cold and de-animated domination of objectivity. Remember the immense energy spent by Kantians to define humans as those able to extract themselves from the shackles of necessity? Now, it is such a subjective, autistic, anthropocentric human that sounds like a monstrous 'mind in a vat' unable to elevate itself even to the level of an animal. As to ascetic preachers imitating the holy model of Saint Francis, they would be so unconcerned with the practice and instruments of science that they would embrace in the same love the wolf with the lamb, the lily with invasive plants without being able to tell who are friends and who are enemies.

Would a better candidate be the resilient and biophilic species advocated by E.O. Wilson? But the poor, the down trodden, the

exploited, cannot be made part of the same species as their rich exploiters. Such a Wilsonian peace proposal will bring the a-political and a-historical Nature through the back door. Unfortunately, it won't do either if the agent of geostory had to be the revolutionary humanity of the Marxist utopia since, as Chakrabarty dryly remarks, had the proletariat succeeded in destroying Capitalism for good, pollution would have been even greater than it is today thanks to the fact that vast masses have remained in abject poverty! Would it be possible to accept the candidacy of those people who claim to be assembled, for instance, by Pachamama, the Earth goddess? May be, if only we could be sure that what passes for a respect for the Earth is not due to their small numbers and to the relative weakness of their technology. None of those so called 'traditional' people, the wisdom of which we often admire, is being prepared to scale up their ways of life to the size of the giant technical metropolises in which are now corralled more than half of the human race.

Obviously, at such a juncture, what would be needed is a multiplicity of engagements and a proliferation of manners to behave as humans on Earth. This would be the only way to cope with what the multiple loops traced by the instruments of science reveal of the narrative complexity and entanglement of Gaia. Bad luck, this is just the time when under the name of *globalization*, the same definitions of what it is to be human—equipped with exactly the same set of calculative skills, the same narrow limits defining what it is to be an individual, the same standardized ways of life, the same appetite for consumption, the same limited range of communication and information, the same format for feeling responsible, the same laws of ownership, in brief the same version of The Economy—are supposed to reign everywhere on Earth. To explore the *nomos* of the Earth, there is no other instrument than the tiny range of patterns provided by management and governance. The universalization of a provincial definition of what it is to be a human has made the research for multiple solutions appear impossible. Just at the time when first Nature had begun to loosen its grip, the second Nature of The Economy imposes its iron laws more tightly than ever.

Inertia seems to have changed sides. As long as modernism has held sway, 'Humans' were happy to live divided, bifurcated into the 'realm of necessity,' on the one hand, that is, concatenations of causes and consequences, and, on the other, the 'realm of freedom,' that is, the

creations of law, morality, liberty and art; the stringent necessity of Nature against the freedom of proliferating cultures, or, if you wish, mono-naturalism versus multi-culturalism. The geostorical event that I am trying to underline has turned this divide upside down.

'Acceleration,' 'revolutions,' 'quick pace,' 'catastrophes,' 'upheavals,' 'tipping points,' have become parts of the common vocabulary we use to describe what happens to the former Nature (in fact sublunar Gaia); and to describe the former realm of human history, of law, mentality and politics, what is the vocabulary we use? 'Indifference,' 'hysteresis,' 'rigidity,' 'denial,' 'irreversibility,' 'lock ins,' and, yes, even 'ineluctable necessity'! The power of invention and surprise has shifted from humans to non-humans as in Frederick Jameson's famous quip that 'Nowadays it seems easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism!'

Remember how much energy has been spent by social scientists to fight the dangers of biological reductionism and naturalisation? Today, it would be difficult to determine if you gain more freedom of movement from nature or from nurture. What is sure is that glaciers appear to slide quicker, ice to melt faster, species to disappear at a greater speed, than the slow, gigantic, majestic, inertial pace of politics, consciousness and sensibilities. Shelley would be at pains today to chant '*the everlasting universe of things*' since we have stopped believing that waterfalls will '*leap forever*' and that '*a vast river over its rocks*' will '*ceaselessly bursts and raves*.' If there is still enough of a chiasm to feed the mixture of '*gloom*' and '*splendour*' that goes into the feeling of the sublime, it is not because we witness poor transitory humans agitating themselves on the stage of an everlasting nature, but because we are asked to witness obstinately dumb humans sitting impassibly frozen while the whole former décor of their older plots is passing away at a frightening speed! Sublime or tragic I don't know, because one thing is sure: it's no longer a spectacle to be enjoyed from any distance; we are now caught up in it just as much as are the visitors crawling around Saraceno's plastic sheets.

