

WE HAVE NEVER BEEN LATOURIANS!
religious pluralism & new materialism in Bruno Latour's 'terrorism'¹

Fernando Suárez Müller²
University of Humanistic Studies
f.suarezmuller@uvh.nl

Abstract

In his works on ecological philosophy, Bruno Latour develops an interesting ontology. He proposes a new worldview, in which religion is reinterpreted in view of a Gaian philosophy. He extends 'pluralism' beyond the anthropocentrism that dominates modern humanism. In his book *Facing Gaia* Latour includes nonhuman beings in a larger community and works towards a larger concept of eco-humanism. In this paper, I try to reconstruct his position by showing that the philosophical foundation for his interpretation of ontology is to be classified as a form of new materialism. This new interpretation of materialism has postmodernist origins (inspired by Gilles Deleuze), but it is not identical to it, because Latour explicitly distances himself from 'postmodernism'. He wants to contribute to a 'positive' ontology. My point is that Latour's materialist grounding of ontology, which he tries to elaborate in order to make a religious pluralism possible, obstructs any foundation of transcendence and, finally, congests a pluralistic ecumene, because it renounces to the idea of the 'whole' and a unitary principle of being. His ideas on eco-humanism and pluralistic ecumene could gain momentum if we opted for a more holistic and idealistic way of thinking. In my last section I show how this is possible: objective idealism and pantheism are conceived as models that belong together and can offer a viable alternative for modern versions of materialism.

Keywords: Latour; Lovelock; Gaia philosophy; objective idealism, pantheism, new materialism; postmodernism; religion; eco-humanism.

NUNCA FOMOS LATOURIANOS!
pluralismo religioso e novo materialismo no 'terrorismo' de Bruno Latour

Resumo

Em seus trabalhos sobre filosofia ecológica, Bruno Latour desenvolve uma interessante ontologia. Ele propõe uma nova visão de mundo, na qual a religião é reinterpretada à luz de uma filosofia gaiana. Ele estende o "pluralismo" para além do antropocentrismo que domina o humanismo moderno. Em seu livro *Facing Gaia*, Latour inclui seres não humanos em uma comunidade maior e trabalha em direção a um conceito mais amplo de eco-humanismo. Neste artigo, tento reconstruir a sua posição mostrando que o fundamento filosófico para a sua interpretação da ontologia deve ser classificado como uma forma de novo materialismo. Esta nova interpretação do materialismo tem origens pós-modernistas (inspirada em Gilles Deleuze), mas não é idêntica a ela, porque Latour distancia-se explicitamente do "pós-modernismo". Ele quer contribuir para uma ontologia "positiva". O que quero dizer é que a fundamentação materialista da ontologia de Latour, que ele tenta elaborar para tornar possível um pluralismo religioso, obstrui qualquer fundamento de transcendência e, finalmente, congestionam um ecúmeno pluralista, porque renuncia à ideia do "todo" e um princípio unitário de ser. As suas ideias sobre o eco-humanismo e o ecúmeno pluralista poderiam ganhar impulso se optássemos por uma forma de pensar mais holística e idealista. Na minha última seção mostro como isto é possível: o idealismo objetivo e o panenteísmo são concebidos como modelos que pertencem um ao outro e podem oferecer uma alternativa viável para versões modernas do materialismo.

Palavras-chave: Latour; Lovelock; Filosofia de Gaia; idealismo objetivo, panenteísmo, novo materialismo; pós-modernismo; religião; eco-humanismo.

¹ This is the unabridged version of a text that was first published in *Religions*: 2023, 14, 960. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14080960>. I want to thank the editors of that Journal for authorizing the publication of this larger version, which due to its length could not appear in its original form. This text offers the objective idealistic alternative to Latour's new materialism, which is missing in the version that appeared in *Religions*.

² Department of Philosophy and Humanism, *University of Humanistic Studies*, Utrecht (The Netherlands).



Esta obra está licenciada sob uma licença

Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).

1 INTRODUÇÃO

In Western philosophy, maybe we have never stopped being idealists. How else could we explain the resurgence of so many topics of objective idealism in current discussions of realism, idealism and New Materialism? (Gabriel, 2011; McDowell, 2009; Barad, 2007). How could we explain the many idealist topics in current positions of systems theory and holism? (Dunham *et al.*, 2011: 223-297). And at the same time, it is argued, the major ecological crisis of humanity can be related to the breakdown of *Naturphilosophie*, as we stopped being idealists (Audier, 2017, 2019; Beiser, 2002; Höhle, 1991). German Idealism (Fichte, Schelling, Hegel) and Romantic Idealism (Schlegel, Novalis, Schopenhauer) indeed influenced the course of philosophical history, but were relegated to the background of Western philosophy by positivist, materialist and secular ways of thinking (Comte, Feuerbach, Marx). British Idealism and American Transcendentalism, strongly influenced by German Idealism, rose later, and were important currents covering large parts of Anglo-Saxon thought in the 19th and first decades of the 20th century, influencing American Pragmatism when Charles Sanders Peirce and Josiah Royce tried to reinforce objective idealist positions. This Anglo-Saxon idealism was progressively marginalised since the beginning of the last century by utilitarian, neopositivist and linguistic-analytical thinking (Sidgwick, Russell, Wittgenstein). The picture of nature most objective idealists propounded, seeing physical reality as a panentheistic construction of a mind-at-large, was however quite different from that of their more positivist and realist successors, who mostly reduced nature to physical reality and ultimately to energy as a mere quantitative translation of matter (Kastrup, 2014; Wandschneider, 2009; Höhle, 1999).

In the domain of social philosophy, romantic idealists also strongly differed from their positivist and so-called ‘realist’ successors in their views on modern industrialism, which they critically saw as reducing nature to a resource for humanity. They considered nature to be a forerunner of freedom, as in itself the manifestation of ‘divinity’. Positivist naturalists on the other hand, promoted an industrial and extractive type of society, very much concerned – and partly rightly so – with the social problems of modernity (Audier, 2019; Tylor, 2017; Höhle, 1997). This reduction of nature to mere physical matter in positivist and utilitarian humanism was not motivated by any malicious intent. On the contrary, in the domain of philosophy it was based on the need to deal with ‘reality’ without fancy speculations. In the economic and political domain, it was actually based on a noble humanist concern for the wellbeing of humanity. But this concern also had an ecological shadow side that only started to gain considerable attention at the end of the 20th century. The conception of nature as an abstract and inanimate energy that

would deliver the raw material for the modern fabric of industrialism, constituted the basis of technological productivism.

This conception of nature appeared alongside modern humanist positions that were attempts to proclaim a secular state, and which were often overtly atheistic. To understand the cultural climate at that time, just think of Henri de Saint-Simon, Auguste Comte, Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill, Ludwig Feuerbach and Karl Marx. They all saw themselves as modern humanists. They legitimately strived to improve the conditions of humanity, and were particularly eager to emphasise the *finiteness* of human existence. They had to do this because they developed philosophies which were primarily concerned with securing the material life conditions of humanity. Agnosticism, atheist activism, and also less activist ‘methodical’ atheism – in general a post-metaphysical attitude towards nature – also tended to reduce religion to a sociological institution (Habermas, 2019), and prioritised human necessities and basic rights, which still remain the cornerstone of modern economy, politics and philosophy. Seen from this perspective the current ecological crisis is based on an initial modern philosophical conflict between a more romantic and idealist approach that interpreted nature in an organic and spiritual way, and a more positivist or naturalist approach that conceived nature as being inanimate and material.

To position this ‘ecological conflict’ in an approximative timeframe, we may say that after the death of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1831) and Johann Wolfgang Goethe (1832), idealist positions have been progressively relegated and banished to the backstage of philosophical thought. Positivist, atheist and materialist positions, and in general a post-metaphysical attitude, progressively gained influence in western thought – and strongly so in social philosophy (Habermas, 2019). This new worldview established a frame of materialist concepts, still constituting the cornerstone of what we call the ‘modern world’. In Foucauldian terms we might say that these positions delineated both the ‘episteme’ and the ‘power-dispositive’ of modernity. The development of this positivist constellation of concepts run parallel to that of modern industrialism, positive science and technology. Science and nature were fully settled in a humanist, ‘non-metaphysical’ and materialist worldview, based on the primary idea of an intimate relationship and convertibility between matter and energy. The energy needed for industry was ultimately sedimented into matter, and matter was reversibly convertible into energy. Energy-as-matter or matter-as-energy, as an abstract thermodynamic representation, was in itself ‘inert’ or ‘inanimate’, but in the instrumental way of humanistic thinking of the time, nevertheless a very valuable and useful resource indeed.

There is no other ultimate ontological realm than this inanimate matter or diffuse energy. Comte for example, acknowledged that strictly speaking biology could not be reduced to physics – but his critique of what he called ‘materialism’ was merely epistemological, not ontological, since he strongly committed himself to naturalism. Even his view on sociology was naturalistic; there was therefore no room in his system of science for a distinction between natural and moral philosophy (Comte, 1975 [1830]: vol.1, 713-715). Idealists, like Friedrich Schelling and Hegel, on the other hand, saw matter as the manifestation of a deeper ontological realm, the ‘universal mind’, which made not only the appearance of life and finite consciousness in the cosmos understandable, but also the concept of freedom, as the activity of an ‘agency’ that in humanity finally comes to learn to take decisions on its own. In this romantic and idealist thought there was a clear understanding of the irreducibility of moral and natural philosophy, although the former could be historically rooted in the latter, because the natural world was nothing other than the expression of a spiritual domain.

Current new materialist positions share aspects of this idealist critique of materialism, such as the idea that matter is by itself ‘animated’ and manifesting its own domain of values (Bennett, 2010; Barad, 2007; Braidotti, 2002). There is still an attempt in new materialism to integrate moral philosophy with nature. We might even say that new materialism revisits vitalism, although its proponents resist this. Bruno Latour defends the philosophical idea that matter is in itself agency, and this current type of ‘vitalism’ can be traced back to Arthur Schopenhauer, who owed much to romantic idealism. The main branches of modern philosophy opposing classical naturalism (Nietzsche, Bergson, Whitehead, Heidegger, Deleuze) reproduce in different ways this alternative view on matter. To a certain extent we may therefore agree with Rüdiger Safranski who showed that the romantic perception of the world remains alive in many modern existentialist and vitalist thinkers. He said that human freedom and dignity cannot be reduced to a one-dimensional approach to the human in terms of mere physical materiality (Safranski, 2007: 12, 326-348).