Incredibly enough, the question has become whether humans may retrieve a sense of history that has been ripped away from them by what they had taken until now to be a mere frame devoid of any agency. The Bifurcation of Nature, so criticized by Whitehead, has not come to a close: it has reversed itself in the most unexpected way, the 'primary qualities' being now marked by sensitivity, agency, reaction,

uncertainty; the 'secondary qualities' by indifference, insensibility, numbness. To the point where I could invert Whitehead's quote I used in the first lecture: '*so that the course of [human history], [he had written nature] is conceived as being merely the fortunes of matter in its adventure through space.*'

Soil, people, everything has mutated: what about the science? Here too, the situation is novel. On the one hand, nothing about Gaia's reaction, variety, consistence and composition can be sized up without chains of monitoring instruments, large collections, long term expeditions, well situated observation stations, powerful models, constant coordination of data, standard and formats made possible by a bewildering set of assembled and disjointed disciplines. Wherever the instruments go, our sensibility increases; wherever the instruments are interrupted, our sensibility dims and then disappears. Science is the new aesthetics able to render us sensible to where we are standing. So, in a sense, never in human history was a situation so totally defined by the span, quality and data flows of science.

And yet, what is so troubling is that the standing and status of those sciences bear almost no relation to the modernist ideals of the Science, capital S, of the recent past. Far from marking the triumph of particle physics and of a cosmology able to deduce every agency from first principles, our sciences, lower cases, resemble more the good old disciplines of natural history, all sorts of humble and despised trades, from meteorology to agriculture, from ethnography to nomenclature, from stratigraphy to herpetology, all having a say to follow this or that minuscule and unexpected twist in the narrative complexity of Gaia; all forced to get out from behind the laboratory walls and into the vast and conflicting Earth; all forced to share their results in full public view. The very difference between 'nomothetic' and 'idiographic' disciplines has been turned upside down. Even though such an assemblage of disciplines has put to good use the basic laws of physics and chemistry, far from manifesting the triumph of reductionism, they end up deploying vast cabinets of curiosity in the middle of crowds of interested parties more reminiscent of 16<sup>th</sup> century science than science fiction's dreams of complete control and perfect information. Big data, vast administrative machinery, computer models, multiple local controversies mixed with *wunderkammers*: what a confusion!

And of course, those many interlocking and divided disciplines do not command the same respect and do not appeal to the same authority as in the past. Remember when science studies was accused of unduly 'politicizing' Science? Now you can read Nobel Prize winners in the *Wall Street Journal* accusing climatologists of being a 'lobby' in search of 'grant money' to push forward their 'computer models' and promote their 'climate hoax'; and it is us, science students, formerly accused of the sin of 'relativism,' who have to defend climatologists against this extreme case of 'social constructivism' by foregrounding the institution, the instruments, the beauty and the objectivity of their disciplines. Just as the religious wars had detached piety from the unity of the Church, the many science wars have detached objectivity from consensus. Controversies over matters of concern cannot be solved like disputes over matters of fact by the mere extension of the 'scientific method' and a resumption of a fight against 'irrationality.' The accusation of being 'irrational' cuts no ice any more because scientific disciplines have become coextensive with all the forms of life. How could scientists defend the inside fortress of their science against the invasion of the masses from the outside, when they treat at scale one, in real time, the *very outside* inside of which all those very masses reside? People no longer fight for or against science: they decide for themselves where, with whom and with which agencies they wish to live, which *oikos* they are ready to defend against which other *oikos*. No matter if the old word for household ends up with *nomos* as in eco-nomics or *logos* as in eco-logy, it is no longer able to unify or to pacify.

How disappointing such a post-epistemological situation must be for those who dreamed to be the 'people of Nature'; those who claimed to 'belong to Owwaab' (remember the first lecture); those who prided themselves for not being a people, for having no *cosmos*, no politics and no God, mixing in one single continuous *res extensa* the supralunar and sublunar conditions, making the local ring of entangled feedbacks that we have called Gaia continuous with Nature, without realizing the extent of the gap, the vast *non sequitur* between the two. How difficult it is for them to recognize that they had mistaken a very local style of writing about agencies in a de-animated tone, for the stuff out of which the whole universe had been made. How hard it is to abandon even the idea that they should be disinterested in order to remain objective. How odd they feel, as Clive Hamilton has pointed out, now that: 'the greatest visceral responses to the facts of climate science are being experienced by

those who are most committed to rationality, those climate scientists who attach the highest emotional value to emotionless activity.' Never has science become so vital for daily life and never has the scientific ethos so little resembled the political epistemology of the past. Such is one of the reasons for the disarray in which we all find ourselves: we have to turn to the scientists for revelation and for decision just at the time when those same scientists are most unable to play the role of kings. On the throne is a tragic figure more frightened and more divided than those they have to guide.

To reattach a people, a soil and a science, we have to raise again the question of *shapes* and limits, and ask Earthlings by the borders of which territory they are ready to be bound; by which lines they accept to be drawn; by which ties they wish to be entangled? Fortunately, the same scientists who devised the notion of the Anthropocene, have also proposed that of 'planetary boundaries,' inside which it would be possible, according to them, to draw 'a safe operating space for humanity' — safe, that is, before it is too late.

Humans of the modernist breed might have ignored the questions by defining themselves as those who were always escaping from the bonds of the past, always attempting to pass beyond the impassable columns of Hercules. 'Plus ultra' has always been their proud motto. By contrast Earthbound have to explore the question of their limits. Not because they are forbidden by some outside power to do so, but because their maxim is 'Plus intra.' They cannot rely on any older versions of what used to be a soil, a land, a plot, or, as we say in French, a *terroir*. Not because they fear being reactionary and moving backward (moving backward is what they stopped doing when they stopped believing they were modern!), but because there is no way to squeeze their ways of life, their technics, their values, their vast number, their cities, inside the narrow confines of what it meant to belong to a land. Paradoxically, in order to determine their limits, Earthbound should break away from the limits of what they used to think of as space: the narrow countryside they were so eager to leave, as well as the utopia of indefinite space they were so eager to reach. Geostory requires a change in the very definition of *having, holding or occupying a space, of what it is to be appropriated by a land*. Earthbound cannot diminish their 'footprint' but might change its shape by letting Gaia's foot be imprinted in the dust of their former soil

— and as Christians do on Ash Day they should sprinkle some of it on their front as well: ‘Remember that you are dust and to dust you will return.’

Needless to say, those limits cannot be dictated from the outside simply because they have been ‘objectively determined by the laws of nature’ and transported as a piece of pure information to everybody through generalized education. Bounded by such limits, those peoples would be, once again, enslaved to Nature; maybe Human, but in fact deeply inhuman; maybe without God, but in fact prisoners of the cult of Nature, more pagan than the pagans whose idols they are so proud of having smashed. No, those limits have to be felt, they have to be generated, they have to be discovered, they have to be decided *from the inside* of the peoples themselves. Without decision, there is no body politics, no liberty nor autonomy.

In these lectures, we have learned to recognize several of those lines that are able to give a shape to the *oikos*, to the house, to the abode, inside which Earthbound may decide to live. Let’s trace once again the dividing lines of our geostory and of our geopolitics and see whether or not, once superimposed, they succeed in attaching at least some peoples inside their ‘planetary boundaries.’

The first of these lines is the territory tracing that we have recognized under the old name of *nomos*, and that defines the ‘geopolitics of the Earth.’ Geo-graphy, that is the writing, inscription, mapping, surveying, and inventory of the land, is of course the oldest and best known case of this geo-tracing activity. So is geo-logy. No one can belong to a soil without this activity of space tracking, plot surveying and line tracing: all those Greek words: *nomos*, *graphos*, *logos* of the same *Gè*, *géos* or *Gaia*.

But Earthbound are not land-surveyors, cartographers or geologists looking *from above* at the flat surface of their well-delineated maps. Their discipline is not geometry and optics but rather biology and natural history. The initiative of naming and surveying no longer comes *from them* to the land they have appropriated by a sovereign gesture of domination. As we have recognized in the third lecture, the lines that they have learned to trace, thanks to their instruments, have the shape of entangled and retroactive loops. Those loops don’t start with them toward the map, but *from the landscape back to them* — and more often than not they come back with a vengeance! Each of those loops

registers the unexpected reactions of some outside agency to human action.