These thinkers opposing physicalism certainly damaged the positivist and utilitarian self-perception of modernity, but they never properly managed to identify their friends and foes, and remained strongly hostile to idealism, developing forms of vitalism, or new liquid materialisms, that opened the way to an irrational principle of ‘power’ or ‘life’ – such as Bergson’s ‘*élan vital*’ – which introduced a kind of panpsychism, or ‘unconsciousness’ that always accompanies matter, and cannot exist without it. This force, they say, is not a prior being (in time) but an immanent property of the universe itself. Even Martin Heidegger’s *Sein* (Being) as distinguished from *Seienden* (existing things) can be read in this sense, as *Sein* makes it

possible for things to exist. Strictly – so-called – postmodernist positions in philosophy refrained from such ‘large readings’ or ‘big stories’ of the world (Lyotard, Vattimo), preferring scattered ‘genealogies’ (Foucault, Agamben) and strategic ‘deconstructions’ (Derrida, Nancy) to any ‘vitalist’ or ‘new materialist’ grand narrative.

In a sense Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1980) were an exception to this self-restrictiveness, thereby already delineating, at an early stage, the outer margins of postmodernism, since their reflections were much more overtly ‘metaphysical’, but not to the point of remaking religion or the divine in a renewed big story. They managed to stay inside the boundaries of a renouncement of grand narratives, by at the same time reinventing a large story of the cosmos as chaosmos (Deleuze) or chaosmosis (Guattari). Their whole position boils down to the idea of an entangled rhizome, a loose energetical or living connection of non-hierarchical knots or agents, a network of interrelations, constituting what is now called a ‘relational ontology’. Guattari and Latour stretched this idea further into what can be characterised as ‘French ecological philosophy’, of which they are the major proponents. This position – first proposed by Deleuze and Guattari, and later also by Latour – abandoned anthropocentrism, but was never overtly anti-humanistic, and tried to resituate the human in what William Connolly has called ‘entangled humanism’ (2017).

It is with Latour that this ecologically entangled humanism started to relate to religiousness, and theoretically opened itself up to worldview issues connected to religious pluralism, setting a next step beyond the restriction of big stories, but without returning to the philosophical grand narratives that we know from German Idealism, since worldviews and religions are now seen as conceptual experiments based on practices of faith. Being a practising Catholic himself, Latour has much more sympathy than, for example, Guattari for the connection of ecology and humanism on the one hand, and religion on the other. His major works delineate a ‘terrorist’ position, a philosophy of ‘Earthlings’, in fact a version of new materialism that also tries to encompass ecological Gaia-philosophy, eco-humanism and religious pluralism. The question underlying this paper is to what extent this terrorism of Latour succeeds in grounding an eco-humanist approach to religious pluralism. So, after showing what the implications of Latour’s terrorism for the concept of matter are, and how this ontology affects his conception of ecological humanism and religious pluralism, I will outline the shortcomings of his new materialist approach, and discuss how his ontology can be improved by an idealistic model originally from the 19th century.

2 TERRARISM AND NEW MATERIALISM IN LATOUR

In his book on the Gaia hypothesis (2015; English: 2017) Latour states that in order to deal with the ecological challenge we need a new paradigm of thought. This new ‘worldview’ is based on a perspective shift he partly sees already in the work of James Lovelock (1979). A discussion of the implications of this new perspective brings Latour to a new concept of matter, an ‘earthly materialism’ that is compatible, he says, with an ‘earthly humanism’ that includes nonhuman entities in a large pluralist society, and with a new reading of religion, especially of Christianity, that also makes room for a pluralism of beliefs. The idea of creating a new worldview that could constitute a paradigm for a new materialistic ontology and that gives his former works on modernity (1991), political ecology (1996), and his personal sense of religiousness (2010a), a kind of deep grounding, is what makes *Facing Gaia* such a fascinating book.

In order to show what Latour’s approach to nature is, I would first like to elaborate on his Gaian perspective and then see how he attempts to delineate a new ontology. His philosophy of nature is loosely revealed in the form of general reflections in the best French essayistic tradition. Every page of this work shows Latour’s Burgundian wit and his sense of self-relativisation, which makes the reading of his essay most enjoyable, even though it requires a considerable effort of conceptual reconstruction. His book on Gaia is based on the Gifford lectures held in Edinburgh in 2013, where he was invited to speak about ‘natural religion’ (Latour, 2017: 2). Religion however is only thematised in the margins of the book, with many remarks suggesting a possible future elaboration. In fact it is ‘nature’ and more precisely a new view on the ‘natural’ that became its main topic – a worldview that draws its inspiration from Lovelock’s holistic tendency, although Latour distances himself from this holism as it implies a paradoxical external point of view on a totality. Latour is explicit about the fact that his view of nature serves to ground a ‘new climatic regime’, a new political and juridical structure of society, which he developed in previous works. Alluding to Montesquieu, he conceives his worldview – his view on nature and matter – as presenting a new ‘Spirit of Laws of Nature’ [Esprit des Lois de la Nature] (Latour, 2015: 11/12; 2017: 4).

The first step of Latour’s philosophy of nature is partially deconstructive and emphasises the instability of the modern concept of nature (Latour, 2017: 7). ‘Nature’ often means a pre-cultural state, to which most people don’t want to return. The concept has also been used, he says, to ridicule the ecological movement as people wanting to return to the stone age (15). ‘Nature’ in this sense is marked by two main ‘linguistic’ ambivalences:

- a) It first marks a bipolar concept ‘nature/culture’ that according to Latour must be overcome, because in reality there exists no clearcut demarcation (Latour, 2017: 16). This bipolar concept is related to the modern binomial ‘subject/object’. As an object, nature is the perceptual scope of a subject (18). This infuses nature with the abstract settings of a ‘non-subjectivity’, thus becoming inert or dead (*nature morte*). Nature is that which is contrary to a subject and has no capacity to act from itself, it is a being without inner agency (49). The oppositions ‘nature/culture’ and ‘subject/object’ already show that in the modern worldview nature is primarily defined as being inanimate, and as being inferior to a subject since, as an ‘object’, it is defined by a subject, which is the agent.
- b) Secondly it marks a concept that functions in both a normative and descriptive way (Latour, 2017: 20). When we speak about following the natural way of things, nature is used in a normative (moral – or even legal) sense. Nature becomes a model of life that determines what legitimate conduct is. In Aristotle’s time this normative sense was still capable of enforcing political laws. In modernity such reasonings may still exist in daily life, but epistemologically nature and morality have been separated by the is/ought-distinction (22, 34). To give nature a moral claim, it is said, comes to essentialise or naturalise our conduct. This essentialism is perceived as a regressive (or conservative) attitude, where nature becomes an enforcing law of its own. But, as the is/ought-distinction manifests, the descriptive sense of nature in itself cannot ground any imperatives of conduct. Subjectivity must find its own ways and moral guidelines. This liberation from nature in recent history made, for example, free sexual choices possible. But Latour makes clear that the is/ought-ambiguity returns when in ecological philosophy ‘respecting nature’ becomes again a moral imperative (23, 47). Essentialism – now perceived as a progressive attitude – comes in again through the backdoor. An alteration of the natural state acquires a normative dimension (46). Today the prescriptive consequences of the ecological crisis are so obvious, Latour says, that the climate sceptics have ‘wisely’ focused on denying the facts (24, 27).

So, whereas in modernity the first ambivalence ‘nature/culture’ creates a concept of inert matter exempted from agency, the second is/ought-dualism leads to a ‘nonmoral nature’ exempted from any prescriptive force (Latour, 2017: 225). These binaries wouldn’t however be

ambivalent if they had no reverse, which is also Latour's alternative: nature as an agent with a prescriptive force. But in modernity the idea of a nonmoral domain of inert matter gained influence and became dominant. When Latour says "nature does not exist" [la nature n'existe pas] he means nature as the physicalist aspect of the abovementioned binary: "one half of a pair pertaining to one single concept" [comme moitié d'un couple défini par un concept unique] (Latour, 2015: 29; 2017: 19). Latour however goes beyond mere deconstruction and tries to restore the lost balance. In a quite Hegelian way, for Latour the opposing sets (is/ought, nature/culture) are to be *mediated* by recognising that 'is' can be 'ought', and 'culture' can be 'nature'.

In *We have Never Been Modern [Nous n'avons jamais été modernes]* (1991) Latour had already elaborated a theory of mediation in order to create a new worldview that could succeed modernity without one having to become a postmodernist. There he states that although the modern worldview works with strong polarities (such as between culture and nature, or human and nature) modern biology, anthropology and sociology have progressively blurred this distinction, reconsidering the naturalness of man and culture. Meanwhile the ecological crisis seems to have blurred the strict is/ought-divide (Latour, 2017: 34/35). Today the Earth is imposing on humanity clear limits of action: limits to growth, limits to human centredness, limits to extraction, and is menacing us with extinction.

However, Latour does not want to dissolve these oppositions but only to soften them. He is looking for a notion that serves as a compound of both sides, the poles in themselves having a malleable plasticity:

"We would have to be able to introduce an opposition, not between nature and culture this time (...), but between Nature/Culture on one side and, on the other, a term that would include each one of them as a particular case" [Il faudrait que nous puissions introduire une opposition, non plus cette fois entre nature et culture (...) mais entre Nature/Culture, d'un côté, et, de l'autre côté, un terme qui les inclurait toutes deux comme un cas particulier] (Latour, 2015: 49; 2017, 35).

This is where the notion of 'Gaia' comes in. According to Latour, Gaia is not a divinity nor a higher soul nor a subjectivity governing the world. It is just a metaphor designating a new paradigm, a new perspective on the divide between nature and culture. It permits us to get rid of a concept of nature as something strictly separated from culture, and vice versa. The Gaian concept of nature, which sees nature as an autoregulative system, can blur the opposition nature/culture, because it conceives nature as a network (or rhizome) of agents, in which we humans are knots or parts with a specific arrangement of actions and ways of connecting with other knots (Latour, 2015: 50):

"Only if we place ourselves inside this world will we be able to recognize as one particular arrangement the choice of existents and their ways of connecting that we

call Nature/Culture and that has served for a long time to format our collective understanding (at least in the Western tradition)” (Latour, 2017: 36).