Because of this responsiveness, what is a territory has been entirely subverted: it is no longer the old pastoral landscape of the well delineated fields out of which crops are slowly and faithfully coming to fruition — ‘Et in Arcadia ego.’ A territory is everything that you need to survive and that may suddenly fail you. Such a plot is not well delineated but made of highly surprising networks of unexpected connections suddenly jumping up at you — be they fish, fowl, air, soil, carbon, protein or rare earths. There is nothing pastoral in looking at it. Far from being the ‘land-appropriation,’ the *Landnahme* celebrated by Schmitt, it is rather the violent *re-appropriation* of all Humans titles by the land itself. As if ‘territory’ and ‘terror’ shared a similar root.

Such is the Möbius strip in which we are now entangled. Such is the experiment in which, unwittingly, the *anthropos* of the Anthropocene has been placed: the Earthbound learn their limits by feeling the violent reactions of what they do to modify their ways of life more and more desperately. But this time, experiments are not safely confined inside the laboratory where scientists are used to learning slowly from their mistakes. The Earth is the laboratory inside which experimenters are imprisoned with no time to scale things up, step by step. Whereas, as we have seen earlier, the *Atlas* of the scientific revolution could hold the globe in his hand, scientists of the Gaian counter-revolution, I am sorry to say, look more like ticks on the mane of a roaring beast.

This is why geostory does not have the same tonality as either history or geography: each limit, each loop has to be collectively narrated, collectively lamented, collectively replayed and ritualized, by the public who is not simply listening to the tentative result of a science later to be scaled up and applied, but thrown in real time inside the unintended consequences of a full scale experiment which started with applications and was only later caught up by hastily drawn loops of reflexion. Retroaction there is indeed, but *after the fact* and maybe too late. The thread of tragedy does not have to be spun only by the Olympian gods of old. Humans might be perfectly able to spin it with their own hands: they just have to find themselves entangled in events that have preceded them by a few centuries and on which they have no control any longer.

This is why we need to trace and ceaselessly retrace again the lines made by all those loops, as if the old distinctions between science, public, art and civic space were quickly vanishing. All those obsolete distinctions are much less important than this strong injunction: keep the loop traceable and publically visible or else we will be blind and helpless with no soil on which to settle, strangers on our own land. That's what the Anthropocene is about: a really Oedipal tale. And, contrary to Oedipus, we should resist the temptation to blind ourselves at the revelation: we should face it head on and look at what is coming.

The second line that can be tentatively traced is the direct consequence of the first: whatever is reacting to your actions, loop after loop, begins to take on a consistence, a solidity, a coherence, that, for sure, does not have the technical predictability of a cybernetic system, but which nonetheless weighs on you as a force to be taken into account. This is what happens when you keep adding the 'response' of the ice sheet to the 'response' of acidity of the oceans to the 'response' of thermohaline circulation, to the 'response' of biodiversity, and so on and so forth. Such an accumulation of responses requires a responsible agency to which you, yourself, have to become in turn responsible. Here again, the performances end up generating a competence: 'behind' those cumulative responses, it is hard not to imagine that *there exist a power that does listen and answer*. To grant it a personhood, is not to imply that it may speak and think or that it exists as one single substance, no more than you would do with a State, but that in the end it has to be recognized as a politically assembled sort of entity.

What counts is that such a power has the ability to steer our action, and thus to provide it with limits, loops and constraints, which is, as you know, the etymology of the word 'cybernetic.' In that sense, Gaia is indeed a cybernetic sort of being even though, as I have shown in commenting on Lovelock, it is not a technical system, a space station. It is cybernetic in an old and frightening sense of the word: such a power exerts a sort of sovereignty. Since it plays the role of a collective person, that is, to act as a collected body, it should be given a collective name. We do it for 'France' or 'Scotland,' and there is no reason to abstain from doing it for 'Gaia' since it is now clearly understood that It is addressed *not as Nature but as a new political entity*. To live in the epoch of the Anthropocene, is to admit a strange and uneasy shift in power to the

profit of Gaia taken as the secular aggregates of all those agencies recognized as acting back through loops of retroaction.

Of course, Gaia does not possess — does not possess yet — the legal quality of the *res publica*, of the State, of the great artificial Leviathan of Hobbes' invention. And yet it's clear that the Earthbound are tied to Gaia in a very different way than Nature used to tie Humans to Her. On one hand, Gaia is much less personified than Nature, but, on the other, it does not claim to be outside or undisputable and does not pretend to be indifferent to politics. Whereas Nature could lord over Humans as a religious power to which a paradoxical Cult had to be rendered, Gaia commands, orders, binds as a secular not as a religious power. The *translatio imperii* does not go from God or from Nature to Gaia, it comes from the more humble tradition of the body politic to the Earth by which this assembled body accepts solemnly to be definitely bounded. Even though so far there is no cult, not even a civic one for such a self-imposed tracing of 'planetary boundaries,' it is fascinating to imagine through what sort of public ceremonies such self-imposed limits would be sworn and enforced. The rituals to be imagined might not fill the churches, but they will shake the scientific disciplines quite a lot and extract from ethnography a rich lore of practices.

When we begin to gather together as Earthbound, we realize that we are summoned by a power that is a fully political one since it possesses what is called in Anglo American law 'radical title' to the whole land, that is, a legal claim that has precedence over all the other property rights. Faced with such a title, the Earthbound understand that, contrary to what Humans keep dreaming, they will never play the role of Atlas, nor that of a Gardener of the Earth, that they will never be able to fulfil the function of the Master Engineer of Spaceship Earth, not even that of the faithful and modest Steward of the Blue Planet. It is as simple as that: they are not alone in command. Someone else has preceded them, even though they learned of its presence and precedence long afterward. It's called power sharing.

The third line able to trace the shape of the land is the oldest one, that of politics, what distinguishes friends from foes through a shibboleth and which has to decide on enmity in the absence of any outside arbiter. What is part and what is not part of the body politic is the outcome of a decision, and this decision has to be renewed again and again, thus tracing around the people a constantly changing

circular movement — what I have called for that reason the political Circle — that might grow or shrink depending on the fate of battles and the generosity of the winners.

This is where geo-politics takes a new meaning: masses of agencies are given a voice and a say in what is at stake, each trying to transform the loop that I have just stressed into the political Circle that grants them autonomy: 'they obey their own rules.' But here, on sublunar Gaia, this proud and venerable expression is applied to the former 'realm of necessity' as well as to the former 'realm of liberty,' to non-humans as well as to Humans. If it was so difficult to imagine in which Parliament 'the laws of Nature' could be voted, it is not so difficult to detect the forum where the laws of Gaia are voted, registered, recognized, invoked, discovered, and enforced. While those of Nature were imposed from the outside to actors devoid of any of agency, the laws of Gaia should be 'self imposed' by the agents themselves — the word 'self' designating a shifting sort of being covering the whole trajectory of the loops to which are tied agents formerly called 'Subjects' and agents formerly called 'Objects.' Such are the legislative and executive powers to be invented at the time of the Anthropocene. Imagine the political, legal and scientific set of inventions necessary to bind humans to their carbon footprints! How many procedures will have to be designed so as to feel legally tied by the possible disappearance of the Gulf Stream?

Is this an extension of politics? Indeed it is. How strange to have thought that only Humans are 'political animals'? What about animals? What about all sorts of animated agencies? None of them should be de-animated to the point of having no voice at all; nor should they be over-animated to the point of speaking in the comic repertoire of anthropomorphic citizens. But all agencies that define a territory — what is necessary for the subsistence and durable existence of a given agent — are political agencies once they are accepted as part and parcel of the body politic in formation. This is where we begin to move for good from the state of nature to the Estate of Gaia. How far will it expand? How many agencies will it be able to absorb? How strong will be the voices of non-humans? Those questions cannot be solved in advance. They have to be composed. There is no arbiter. They have to be fought in as many battles as they are front lines around issues and matters of concern.

Remember also that the extent, duration and intensity of those wars to decide those questions might be limited only if we accept that the composition of the common world has not yet been completed. If conflicts led in the name of ecology and economics might turn out to be so devastating, it will be because, in the name of rationality and calculation, they will claim to bypass politics entirely. Precisely because of the opponents no longer being simply an enemy, *hostis*, but also a monster, a criminal and, worst of all, an irrational sort of being, fights against them know neither end nor limits. Schmitt's argument is that only religious wars, so called 'just wars,' that is, conflicts led in the name of universal morality and reason, risk becoming total wars of extermination.