Whereas the nature/culture-divide was privileged in the Western worldview, the new Gaian perspective makes it possible to see this modern divide as an interpretative choice, as a ‘*métaphysique*’ that doesn’t really fit the picture of an interconnectedness of existents (Latour, 2015: 51; 2017: 37).

Although Latour acknowledges his indebtedness to Lovelock when it comes to defining the concept of Gaia, it seems that he differs considerably from Lovelock’s holism. What Latour calls an earthly (terrestrial or terrarist) perspective, is in fact an ‘immanent’ perspective rather than a holistic one (Latour, 2015: 53; 2017: 38/39). The Gaian perspective, he thinks, looks at things only from inside, and takes Earth as a multiplicity, a network (*réseau*) of interconnections: “(...) we are going to try to descend from ‘nature’ down toward the multiplicity of the world [nous allons essayer de descendre de la ‘nature’ vers la multiplicité du monde] (Latour, 2015: 51; 2017: 36). This perspective does not situate itself above nature, nor takes her to be a ‘whole’, as an object placed in front of an imaginary spectator or subject. This is the way the classical physics of Galileo Galilei looked at the Earth, as something inanimate and ‘objectivised’ (2017: 69, 76). This is what, according to Latour, Peter Sloterdijk meant when he referred to the ‘Globe’ (2005), an object that can be colonised by modern capitalism (123). And this is the crux of Latour’s ‘terrarism’, of what he calls the ‘terrestrial’ perspective: it considers entities to be part of a space of interrelations, in which they are or live; of a ‘habitat’, in which they are always immersed. He sees it as Lovelock’s major challenge to speak of the Earth without taking her as a prefigured ‘totality’: “how to speak about the Earth without taking it to be an already composed whole, without adding to it a coherence that it lacks” [comment parler de la Terre sans la prendre pour un tout déjà compose, sans lui ajouter une cohérence qu’elle n’a pas] (Latour, 2015: 116; 2017: 86).

This perspective that rejects the holistic view, is, I think, difficult to reconcile with the Gaian paradigm introduced by Lovelock. To the Englishman we can only represent ourselves as Earthlings, as being part of a web of interconnectedness, if we first manage to see Gaia as a whole: “the recognition of Gaia depends upon our finding, on a global scale, improbabilities in the distribution of molecules” (Lovelock, 2009 [1979]: 32). This in some way implies a point of view that is transcendent, and that can only become immanent with a second step. Lovelock integrated a two-level epistemology – transcendent and subsequently immanent – to which Latour’s terrarism does no justice. Lovelock started his Gaia hypothesis by looking back to the

Earth after having inferentially questioned (and denied) the possibility of life on Mars. By focusing on the Earth as a totality, as a self-regulating system, the Earth appeared to him to be an organism, which he then called Gaia. This is what constitutes Lovelock's holism. Gaia is to be compared to an organism, to a living totality – Lovelock speaks of a 'single living' and 'planet-sized entity' (Lovelock, 1979: 9, 10). This is why Anne Primavesi, the Irish feminist theologian, who compared Lovelock with Galileo, sees Gaia as an accomplishment of the idea of the whole, as it was already anticipated by Copernicus and Galileo, who created an astronomic heliocentrism, thus preparing a 'biological heliocentrism', a sun-centred Gaia (Primavesi, 2003: 25-39). Ontologically and historically this astrobiological totality emerged from within the interrelations of living things in the world. But to Lovelock the ordering principle that makes it possible to speak of 'one organism' cannot be reduced to the relations between the parts. Organisms have interrelated parts but these are ordered by a pattern and propensity to autoregulation. There is a totality, a principle of autoregulation out there, that cannot be grasped just by showing that things are interrelating: there is a law behind this circular stability that constitutes the harmony of the whole. Latour is right to say that Lovelock develops a version of the Earth which is 'entirely from here below' [entièrement d'ici-bas] (Latour, 2015: 116; 2017: 87), because Lovelock is indeed a scientist, who doesn't see Gaia as a divinity, but this does not imply, as Latour wants us to believe, that he only takes up an immanent perspective placing things in a web of interconnections.

For Latour it is important to see that Gaia is a composite of agents, which are not primarily unified in a whole. The Earth is "composed of (...) of agents that are not prematurely unified in a single acting totality" [constituée d'agents, qui ne sont pas prématurément unifiés dans une seule totalité agissante] (Latour, 2015: 117; 2017: 87). That is why to him Gaia only appears as a battlefield of forces, blindly adjusting and composing a togetherness that constitutes no harmony in a real sense, since this togetherness of relations, this '*réseau*' of lifeforms, always has a fundamental instability (141). Here Latour is indebted to the chaotic model of Deleuze's 'chaosmos' and Guattari's 'chaosmosis'. Behind nature there is a subterranean omnipresence of chaotic relations, which constitute organisms, and which, due to this natural instability, are always very vulnerable. It is clear, that for Latour, in line with Deleuze and Guattari, the element of multiplicity is more important than that of unity or totality. This is also where his so-called 'compositionism' (2010b) comes in: Gaia, he emphasises, is 'composed' of agents relating to each other, also 'composting', so constantly decomposing, each other. Gaia is not a closed unity, but a composite (Latour, 2017: 87). In a sense compositionism is Latour's alternative to deconstructivism because the composite decomposes

and composes at the same time (39), which means that any composition is a process of de-composing and of re-composition. Latour loves to compare Gaia with Pasteur's observations on the fermentation of bacteria (126). It remains however difficult to immediately discern in such a picture of fermentation the image of a self-regulating system aiming at a stabilising Lovelockian optimum for life.

Latour's perspective seems more distanced from the idea of divinity than Lovelock's Gaia, which assuredly is no goddess but is at least a kind of ordering or pre-existing natural principle, a general law of biology, 'animating' the whole. But Latour manages to read the myth of Gaia in a compositionist way. Gaia in mythology is not, he says, a divinity in its own right, but a 'natural force' preceding all other gods (Latour, 2017: 81). In Hesiod, Gaia is not a caring entity, but an agent of terror – similar to Chaos – because she gives birth to violent gods capable of abominable crimes (82). She is definitively no figure of harmony, nor of maternal love, as propagated by the spiritual New Age movements described in Bron Taylor's *Dark Green Religion* (2010) and in Galinier and Molinié's book (2013) on the current cults of Pachamama (Latour, 2017: 82). Latour wants to emphasise the 'wildness' of Gaia, that she represents an 'antisystème', a 'hors-la-loi' [outlaw] (Latour, 2015: 117). To highlight this chaotic basis of Gaia, Latour also declares that she doesn't represent a principle of 'harmony'. He says: "There is no harmony in that contingent cascade of unforeseen events" [Il n'y a pas d'harmonie dans cette cascade contingente d'événements imprévus] (Latour, 2015: 142; 2017: 107). This is quite different from Lovelock, who sees 'self-regulation' as an overarching principle of harmony, explaining the limits of the system-contained violence of Gaia. From Lovelock's holistic point of view, natural violence can also be seen as the way species cooperate in balancing towards an optimum. Charles Darwin's natural selection itself is a form of violence that constitutes the driving force of the natural balance of Gaia. But to Latour all these teleonomic aspects of Darwinism – he in this context amusingly speaks of 'providence' – are reminiscences of old theological ways of thinking (102). Darwin's "appel à la balance de la nature" (Latour, 2015: 138) is still based on an old-fashioned natural picture of harmony, but life, Latour thinks, is much more chaotic than Darwin, and consequently Lovelock, think (Latour, 2017: 103).

Latour's reading of Gaia clearly takes a certain distance from Lovelock's holistic view defining the Earth as a totality, as a self-regulating 'system'. In a postmodernist manner, Latour declares that certain expressions of holism are dangerous: "'system', 'homeostasis', 'regulation', 'favorable levels', these are all quite treacherous terms" ['Système', 'homéostasie', 'régulation', 'limites favorables', voilà des termes bien périlleux] (Latour, 2015: 127; 2017: 94). And: "it is essential not to confuse Gaia with the Sphere, the System, or the

Earth taken as a Whole” [il est essentiel de ne pas confondre Gaïa avec la Sphère, le Système ou la Terre prise comme un Tout] (Latour, 2015: 308; 2017: 238). Concepts like globe, sphere, totality, whole and system tend to overlook compositionism, they tend to conceive things as just being parts of a larger totality: “The notions of globe and global thinking include the immense danger of unifying too quickly what first needs to be *composed*” [La notion de globe et de pensée globale contient l’immense danger d’unifier trop vite ce qui doit être d’abord *composé*] (Latour, 2015: 183; 2017: 138). Much better than Lovelock, who has an extraordinarily philosophical intuition but hardly involves himself in sophisticated philosophical discussions, Latour is aware of the fact that Lovelock’s holism is reminiscent of Platonism, because Gaïa here has much of a platonic sphere, being a kind of principle or idea including and steering a subset of elements. Latour says: “A sphere (...) it is not merely an idea but the very ideal of ideas” [Une sphère (...) ce n’est pas seulement une idée, mais l’idéal même des idées] (Latour, 2015: 180, 2017: 136). It should be possible, Latour thinks, to avoid a picture that amounts to pantheism where Gaïa is the “orbis terrarium sive sphaera sive deus, sive natura” (Latour, 2015: 180; 2017: 136). The dangers Latour perceives are apparently philosophical: Lovelock works with platonic and pantheistic presuppositions. For Latour, Gaïa is not, as we saw, “a unified whole” [un tout unifié] but a composition (Latour, 2015: 118; 2017: 87).

Now Latour is certainly right that the history of Gaïa is not to be viewed as a general plan that delineates the future of the whole (Latour, 2015: 129, 135). But for Lovelock there is certainly a preexisting natural law that dynamically and continuously tries to establish an equilibrium in the system. This Lovelock clearly says, is a “cybernetic process (...) having as its goal the establishment (...) of optimum physical and chemical conditions for life” (Lovelock, 1979: 45/46). Latour however denies this, and prefers to see Gaïa as an arbitrary sequence of events: “Gaïa is not a cybernetic machine controlled by feedback loops but a series of historical events” [Gaïa n’est pas une machine cybernétique contrôlée par des boucles de rétroaction, mais une suite d’événements historiques] (Latour, 2015:185; 2017: 140/141). Latour is aware that Lovelock conceives Gaïa as a ‘system’, but he himself prefers to see Gaïa as a set of ‘events’. Gaïa becomes a sum of events, of arbitrarily related parts, instead of really being a self-regulating whole, trying to steer life towards an optimum. For Lovelock this principle of self-regulation is “a key Gaian regulatory function” (Lovelock, 1979: 53). It is a natural principle with a predetermined functionality: to create an optimum for life. He even presents this as a ‘purpose’ (1979: 58), as a teleonomic tendency of the system. Latour conversely acknowledges no purposes: for him there is only a casual conflation of events, resulting from a manifold

intentionality: “Gaia captures the distributed intentionality of all the agents” [l’intentionnalité distribuée de tous les agents] (Latour, 2015: 132; 2017: 98). But this picture is difficult to reconcile with Lovelock’s idea of Gaia as an organism piloting its acts in a self-regulatory way. We can therefore safely say that for Latour the whole is *not a reality*, but a multiplicity, the only real thing being its compositeness.

To summarise, we may say that there is no divergence between Lovelock and Latour when it comes to viewing entities as symbiotically creating a life support system, but that there is an important philosophical divergence whether nature is *primordially imbued* with a pre-existent lawlike principle or ‘purpose’ that connects the living knots in a way that creates a self-regulatory system, progressively steering towards an optimum for life. We may say that with such a principle, Lovelock is a *realist*. In his most recent futurological works this becomes very obvious, because he speculates about the possibility of an ‘electronic Gaia’ based on robotic ‘life’ (Lovelock, 2014: 165; 2020: 11,123). For Lovelock, what is real is the *holistic principle of autoregulation* – whether this system is organic or electrical is not important. The *principle* itself, not its compositeness, is what determines Gaia’s reality. Latour, on the contrary, appears to be a Gaian *nominalist*, because for him the system has no reality in itself, the only existing reality being a multitude of events. This marks *in nuce* the divide between Lovelock’s holism and Latour’s compositionism. Whereas in holism the whole is *no* sum of relating parts, new materialism takes relations to be all there is. So, for Latour, not only the name of the system, ‘Gaia’, is a metaphor, but also the ‘system’ itself, since the only ‘real thing’ existing out there is a composite of relating agents.

This epistemological divergence between Lovelock and Latour seems to be based on a difference in ontology. Lovelock seems to adhere to a more traditional ontology, applying circular structures to the phenomenon of life in general. His ontology is, as we have seen, also spiced with important elements of Platonism and Aristotelianism – think of Gaia as a preexisting idea or law, or as a purposiveness of living nature. It is mainly in later years that Lovelock’s ontological position also comes within the reach of objective idealism properly speaking, since in his *Novacene* (2020) he adheres to the anthropic principle introduced by John Barrow and Frank Tipler (1988). This inbuilt teleonomic purpose of the cosmos, he says, can be seen as a preexisting state of ‘pure information’, a ‘set of ideas’ determining the physical conditions, which finally make intelligent life possible. Lovelock also speculates about this information as being “an innate property of the universe” (Lovelock, 2020: 26). He links this idea to his declared humanism and partial transhumanism: humanity has been chosen, as he says, by the cosmos in order to become conscious of itself (27). It is not clear how literally

Lovelock's mysterious transhumanist claim must be taken that it is the purpose of the universe to reconvert "all of matter and radiation into information" (75), but in such pronouncements he clearly presupposes a transcendental realm of ideas preceding the objectivity of the world. This doesn't really make the appearance of the world any more intelligible. Why should pure information convert into a material universe to then return to a state of pure information again? Indeed, if we take all these statements of Lovelock seriously, Gaia would just be a biological structure enabling a future transhumanist state of 'pure information'. This makes little sense. His ideas could however gain greater significance if Gaia's purpose was to create not a pure state of information, but a higher state of communication. I will pick up this idea in my last section.

Latour conversely, focusing, as we have seen, on networks that can be traced back to the rhizomatic connections of Deleuze and Guattari (1980), and to the dissipative structures of Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers (1984), presupposes a new materialist ontology. This means that, whereas the concept of 'inert matter', coming from an old mechanistic paradigm, still dominates our everyday conception of the world (Latour, 2017: 49), for one and a half centuries science has been developing and deepening an image of matter that is much more 'animated'. The quotation marks here are important since Latour is not reintroducing Bergson's *élan vital*, but he certainly means more than a mere quantitative reversibility of matter and energy because he draws a straight line through being, connecting human 'intentionality', biological 'life' and subatomic 'inner motion'. These, he speculates, are instantiations of a phenomenon he calls 'agency'. He is not thinking here of so-called 'subjectivity' as an inner predisposition of decision-making, although in the realm of biology he uses a quite anthropomorphic language, speaking of 'interests', and describing 'agency knots' as self-piloting entities: "agents, each of which is pursuing its own interest" [puissances d'agir dont chacune poursuit son propre intérêt] (Latour, 2015: 187; 2017: 142). Latour isn't thinking of an Aristotelean entelechy or inner telos. Rather, in a more Nietzschean way, he takes agency to be an 'inner power to do things'. He defines it as a "capacity to establish more or less numerous relationships, and especially reciprocal ones" [capacité d'établir des relations plus ou moins nombreuses et surtout réciproques] (Latour, 2015: 179; 2017: 136). It becomes clear that in this relational ontology of Latour both agency and force are defined as a capability of connection and pursued entanglement.

Latour stresses however, that in a secondary or deviate sense – he means in a more religious or metaphysical language – this blind force, agency or capability was called the 'soul' of things:

“It will then become clear that to say of an actor that he/she/it is inert—in the sense of having no agency—or, conversely, that he/she/it is animated—in the sense of ‘endowed with a soul’—is a secondary and derivative operation” [Nous comprendrons alors que dire d’un acteur qu’il est inerte – au sens de n’avoir aucune puissance d’agir – ou qu’il est animé – au sens de ‘doté d’une âme’ – est une opération *seconde et dérivée*] (Latour, 2015:68; 2017: 50).

In this way characterising matter as being fundamentally permeated by agency, Latour follows two objectives related to the nullification of ambivalences mentioned above: to blur the object/subject or nature/culture divide on the one hand, and to neutralise the is/ought-binary on the other. The first objective makes religious, and specifically animistic perspectives on nature more digestible for modern secular people. As I said before, Latour is a Catholic with strong sympathies for indigenous wisdoms (Latour, 2010a: 99), and his new materialistic perspective is a philosophical grounding of this animistic view. The second objective makes it possible to extend the domain of normativity, values and morality beyond the realm of the human. This grounds the possibility of an ecological politics, of a parliament of things, based on the idea that human and nonhuman entities all have an inner quality (agency) that makes them to a certain extent ‘equal’. Latour concludes: “the distinction between humans and nonhumans has no more meaning” [la distinction des humains et des non-humains n’a pas plus de sens] (Latour, 2015:79; 2017: 58). As we will see later, this does not amount to an anti-humanist position. On the contrary.

Although, according to Latour, science itself is working towards a concept of matter imbued with agency, the modern average scientific perspective of the world still lives in an old-materialist abstraction, a “monde fantomatique” [phantom world] that presupposes an enchained and causally closed totality lacking any realism (Latour, 2015: 96; 2017: 71). This means that Latour’s new materialism also implies a new concept of ‘realism’. Modern science, especially physics, is still obsessed, he says, with de-animating the world, while at the same time showing more and more ‘agents’ pullulating everywhere (Latour, 2017: 72). In fact, he says, the idea of a de-animated world doesn’t fit the current stand of science, and is a remnant of the 17th century (149). It was then that a counter-Renaissance took place in Europe, leaving no room for the many worldviews and philosophies that characterised the tolerance of Renaissance humanism, instead favouring a rigid and one-dimensional view of science. It was then that scientists saw themselves as able to univocally establish with mathematical certitude what the truth of ‘reality’ is (188). However, not without the support of Christianity, which according to Latour had incorporated devastating Gnostic perspectives identifying matter with evil; the Cartesian concept of matter was defined as being fully de-animated. In line with

Prigogine, Latour claims that many so-called ‘rationalist’ positions in physics and in modern humanism still work with these classical abstractions overlooking the historicity of things: “The great paradox of the ‘scientific worldview’ is that it has succeeded in withdrawing the historicity of the world” [Le grand paradoxe de la ‘vision scientifique du monde’ est d’avoir réussi à retirer l’historicité du monde] (Latour, 2015: 97; 2017: 72). Latour sees these presuppositions as quasi-religious prejudices of modern physics, which, he feels, should be dismantled as soon as possible in order to obtain a *more realistic* type of materialism:

“Perhaps it might be of some use to offer, at last, a view of materiality that no longer (...) offers such a pathetically inexact vision of the sciences. We could then get away from any and every ‘religion of nature’. We would have a conception of materiality that is finally worldly, secular—yes, better still, earthbound” [Peut-être ne serait-il pas inutile d’offrir enfin de la matérialité une version qui ne soit plus (...) si pathétiquement inexacte. On pourrait sortir alors de toute ‘religion de la nature’. On aurait de la matérialité une conception enfin mondaine, séculière, oui, profane, ou mieux: terrestre] (Latour, 2015: 97; 2017: 72).