If it is always wise to ponder the question: 'How would have I behaved had I found myself among the criminals of the past century,' it is even more crucial not to find ourselves among the criminals when, in this century, we will face the 'battles for the ordering, appropriation and distribution of spaces and climates.' Schmitt credits the *jus publicum europeanum* for having limited for two centuries the wars that had burst out of all boundaries in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Will it be possible to invent a successor to this *jus publicum*, in order to limit the coming wars for the world? Will it be possible to place this new law under the same oldest invocation, that of 'Earth, mother of the law', what Roman legists called 'sanctissima tellus'? Such a move would result in a completely new mode of action for the former 'laws of nature,' something that could be called a '*jus publicum telluris*' still to be invented in order to limit the extent of what Schmitt, in his queer, toxic and profound language had called *Raumordnungskrieg*, 'the wars for the ordering of space,' an expression, once purged from its association with 20<sup>th</sup> century conflicts, that offers a radical definition of ecology, but an ecology able at last to carry on with politics with sufficient strength to limit the coming wars.

The fourth type of lines and limits is the one provided by accepting to live at the end of time, or rather, as we have seen in the last lecture, at the *time of the end*. Although this form of historicity can be displayed with all the flashy colours and special effects of the Apocalypse; invoked by long lines of prophets; told in the mysterious and frightening prose dictated to St John in Patmos; it bears no more than a superficial relation with the 'apocalyptic stories' coming from political ecology (and also from Hollywood movies). Before being puffed up

into grandiose big budget cosmic scenes, the radical rupture of eschatology should first be recognized in a lighter, humble and more parsimonious tone. It is that tone that we recognized in the second lecture, when I contrasted it with the question of belief, especially of belief in God, a belief that attempted to mimic an access to a far away without having the vehicles to do so (what I called Religion One so as to stress its difference with Religion Two).

Instead of providing information about distant states of affairs, this tone transforms, converts and, yes, resuscitates those who are thus addressed by its message, its Good Message. Those who hear it become close with one another — ‘thy neighbour,’ ‘proximum tuum’ — without gaining the slightest piece of news on what happens to anything far away. The end of time is not the final Globe that encircles all the other globes, the final answer to the meaning of it all; rather it is a new difference, a new line, traced inside all the other lines, crossing them everywhere, and giving another meaning to every event, that is, an end, a goal, a final and radical presence, an achievement. Not another world but this same world grasped in a radically new way. Many are those appeals to conversion: ‘the Kingdom of God is near,’ ‘Come inhabit the House of the Father,’ ‘the Word, or the Logos has become Flesh,’ and so on in a bewildering flourish of expressions that gain their meaning only if they are able to convert, on the spot, in real time, one after the other, those who hear them — or that lose any meaning if they fail to convert. A way of talking which is just as exacting, just as attuned to the difference between truth and falsity than that of the sciences, but that directs attention in the opposite direction, to the close at hand, not to the distant, to the end not to the continuation. This was the reason why I claimed to detect a family resemblance between the slow process of science (understood as the exploration of Nature Two) and the slow predication of religion (taken as the exploration of Religion Two).

Tragically, this twist in the flow of time, this event inside the event, this eskaton lodged inside the movement of history, has been transmogrified into an escape from time, a jump to eternity, to what knows no time. Incarnation has been inverted into a flight from any flesh to the disincarnated realm of a spiritual domain of far away. As if the calamity of the natural was not enough, generations of priests, pastors, preachers and theologians have belaboured the Holy Scriptures to prop up on top of Nature a domain of the supernatural. As if the non-existence of Nature could serve as a solid foundation for the

non-existence of the Supernatural. The whole of religion has been progressively displaced to an attempt to save the disembodied souls of humans from their sinful attachment to the Earth. Look above, eyes enraptured by the vision of the final event!

Even more tragically, a misunderstanding ensued about what was called *paganism*. Pagans, even though they had totally ignored the very notion of Nature, were taken as those who were 'too close to Nature' to hear the call of a transcendent God. Even though the transcendence of this God of Incarnation had to be inserted in the very immanence of passing time '*like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.*' At the epoch of the Anthropocene, some Christians keep hesitating to embrace ecological causes for fear of falling into paganism and pantheism. (They still worry about pantheism and panpsychism as if the place of acting in matter had not already been taken by human action!)