Latour’s terrarist or new materialist conception of matter asserts that particles are moved from within. There is an inner force, which of itself constitutes the structure of matter. Latour sees each and every thing in the cosmos not just as being moved by something else, but also as moving by itself. Form the outside, matter may look inert and devoid of activity, but if we immerse ourselves in nature, we see activity everywhere (Latour, 2017: 49). Whereas the classical Cartesian picture in physics sees matter as a passive entity subject to the external laws of motion, Latour conceives it as being inherently active. This is also what constitutes the difference, he says, between Galileo and the new paradigm introduced by Lovelock. To Galileo the Earth is a body moved by celestial mechanics, while for Lovelock the Earth is not just motion, but *e-motion*, a movement coming from within, that reacts to circumstances in a self-regulatory way (79). To Latour however this is not a kind of Platonic principle preceding life, as in Lovelock’s ontological realism, but a kind of inner volition, a blind ‘force’. This ‘voluntarism’ fits quite well with his nominalist conception of Gaia. In fact, Latour extends this compositionist idea to the deepest interiority of matter, in such a way that its ‘ultimate’ parts can be seen as e-motive. ‘Ultimate’ must be read with quotation marks, because in Latour’s picture of matter there is no reason to believe in ‘ultimate’ parts. Matter seems indefinitely and infinitely divisible, although there is no explicit pronouncement about this in Latour’s work as far as I can see.

Latour remains critical about pantheist Spinozism. He counteracts this position, which to Deleuze was still an attractive idea, with a kind of naturalistic panpsychism. This means that

everything is considered to be animated not by ‘subjectivity’ but by a compound of forces that constitute an ‘inner agency’, an ‘actant’. The ‘soul’ of things is not some transcendental subjectivity, but a realm of natural forces constituting this e-motive layer of being. We have to bear in mind that the concept of agency here is so large that it includes not only particles, but also any technical device, including future robots and cyborgs in the sense of Lovelock’s *Novocene*. When speaking of things being ‘animated’, Latour in fact means things are ‘pragmated’ – that is, active and moved from within. To distinguish his position from classical pragmatism, I propose to call this ontology ‘pragmativism’.

So, to Latour, neither Earth nor matter are inert or dead (Latour, 2017: 70), but neither is an electronic Gaia nor a robotic Death Star. Unlike Lovelock, who glorifies self-consciousness, which first appeared in humanity as the apex of Gaia, for Latour, all things equally have a ‘soul’ and are ‘animate’, even when lacking an iota of consciousness. And further, to Latour nothing material can be inanimate. Thus, his parliament of things becomes a very crowded place indeed. Due to this extensity of being animated, in Latour’s compositionism, higher and lower level entities become counterparts mirroring each other: Gaia has its counterpart in the smallest perceivable particles of being, since they are ‘relational entities’, although moving on a different descriptive scale. In this sense for Latour, macro- and microcosmoses mirror each other: everywhere we find struggling and cooperating forces manifesting themselves into being.

3 LATOUR ON RELIGIOUS PLURALISM AND HUMANISM

As I have tried to make clear, the new materialism sketched above can be interpreted as an ontological layer grounding Latour’s views on both religion and humanism. It is now time to have a closer look at these, especially at his pragma-Catholicism as I call it, his sympathies with indigenous wisdoms, and his ideas on ecumenism. This can explain why in the West, science, mainly in most positivist interpretations of humanism, is often taken to be the successor of religion. As Latour himself acknowledges, his Gifford lectures on ‘natural religion’ were primarily heading towards a philosophy of the ‘natural’, and his major conception of an Earthly Christianity is still a project to be accomplished. In this respect *Face à Gaïa* and his earlier *On the Modern Cult of the Factish Gods* that also deals with religion, are only offering some prolegomena.

Latour compares the general structure of modern science with the structure of modern, so-called axial, religions, especially Christianity, and comes to the conclusion that they have

strong affinities. He already did something similar in the first chapter of *On the Modern Cult of the Factish Gods* (Latour, 2010a: 1-67), but I will refer mainly to the most recent version in *Facing Gaia*. It is important to see that for Latour, humanism, as an attitude and overarching worldview, can mediate between science and religion. Humanism breaks through the dogmatism of both science and religion, and as a practice of the free spirit it is characterised, he says (following Stephen Toulmin, 2003) by a discursive curiosity and tolerance based on the philosophical insight that there is no positive or scientific certainty in matters of worldviews, that it is all about speculation based on well-developed arguments. This does not at all mean that science offers no facts, but there is a step from facts to ‘readings for usage’: one thing is to determine the facts (‘facticity’), another to give scientific facts some interpretation to substantiate a worldview (a ‘truth’ in the sense of a ‘true’ story). Seemingly, divine revelations maybe possible but these always function in certain situations and practices, and an interpretation must always take this practical context into account. This emphasis on usages and practices constitutes Latour’s pragmatism, and as we will see, especially his pragma-Catholicism. His new materialism is an ontology supporting this humanism, especially his eco-humanism and views on religion.

Humanism in a deep Socratic way cuts to pieces the presumptions of science and religion, but it does so without fully giving up the idea of truth as a signifier for meaning. In Latour’s perspective, humanism tries to constitute a worldview that is supportive of this dialogical openness towards both science and religion, opening itself for possible ‘worldview-truths’ based on both of them. But ‘truth’ here does not mean a ‘positive truth’ in the sense of having scientific or doctrinal certainty. Latour is very explicit about this in his comparison of science and religion in *On the Modern Cult of the Factish Gods*: both forbid “meaning to be carried in truth” and separate truth from a “cascade of mediations” between science and religion (Latour, 2010a: 122/123). Truth for Latour means instead a dialogical and speculative endeavour that is limited and steered by the finitude of our own philosophical practices, which are discursive and based on continuous efforts of what Hegel called ‘Vermittlungen’ and Latour translates with ‘mediations’. There seems to be an affinity here between Latour and American and German discursive pragmatism (Peirce, Apel, Habermas): truth seems to function as the regulative idea of communication and argumentation that can be partially realised but that is never closed – unless people stop thinking. This point of view definitively distinguishes Latour’s compositionism from deconstructivism, which focuses on dismantling not just this or that specific truth by showing some inner contradiction or paradox, but which denies the idea of truth itself. Compositionism, on the contrary, only decomposes worldviews in order to regain

a well-argued story of the world, especially a Gaian or Earthly one, representing a ‘unitary story of truth’ that is however based on epistemological uncertainty and on the ontological concept of an interconnected multitude.

It must be said, however, that this unifying story, especially the wholeness of Gaia, is largely neglected in Latour’s nominalist approach, and is certainly secondary compared to his focus on the existing multiplicity of bottom-up practices. Plurality, according to Latour, grounds the oneness because there is no real whole irreducible to the sum of the relating parts. This makes it difficult not only to justify holism on an ontological level, but also to defend the idea of ‘transcendence’ on a theological level. It also inhibits both a philosophy of nature (in the sense of *Naturphilosophie*), able to integrate positive facts of science into a normative worldview, and a religious ecumenism, able to include the Abrahamic traditions. Although compositionism clearly moves away from deconstructivism, Latour still hangs on to the quite postmodernist position that philosophy cannot be guided by a higher unifying criterion: “there should have been an agreement”—he says—“not to come together under a common higher principle” [il faut accepter” – he says – “de ne pas se réunir sous un principe supérieur commun] (Latour, 2015: 334; 2017: 259). This also grounds his opposition to Spinozism that departs from the idea of a unique substance, and his adhesion to a certain epistemological anarchism. He shows this adhesion by slightly changing the title of Louis Auguste Balanqui’s journal: “neither God nor Nature—and thus no Master!” [ni Dieu, ni Nature – et donc pas de Maître!] (Latour, 2015: 334; 2017: 259). This position of Latour, as I will show, makes it impossible to join together religious traditions and the various sciences.

But seen from a pragmatic point of view, both science and religion take things in the world to be united by a similar source – either God or an initial singularity. Latour emphasised this at the end of *On the Modern Cult of the Factish Gods* where he sees both science and religion articulating an ‘invisibility’ (Latour, 2010a: 122). Latour sets us in the midst of a world of interrelating forces, leaving their common origin unexplained. But science, as Latour himself admits, cannot function without a unitary view of nature. And likewise, a theology without an ultimate source, which religions seem to refer to, cannot ground ecumenism. The abovementioned idea that there is no higher unifying principle ultimately impedes Latour’s mediation of science and religion, and thereby to accomplish his humanistic mission. As we will see in the next section, objective idealism may offer us a model, connecting holism and discursive pragmatism on the one hand, and offering a sound basis for religion and nature on the other.

Although Latour declares that we have to accept that there is no higher common principle that we can use to decide about truth, he nevertheless sets out to develop a so-called ‘comparative cosmology’, in which he analyses and compares the fundamental worldview aspects – the ‘metaphysics’ – behind science and religion. He explicitly does not see this comparative effort as a philosophical method that enables a discussion on truth, but as an ethno-anthropological approach, in which worldview aspects are just taken as cultural facts:

“These are in fact the sorts of questions that philosophers raise as a matter of course. But in the most recent Western tradition the tendency has been to turn rather toward anthropologists when we want to compare the various metaphysical schemas” [C’est en effet le genre de questions que les philosophes ont l’habitude de poser. Mais dans la tradition occidentale plus récente, c’est plutôt vers les anthropologues que l’on se tourne quand on veut comparer des métaphysiques différentes] (Latour, 2015: 51; 2017: 37).

This quotation is consistent with his denial of a higher principle of truth that could be invoked to decide about worldview contents. But Latour does not want to succumb to cultural relativism. In *We have Never Been Moderns* he deals with this very question (Latour, 1991: 124). And in *Facing Gaia* he reiterates that we cannot escape from a certain perceptiveness, even though this is not relativism (Latour, 2017: 37). In order to tackle the question in his earlier work he introduced a ‘symmetrical anthropology’, meaning an epistemological mediation between different worldviews (Latour, 1991:142). But, contrary to what Latour says, I think this mediation also requires a criterion, and in his analysis of science and religion it becomes very clear that he is implicitly using a major placeholder criterion for his comparative cosmology. This is whether a certain worldview aspect of religion or science *benefits* Gaia. In his comparative cosmology the Gaia worldview is used as a higher touchstone for mediation between worldview positions. In *Facing Gaia* Latour therefore clearly focuses on how much science and religion in their general structures and contents contribute to a Gaian perspective of the world. The picture of Gaia he has in mind is that of compositionism, in which only the relational multiplicity has an ontological reality. But nevertheless, notwithstanding the fact that Latour distances himself from the idea of a unifying principle, it is clear he implicitly has one: the idea of Gaia as a relational multiplicity.

According to Latour the concept of Gaia therefore has religious implications. But, why involve religion? Latour’s answer is that Gaia is not only a biogeological structure, but also a worldview affecting other worldviews, including those of science and religion. There is today, he states, in our age of scientific enlightenment, a curious but clear revival of religiousness, as

shown not only by new fundamentalisms and New Age forms of spirituality (Latour, 2017:150), but also by eco-spiritual movements, which include Gaian animistic spirituality (153/154). Although Latour is critical about what he labels ‘postmodern eco-spiritualities’, which invoke the divinity of Gaia (82), it is clear from what has been said before about new materialism, that he also shares many sympathies with post-secular forms of animism.

His compositionist idea of Gaia though, raises doubts about all types of ‘religions englobantes’ (Latour, 2015:198), thereby also including science, which Latour characterises as a kind of ‘religion of nature’. Latour portrays science as a cultural object that can be approached by anthropological and merely descriptive means, reconstructing the procedures, practices and main worldview presuppositions of science, setting aside its many specific claims of truth. If we look at these presumptions, he says, science simply appears as a specific religion of nature. In his ethnographic cosmology that compares science and religion, he focuses on five aspects: 1) the idea of a higher entity, 2) the organisational principle of the world connected to that idea, 3) the limits of the specific collective of people dealing with that idea, 4) the lifeworld or space where this collective situates itself, and 5) the time or period in which the collective of actants find themselves (151). Much could be said about the arbitrariness of Latour’s taxonomy, but I prefer to focus here on his results.

It is definitively an expression of Latour’s Burgundian wit when he calls this religion of science ‘cenosotone’ – an acronym for “*ce dont nous sommes tous nés*” [the place we all come from]. Like religion, modern science presupposes a higher entity, a unitary source, seen as the original state of matter, and conceived as being inanimate. It includes the natural laws, which, according to Latour can be seen as the religious dogma of science (Latour, 2017: 160). The lifeworld of scientists is global and universal. They are interested in atemporal truths, very much like other religions. Scientists take everything to be united in a structure of causality that can be traced back to one first cause or entity: the singularity that caused the Big Bang (163). Scientists also belong to a cast of experts of truth, very much like priests (165). They determine the ‘credo’ of science.

But to Latour these contents of the ‘religion of science’ are not what science is really about. It is not the reality of scientific research, but only an ideal of science, in fact, its own ideological construction. Latour here again shows a nominalist understanding of things. What is real about science is not the sedimented truths about the cosmos – these are, he thinks, just a temporary illusion; the reality of science is its practices; in its daily work science has no unity, because scientists are each dealing with different disciplines and research subjects. In fact, they work in different ‘fields of sense’ as Markus Gabriel would say (Gabriel, 2015: 318). In daily

practice, they are neither dealing with an ultimate source, nor with causal connections to it, but with a specific manifoldness in being (Latour, 2017: 168).

Thus, Latour splits science into two camps: on the one hand we have science as a unitary theory of the world – I call this the theoretical or ‘ideal’ side of science, but Latour prefers to call it an ideology or illusion. On the other hand, we have science-as-practice, ‘pragma-science’ so to speak, which he deems separable from the major truth claims endorsed by science. Here again we see that Latour fully identifies the value of the whole with its connected parts, in this case the scientific practices. It becomes apparent by now that *reducing* the whole to the sum of its relations is a basic characteristic of Latour’s ‘pragmativism’. And as we have seen, this nominalism also characterises his compositionist interpretation of Gaia as well as his new materialistic ontology.

A similar playful subdivision is used in Latour’s taxonomy of religion. The cenosotone, he says, mirrors monotheistic religions, especially Christianity (Latour, 2017: 169). Here too the doctrine is established by ‘experts’, now called ‘priests’, who seem to have a special access to truth. This access in religion is not called ‘research’ but ‘revelation’ (169). Like scientists, priests see themselves as ‘enlightened’ people accessing and possessing truth. They call their ultimate source ‘God’, an entity preceding the world, like the singularity of scientists, existing beyond space and time, and therefore separable from the world (170). The priests also think they are able to participate in a universal discourse or timeless lifeworld. Latour, using an expression of Jan Assmann (2009), prefers to call the conceptual construction that we normally take to be religion an ‘anti-religion’ because it constitutes a particular ideology, a superstructure, built on top of the real part of religion: its practices (Latour, 217: 176-178).

So, in his nominalist way, Latour denies that religious ideology is a legitimate expression of what religiousness truly is. The reality of religion can only be found in ‘pragma-religion’, in the daily practices of religious people. The real part of religion is prayers, meditations, acts of fraternal and mutual assistance, signs of love and carefulness, sacrifices, rituals, missions and so on. While ‘religion as an ideal’, as a conceptual unity, is for him an ‘anti-religion’, the reality of religion itself can only be found in the religious practices of daily life (Latour, 2017: 178). In a sense, Latour thereby goes beyond Martin Luther for whom the reality of religion was situated in ‘inner faith’. For Latour, the reality of religion is the external activity of faith, its expressiveness. He thereby overrides the Reformation to come back to Catholicism – a ‘pragma-Catholicism’ so to speak, which knows no doctrines and institutions, but finds its only reality in the acts of religious people (181).

I think this suffices to delineate Latour's Burgundian exposition of both science and religion. But an additional aspect of Latour's interpretation must be mentioned: he wants to 'reintegrate' this pragmativism into the existing doctrines of both science and religion:

"The chimera that interests me involves imagining groups of people who (...) would no longer feel that they are living under a Globe, but (...) would share the need to protect each other against the temptation of unifying too quickly the world that they are exploring step by step" [La chimère qui m'intéresse, c'est d'imaginer de peuplades (...) qui ne se sentiraient plus vivre sur un Globe, (...) [qui] auraient en commun de se protéger l'une l'autre contre la tentation d'unifier trop vite le monde qu'elles explorent pas à pas] (Latour, 2015: 236/237; 2017: 181/182).

For Latour this comes to adapting the classical doctrines to his compositionist view on Gaia – he calls this 'terrestrialization'. It is curious to see that Latour in this context never refers to the work of Primavesi (2000; 2003), who, as we saw before, tried to reinterpret Christianity using the ideas of Lovelock. But Latour is more radical than the Irish feminist, because he does not start from Lovelock's holism, but from his own compositionism. Whereas Primavesi hung onto the idea of a transcendent divinity whose 'gift' to humanity was Gaia (Primavesi, 2003: 112-123) – a step that Lovelock praised because this holism implied that the whole cannot be reduced to its parts – Latour envisions a pragma-nominalist reinterpretation of the divine, where the whole is reducible to its inner relations.

For Latour divinity is what happens when religious people act and come together – the divine is interconnectivity itself. We may see this horizontal definition of divinity as a very 'sociological' interpretation of religion. In his fifth lecture Latour still limits this interconnectivity to humans (Latour, 2017: 147), but in view of his new materialism there is no reason not to extend this picture to all existing actants. Divinity could then be identified with the entirety of existing connections in the universe. This of course, would again bring in Spinozism, since the interconnectedness of things would be the divine itself, with no divinity existing beyond this interconnection. However, as we have seen, Latour was very critical of Spinozism, because the Dutch philosopher considered divinity to be a substantial unity, existing prior to multiplicity. If my interpretation is correct then Latour sees divinity as the multiple presence of reality itself. Whereas Primavesi sees God as being transcendent but incarnated – God's gift is also Gaia's gift and makes her sacred, she says (Primavesi, 2000: 168-180) – there is nothing, no principle or law, to be incarnated in Latour's theology. Divinity, as he explicitly says, is inseparable from temporality: "If the ends can be *achieved in time*, even though *the times go on*, and *thanks to time*, then everything in the meaning of history and the manner of

occupying the Earth changes radically” [Si les fins peuvent être atteintes, *dans le temps, bien que* les temps *continuent*, et *grâce* au temps, alors tout dans le sens de l’histoire et la façon d’occuper la Terre change radicalement] (Latour, 2015: 229; 2017: 175).

Needless to say, this large conception of the divine should also rejoin the scientific concept of singularity, which seen from his new materialist perspective could never exist as such and would always be an interconnection of some subatomic animate matter. Latour does not develop a reinterpretation of the contents of science, but in terms of his thoughts on pragmatism this could only mean that everything is in itself an explosion of interrelating forces. A pragmatic reinterpretation of science in any case should rejoin Latour’s pragmatic interpretation of religions. For him the task of humanism is precisely this: to bring about such a reinterpretation of science *and* religion, and to create a *convergence* of these domains. Let’s have a closer look at this point.

Latour’s humanism consists in establishing connections between ‘real’ science and ‘real’ religion. ‘Real’ science is based on a new materialistic ontology. ‘Real’ religion on the interconnections of religious actants. Notwithstanding the diversity of religions in the world, it seems that Latour discerns a kind of pragma-Catholicism as the structural basis of all religions – all religions consisting of a set of convergent practices and rituals, promoting *connectivity* and finally *love*, but he hardly elaborates on this in *Facing Gaia*. The task of what Latour calls humanism is to invert the doctrinal contents of religions, by reinterpreting them starting from this pragmatic basis of religiousness. Latour here implicitly uses the Marxian distinction between base and superstructure. The base is the religious practices themselves; in nature the base is constituted by the forces *in matter*. The superstructure, on the other hand, is presented as a construction, but in an Earthly reinterpretation this should be representing as much as possible the structures of the base. Latour calls this humanistic interpretation ‘*négociations diplomatiques*’ (2015: 204). It implies considering a plurality of perspectives: all religions must be able to take part and must be taken into account. The work of humanism should guarantee that religion and science are imbued with the ideals of pluralism and tolerance. But in order to *mediate* religion and science it is necessary to position oneself on a third stage, which, I think, cannot be cultural anthropology, because this may be seen as being scientific. As I will argue later, the third position should be philosophical: cultural anthropology cannot but reduce the contents of science and religion to social inventions.