And yet, such an accusation is the result of a category mistake that burdens the accused party with a belief in some overpowering Nature that is, in reality, the deity of the accuser. What makes the accusation so grave and the imaginary conflicts so violent is that, it is true, there can't be two Natures. Nature is a jealous God! Either She is in the singular or there is none at all. But the point is that Gaia precisely is not Nature and thus the accusation always strikes wrongly (much like the fight against fetishes, as I have shown elsewhere). It is in large part the belief that a combat against paganism has to be mercilessly pursued that has led Christianity astray forcing the faithful to shun the path of the sciences just when those were showing the way on this Earth more clearly than the column of smoke leading the Hebrews through the desert.

To be sure, the belief in Creation as an alternative to Nature is a powerful way to make certain that the converting power of Incarnation is not limited to the inner fold of the psyches, and that it may extend finally to the whole cosmos. But only on the condition that Creation is not another name for Nature, distinguished from it only by the presence of over-animated agencies and packaged by Design. The Holy Spirit may '*renew the face of the Earth*' but He is powerless when confronted with faceless Nature. It is because Gaia is such a secular figure, that it may allow the dynamic of Incarnation to resume its movement in a space freed from the limits of Nature. If we really '*know that the whole creation groans and travails in the pain of childbirth until now,*' it means that it

is not yet achieved and thus that it has to be composed, step by step, soul by soul, agency by agency.

How strange is it that theologians fighting against paganism don't realize that they are the ones that have built up, over centuries, a real Cult of Nature, that is, a search for an outside, immutable, universal, undisputable entity in contrast with the mutable, local, entangled, and disputable narrative which the rest of us, Earthbound, inhabit. By accusing 'pagans' of being close to Nature they have deprived themselves of millenaries of precautions, rituals, institutions, inventions that had much less to do with Nature than their own definition of transcendence. They have tried the impossible political theology of associating a people — the Church — with a place of no place, a Globe of God that has all the characteristics of Nature, what I have called *Deus sive Natura sive Sphaera*. To save the treasure of the Faith they have given it over to eternity. By wishing to migrate to this supernatural world, they did not notice that what was 'left behind' was not the sinful but everything for which, according to their own narrative, their own God had let his Son die, that is the Earth of His own Creation. They might have forgotten that another rendition of the word 'ecology' — to use Jurgen Moltmann's beautifully invented etymology — could be *oikos logos*, that is, the 'House of the Logos,' this 'house of the Father' of which the Gospel of St John writes that it has '*many mansions*.' I hope you have understood that to occupy the Earth, no, to be occupied and preoccupied by the Earth, we need to inhabit all of those mansions at once.

You see that there exist at least four ways, each of them giving sense to their maxim '*Plus intra*,' to make those 'planetary boundaries,' not what is imposed from the outside by Nature, but something inside which the Earthbound themselves decide to remain circumscribed. First, the many loops followed by the sciences that reveal the retroaction of their deeds; second, the sovereign power that takes precedence over them because it has 'radical title'; third, the political Circle that defines the distinction between friends and foes; finally, the certainty that they have to live their life as if it was going to end, suspended by the *katechon* — '*for the fashion of this world passeth away*'.

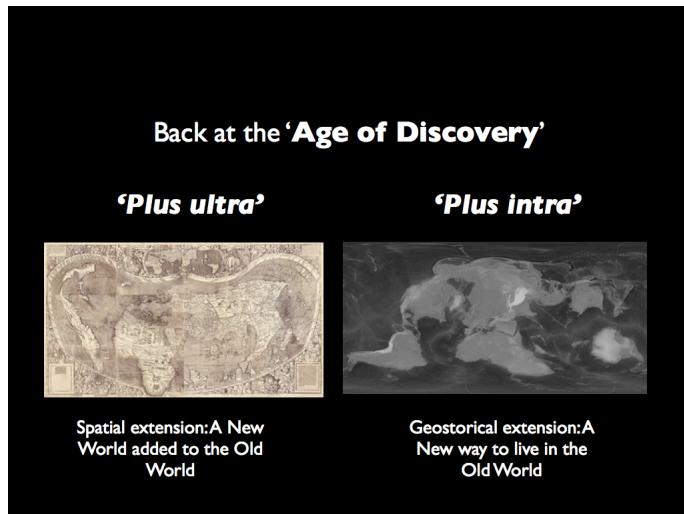
As for the rites and rituals which are necessary to render this people conscious of its vocations, it is to the artists that we would have to turn. My bet is that it is inside the scientific disciplines, especially

because of the peculiar ways in which the models built by climatologists and Earth-system scientists assemble the various agencies of the planet, that we might find the best ways to visualize the new political assemblies summoned by Gaia. In their post-epistemological ways, scientific disciplines are the most powerful collecting agents and offer the most far-reaching aesthetics. But this question of future rituals is another story that would be going way beyond the political theology of nature that I have attempted to sketch here. The task would require becoming a playwright, a curator or a composer.