It must be said that Latour’s picture of humanism strongly leans on the work of Toulmin. This means that he wants to move away from the traditional so-called ‘Enlightened’ or positivistic views of humanism, which he deems to be too anthropocentric, atheistic and anti-

religious. Toulmin's humanism recentres around Renaissance humanism, which pictured the world as cosmos and interpreted human-centredness as a dialogical play with other religions and the universe. For Latour, humans are dialogical entities characterised by their openness and tolerance for different perspectives (Latour, 2017: 187). According to Toulmin there are no strict certainties in humanism. Which means that a humanistic interpretation of science and religion will always remain *speculative* and open (Toulmin, 1992 [1990]: 25, 29). In his latest work, *Return to Reason* (2003), Toulmin states that even *positive* science has to return to a situation of openness, which implies accepting a fundamental uncertainty, that paves the path for philosophical speculation. There should be much room for rational speculation, because in fact science is not exact as there is always unpredictability and instability (Toulmin, 2003: 210, 214).

But to Latour this dialogical attitude of the humanistic approach should not just be centred on humanity. Along with Michel Serres (1999) he also considers the Earth to be an agent 'responding' to what humans are doing (Latour, 2017: 59, 62). Serres does not shy away from anthropomorphic expressions when saying that the Earth 'talks' to us in terms of forces and interactions. This brings him to the idea of a *natural contract* similar to the *contrat sociale* of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Latour acknowledges that all these expressions of Serres are metaphors, but the fact remains, he says, that the fundamental attitude of this new ecological humanism of Serres, is one of dialogue, even with nature (64). Only if we understand nonhuman actants as emphatically 'reacting against' the interventions of humanity, or as 'taking revenge', as Lovelock puts it, can we, says Latour, complete humanism. It is this generalised dialogical attitude, which also makes Latour's 'diplomatic negotiations' vis-à-vis nonhuman entities meaningful.

Latour's rethinking of humanism is in a certain way a clear statement against modern positivist humanism that was obsessed with identifying truth with positive science. He presents this positivistic scientism as having dominated modern humanism during the 19th and 20th centuries, thereby also combining humanism with eurocentrism and a kind of technological triumphalism. This positivist humanism produced "narratives boasting of the fabulous exploits of Mankind transforming the Earth the better to master it" [récits vantant les fabuleux exploits de l'Homme transformant la Terre pour mieux la dominer] (Latour, 2015: 153; 2017: 115). Humanism served as a narrative to indiscriminately dominate the Earth. Latour seems to be thinking of Comte's fully desacralised view of the Earth that combined atheistic humanism with an extractive attitude towards nature, as announced in the title of his unfinished work of 1822,

System of Positive Industry, or Treatise on the Total Action of Humanity on the Planet (Bourdeau, 2014: 16).

As Audier pointed out in his later works (Audier, 2017; 2019), in *Facing Gaia*, Latour suggests that it is not humanity as a whole but specifically this Western productivism and lifestyle promoted by this modern secular humanism that caused our indiscriminate action on the planet (Latour, 2017: 122). But in the Renaissance it was different. In the mind of humanist philosophers, theologians and scientists, it was generally accepted that science and religion could largely converge. Nature in the Renaissance still had a sacralised status. Latour here endorses Toulmin's interpretation of Renaissance humanism as situating man in a 'living cosmos'. Latour thereby recentres early modern humanism around the idea of Gaia. And in a future renewed humanism, he says, the human will again be defined as being part of the composite called Earth (151). Humanism, he says, must become more 'realistic', by which he means that humans have to acknowledge their place in this composite structure called 'Gaia' (109/110). This 'eco-humanism', as I call it, takes man as an Earthling, acknowledging that certain entitlements of humanity, must be reversed and restored to nature (195/196). In fact, all human rights, that once were based on the specificity of the human 'soul', should again be reevaluated as having been made possible by Gaia and, in a deeper sense, by the cosmos.

Latour largely shares this position with Lovelock, who never disregarded religion and spirituality but saw them as bringing in important worldview aspects for the new Gaian way of thinking. To be sure, Lovelock's works are strongly scientific, but he clearly states that intuitions and spirituality really do matter. Lovelock always emphasised that his Gaian perspective is neither dismissing religion nor humanism but changing them from within. In a certain sense his critique of positivist scientism is taken up by Latour. But whereas Lovelock clearly tends towards a *vertical story* in which human-centredness goes along with an idea of a hierarchy of consciousness because the human being is still the major moral actor in the world, Latour tends towards a *horizontal story* in which human-centredness is combined with an idea of relational entanglement. While Lovelock, in a quite Hegelian way, sees humans as the forefront of Gaia's self-consciousness, having to take up major responsibilities towards the planet, Latour always avoids such idealistic expressions and merely presents morality as a horizontalised responsibility towards fellow beings.

It should be clear by now that for Latour this moral responsibility towards Gaia is a major reason to cling to humanism: "The actor still remains humanity. Humans are the ones who found, who measure" [l'acteur reste toujours l'humanité. C'est l'homme qui fonde et qui mesure], he says (Latour, 2015: 323; 2017: 250). But this humanism is always also 'posthuman'

in the sense understood by Rosi Braidotti (2013) and includes nonhuman entities in all its moral and political considerations. This is not that different in Lovelock, but to him Gaia is mainly an ‘ideal principle of nature’, and therefore he is more liable to abandon Gaia’s organic shape. This explains Lovelock’s curious jump towards transhumanism in his latest work, in which he envisions the bizarre possibility of substituting both humans and Gaia by electronic ‘life’ forms (Lovelock, 2020: 95). Latour is less prone to such idiosyncrasies and is understandably critical about such shallow ideas about a technological evolution beyond humanity. He rightly sees this as a remnant of positivistic scientism and takes it as a “vast conspiracy on the part of scientists to ‘naturalize’ humanity” [vaste complot des scientifiques pour ‘naturaliser’ l’humanité] (Latour, 2015: 156; 2017: 118).

To Latour a major effort of this new type of humanism should be to neutralise Christianity’s implicit Gnosticism, by which he means the idea of an immediate knowledge (gnosis) about metaphysics on the one hand, and of matter as being substantially evil on the other (Latour, 2017: 186). This implicit Gnosticism explains, he says, the modern *desacralisation* of the Earth, the particular indifference and negligence of modern science and technology vis-à-vis nature. Science took over its desacralised view of nature from these Gnostic aspects in Christianity. But whereas in Christianity there is still an aspect of the sanctity of the Earth in the idea of divine creation, modern science hyperbolised the Gnostic elements of Christianity by fully desacralising matter. Latour therefore also sees it as a major task of new humanism to correct this inner tendency of modern science. In fact, Latour’s own new materialism is a contribution to this effort which makes it possible to *resacralise* nature without relapsing to simplistic romanticism (142).

But a renewed humanism should also put straight another aspect of Gnosticism related to the identification of matter and evil. Latour means the idea of divinity’s transcendence. Gnosticism radicalised Platonic or Jewish ideas of transcendence, which still allow for some immanence of God in the world. Such dualistic ideas of total separateness automatically led to the view that matter is evil and fully disconnected from the divine. Latour combats these medieval perceptions by defining religion, and especially Christianity, as a set of practices within history, and not as an immediate transcendental revelation. It is all about practices rather than beliefs. He says: “As belief in something, religion is of little interest” [comme croyance (...) la religion ne présente guère d’intérêt] (Latour, 2015: 252; 2017: 194). But the really toxic part of these medieval Gnostic elements of Christianity is the dualistic belief in a transcendent divinity existing beyond everything earthly. Although Latour also values the liberative power of transcendence (Latour, 2017: 195), in this dualistic structure it finally leads to an apocalyptic

discourse, in which the Earth is reduced to nonreality (196). As he says, in the Abrahamic religions, especially in medieval Christianity, there is an ‘overdose of transcendence’ (200). The task of humanism is to counter this tendency of the desacralisation of the Earth that we find in both Western science and religion. I think all these ideas of Latour around religion also explain why he ends up construing a new type of materialism that cannot conceive prior laws of nature separated from matter anymore, so he sympathises with a fully horizontal spirituality that is ultimately contrary to transcendence.

The highest mission of humanism, in Latour’s view, should be to safeguard pluralism, both in science and religion. He therefore changes the famous word of the poet: “Only a God can save us now!” could be reworded: Only the assembly of all the gods can save us now” [‘Seul un Dieu peut encore nous sauver!’], devienne: ‘Seule l’assemblée de tous les dieux peut encore nous sauver’] (2015:368; 2017: 288). By taking up this quote of Heidegger, Latour does not want to adhere to some old-fashioned polytheism, but he is invoking pluralism as the guarantee of humanistic openness and tolerance to science and religion, while at the same time he invokes an ideal of ecumenism that not only includes different religions but also tries to reconcile religion with science. Here his religiousness and new materialism converge: Latour advocates a modern new materialist version of animism that integrates pieces of indigenous spirituality and Christian practices with a scientific concept of natural forces. He clearly tends to see divinity as a signifier for this natural interconnectedness of things, as a realm that is inseparable from the multiplicity of the agents and voices in being.

4 ECO-HUMANISM & OBJECTIVE IDEALISM

After analysing the main aspects of what could be called Latour’s entangled eco-humanism, it is now time to quickly review the main challenges we encountered in order to delineate an alternative grounding of eco-humanism that includes major fruitful insights of Latour’s philosophy. I would like to concentrate on the following issues: 1) Lacking any form of verticality, Latour’s relational ontology seems to be incapable of properly determining man’s dignity: his picture of an entangled humanism fails ontologically to prioritise man’s responsibilities; 2) it therefore also struggles with the idea of God’s transcendence, which should be disturbing for a practising Catholic, even for any pragma-Catholic. Also, Latour’s new materialism has several shortcomings: 3) it wants to animate nature without explicitly rejoining vitalism, thus ending up being neither fish nor fowl, and therefore, 4) failing to reconcile science with religion. Latour’s perspective on Gaia, 5) does not account for the reality

of an autoregulative whole, and develops the nominalist idea of compositionism, thereby failing to account for the unity of Gaia. His critique of positivist humanism, 6) strives to acknowledge the dignity of Gaia's entities but does not succeed in resacralising matter. His interpretation of religion rightly refers to an overdose of transcendence, but encapsulates itself in immanence, and is therefore, 7) unable to serve a type of ecumenism that engages with the contents and truth claims of religions. I refrain to enter into other urgent problems of Latour's philosophy, such as his indecisiveness with respect to the epistemological discussions around universalism and relativism. There is an ominous idealist ontology that Latour apparently wants to avoid by all means, although it seems to offer obvious solutions for all these challenges. Humanism would be well-advised to explore this possibility. In my short discussion of the challenges Latour has left us, I will try to delineate some aspects of this obvious alternative.