I have now completed the movement that I wanted to share with you, this strange trajectory that has forced us to take up again this odd task of doing the 'political theology' of a non-existing people, a people that I have invented by imagining that its members could be freed from many other attachments, lands and missions. Out of Egypt all over again! I am well aware that political theology is not a quiet and cheery field. It is too dark, too dangerous; also it is torn between sermon and manifesto and more often than not written by sombre and reactionary thinkers. It's just that by proposing the golden spike of the Anthropocene, by throwing the Earth and Its inhabitants into the same historicity, naturalists have pushed the whole of our thoughts into a tailspin. Our entire operating system has to be rewritten. What I have done is to bring together science, politics and religion, after having extracted each of them from its confusion with Nature. Strangely enough, Nature is much too restricted a globe for the geostory that those three fields wish to tell.

Actually, the first thing I did on arriving in Edinburgh was to pay a visit to the Outlook Tower with which I started these meditations Monday before last. I was deeply disappointed! That Patrick Geddes could pretend to accommodate the whole known cosmos inside those few shabby rooms, seems as bizarre as those medieval T-Maps with Jerusalem at the centre, that preceded the shapes of the many new lands brought back by navigators. How could you squeeze the universe in this small space? In my disappointment, I saw a vivid confirmation of the argument that, because She has the shape of a Globe, Nature, in spite of Her immensity, is too small to hold the discovery of the Earth, too completed already, too circular, too narrow-minded to absorb the

stupefying historicity of the planet. This is why geography is to be rewritten.



In that sense we find ourselves exactly in an Age similar to that of Columbus, when his voyage encountered a whole new continent that the circular view of the Mediterranean people could not have anticipated. To absorb a new subversion in the shape of the Earth, we are exactly as ill prepared as Medieval Europe was. Except, this time, it is not the extension and expansion of a new piece of land that is revealed, but the agency and intensity of the whole Earth. It is not a revelation about the spatial but about the historical extension of the planet. Humans are not stupefied to learn that there is an entire New World at their disposal, but that they have to entirely *relearn* the way in which they inhabit the Old World. This is why in so many ways we feel transported back into the climate of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Another Age of Discovery.

I am sure that historians will say that humanity has been there many times and that the tendency to exaggerate the novelty of the period is as old as the Apocalypse itself. But what I did in those lectures was to take seriously the possibility that the Anthropocene was indeed a radically new situation. Even the threat of the nuclear holocaust that had occupied my generation for so long, retained some of the features of the wars of old, humans against humans, and with it a mad sort of rationality. Today, even that form of mad rationality is gone. What was potential has become actual; what was figurative has become literal. On the other hand, instead of depending on the risky calculations of a few heads of states, the situation is now in the hands of billions of humans whose vocation is to become Earthbound. The issue that the politics of

nation states could not envisage, the transformative power of billions of people might discover.

It is in Gaia, after all, that we might discover the 'five planets' which are necessary for our progress and development: that is, inside the planetary boundaries themselves, folded into their multiple worlds, and because we will learn to maintain our activity in that 'safe operating space.' This is where the transcendence of religion lies, deep in the recess of human souls; that is where the sciences and technology reside, deep within the many entangled narratives of all the events of all the agencies in all the twists and folds of Its natural history; this is where the resources of politics lie, deep within the indignation and the revolt of those who scream at seeing their soil disappear from under their feet. What the maxim *Plus intra* designates is a path for progress and for invention, a path that links the natural history of the planet with the holy story of the Incarnation, and with the revolt of those who are going to learn never to accept remaining quiet simply because they have to obey the laws of nature. It is still the old and proud injunction 'Forward!' 'Forward!' not toward a new land but toward a land whose face is to be renewed. If Columbus took very earnestly his surname of Christopher—carrying Jesus across the Atlantic, we can no longer believe that we have the shoulders strong enough to carry such a weight. Rather we should agree to weigh much less heavily on the back of what is taking us through the ford of time, namely Gaia.



For me, not to have been instantly crushed by the burden of the topic and the prestige of the long line of my predecessors in this lecture series is all that I could have wished for!