Latour's new materialism implies that there is a force or actant in all parts of matter, a position that is very similar to panpsychism. These forces are also the constituents making possible the entanglement or interconnectedness of things. Although there are different levels of being – the subatomic level, for example, being different from the biological one – Latour conceives 'things', both internally and externally, primarily as relations or networks. In this relational ontology these levels are descriptively – but not ontologically – different; Latour's point is that we can discern actants everywhere. A level of being is therefore not an ontological *novum*, as Nicolai Hartmann (1942) claimed. This means that there is no ontological verticality in being. Latour therefore says: "Gaia does not have levels" [Gaïa, elle n'est pas ordonnée par niveaux] (Latour, 2015: 142; 2017: 105). A relational ontology that is not capable of thinking vertically – that is, with ontological stratification or nested layers – can therefore by no means determine the specificity of the ontological innovation implied with the human realm; it cannot explain what dignifies the human being, since being an actant is now something discernible everywhere and not something specifically human. The nature of human self-reflection and therefore of human morality cannot be grasped unless in this ontology a vertical aspect is included that dignifies it. In objective idealism, human consciousness is viewed as a centredness that, downwards, is gradually related to the active forces in matter, but upwards, is similarly the expression of a higher level ontology that constitutes a *novum* and differentiates man – or possibly other self-reflective beings – from the animal kingdom. This kingdom however, has a dignity of its own, since in objective idealism there is no hard separation of God and world, but a professed *panentheism* in which the world is part of God, as we, for example, know it from German Idealism, Hegel or Alfred N. Whitehead's process philosophy (Cooper, 2006). Therefore, nature is not just a multitude of relations but also of ontological levels, determining

different types of dignity. It thus becomes possible to differentiate an entangled humanism, as professed by Latour, from a strict ‘eco-humanism’ in an idealistic sense that acknowledges different levels of dignity, a *scala dignitatis* in being. Such levels would be simultaneously based on the development of individual freedom and the capacity to create forms of communication ultimately able to formulate answers to the grand questions of existence. This *scala* is based on the growth of mind’s self-reflectiveness and communicative capabilities, not on the idea of a return to a state of pure information, as Lovelock suggested in his later work.

This panentheistic model of objective idealism, that is beyond the scope of this paper, would offer a possibility to overcome the challenges posed to Latour by the idea of God’s transcendence. Latour’s pragma-Catholicism can only cope with an immanent image of God, not with a transcendent one. In a panentheistic model however, the cosmos is divine as it is ontologically part of the larger whole of divinity. Now it is possible to think of actants pullulating everywhere and at the same time to think of a vertical distinction or progression of ontological levels. Adhering to panentheism would offer Latour the possibility of escaping the constrictions and physical determinations of Spinozistic pantheism, that he rightly criticises, because in panentheism it is possible to think of freedom and to escape – as Latour wants – the fatalistic determination of material causality.

This model therefore also helps escape from the indeterminacy of new materialism that tries to think of the natural animateness of things without falling prey to vitalism. New materialism is ambiguous because it situates itself in an indeterminate space between vitalism and physicalism. In the panentheistic model of objective idealism, it is however possible to think of elementary forces, laws of nature, biological consciousness and human self-reflection as stairsteps in the verticality of being. This verticality is not based on differences in materiality but on stages of a nonmaterial domain that guides and constitutes matter. This is the ‘objective’ part of objective idealism. The panentheistic model of idealism also makes it possible to escape from the alternative between vitalism and physicalism, which seems to be what Latour was looking for.

The fact that in the panentheistic model of objective idealism the material world and divinity can be thought of together, makes it also possible to reconcile science and religion from the perspective of their claims of truth and not just from their practices. The *tertium comparationis* would of course need to be something different from science and religion. Ethnography is an empirical science. It cannot therefore be ethno-anthropology, as Latour for personal reasons would like it to be, but should rather be speculative philosophy itself, especially a speculative humanism as Toulmin suggested. If we want to reconcile religion with

science, this cannot be done by one of the positive sciences. It should be done by a rationalist approach capable of systematically analysing and reflecting upon both (science and religion) from the outside in order to create a convergence in contents, to reconcile them. A philosophical perspective based on objective idealism seems especially fit for this purpose, since it takes itself to be separate from science and religion, and at the same time tries to unify them within a rationalist interpretation of being.

Such a perspective would also enable us to understand the core of Latour's compositionism without abandoning Lovelock's holism, which means without reducing the whole to the relating actants as Latour does. The panentheistic model makes this quite obvious, since the composition of the cosmos or of Gaia cannot count for the whole, which in this model is – by definition – something containing the cosmos. It then becomes possible to think about aspects of the whole, which are not the interrelating parts, such as, for example, the laws of nature, or the general law of self-regulation which is constitutive for Gaia. These are immaterial principles guiding, preceding and structuring the material components of the Earth, without being absorbed by them, as Lovelock has shown. It is quite promising that this idealistic model can simultaneously explain and cope with both Lovelock's holism and Latour's compositionism.

It is also obvious that the panentheistic model enables us to *resacralise* the cosmos and its material components in a more realistic way than with either Latour or Lovelock, because for both of them divinity is a metaphor, although they both sympathise with religious approaches without offering new religious contents themselves.

The last point concerns the fact that such an idealist perspective would make it possible not only to compare and scrutinise religions starting from the outside appearance of practices but also to '*ecumenise*', that is, to discover the common denominator of their inside, of the contents of religious beliefs. Ecumenical pluralism would then be more than just a juxtaposition or comparison of practices or beliefs, it would really be a dialogue about the basic contents and concepts of religious worldviews, an interconnection of contents possibly defining a common ground. Humanism would appear as the mediating discursive force, rationally and philosophically considering the different concepts of the meaning of life inherent in the different worldviews. It seems necessary that a discursive pragmatism that is open to different speculative worldview options and that at the same time acknowledges the possibility of mediation, reconciliation, convergence or even consensus, presupposes a domain of common rationality, not only including different religions but also science. Ecumenising would thus denote an epistemological practice, a dialogical effort, to find the largest possible common

ground between all religions. The ontological model of panentheism typical of objective idealism would find here its epistemological mirror: a consensus model that is not just social but is based on an objective point of convergence that actually exists in reality.

Needless to say, all these reflections about a possible alternative model that would resolve the problems of Latour's approach and at the same time maintain the central ideas of his ontology and conception of religious pluralism and humanism, require further development. It was my aim to point to a model that could ground eco-humanism in idealism. In the light of the many current efforts to revitalise idealistic positions – Vittorio Hösle (1999), Bernardo Kastrup (2014), and Iain McGilchrist (2021) being the major figures – this can definitively no longer be perceived as an old-fashioned or idiosyncratic endeavour.

5 CONCLUSION

The question guiding this paper was to what extent Latour's terrarism is capable of grounding an eco-humanist approach to religious pluralism. I have therefore analysed Latour's concept of nature articulating what can be seen as his particular version of new materialism. This implies a concept of matter that is neither vitalist nor physicalist, and that, in itself, is unable to coherently ground ecological humanism and ecumenic pluralism.

As we saw, one of the major problems is that Latour's ontology is unable to understand the idea of Gaia as a whole, which is inherent in Lovelock's systems approach, and can only interpret system theory in a nominalist way. Latour's network model is also, as we saw, too horizontal to present humanity as a responsible actor taking into consideration the Earth as a whole. Precisely this high capability of information processing is what constitutes the novum of humanity. This is the dangerous 'power' of humans, but also their moral capacity. Only humans can pose the question of the global repercussions of all their actions. It is possible, as I tried to show, to uplift the natural entities without lowering the importance of humanity in the cosmos, but this requires, as it became apparent, an idealistic point of view.

Another major problem is that Latour's new materialist ontology and his pragmativist view of religion can interpret divinity only as an immanent force or connectedness, whereas large parts of current religions presuppose the idea of a transcendent God. Latour's ontology, as it is right now, therefore cannot offer a suitable basis for a serious ecumenism, because it is not capable of integrating the idea of the transcendent God of different religions. There is thus no common ground where a religious pluralism can subsist that could enable a real dialogue on theological contents. Latour shows that there are formal and practical similarities between

science and religion, but his new materialist ontology does not delineate a structure capable of processing, including and integrating the particular truth claims of both science and religion.

Considering all this, we may therefore conclude that Latour's ontology falls short when it comes to offering a basis for an eco-humanist approach to nature and religious pluralism. But it is nevertheless possible, as I have tried to make clear, to reset the justified goals of Latour's philosophy – such as offering a basis for the concept of Gaia, or resacralising nature, or reviewing the concept of humanism in the light of the ecological crisis without abandoning a certain idea of human-centredness, or constructing a new worldview based on the contents of science and religion– if we reformulate Latour's new materialism in terms of objective idealism. The panentheistic model worked out by objective idealism reconciles the divine and the world, making possible a resacralisation of nature, enlarging the concept of dignity to include nature, and thus uplifting nature without lowering the importance of man. This model also creates the possibility for a convergence of science and religion, mediated by humanism. Objective idealism deals with positive science and sets its results in a larger speculative framework. Scientific facts then become an integral part of a normative worldview that is humanistic and not based on immediate divine revelation, but that nevertheless, thanks to its inclusiveness, is capable of covering the major claims of religions.

REFERENCES

- Audier, Serge (2017), *La Société écologique et ses ennemies. Pour une histoire alternative de l'émancipation*, La Découverte, Paris.
- Audier, Serge (2019), *L'Âge productiviste. Hégémonie Prométhéene, brèches et alternatives écologiques*, La Découverte, Paris.
- Barrow, John & Frank Tipler (1986), *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Barad, Karen (2007), *Meeting the Universe Halfway. Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, Duke University Press, Durham.
- Bennett, Jane (2010), *Vibrant Matter. A Political Ecology of Things*, Duke University Press, Durham.
- Beiser, Frederick (2002), *German Idealism. The Struggle against Subjectivism*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (M.).
- Bourdeau, Michel (2014), "Auguste Comte", in: *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Stanford University, Stanford.
- Braidotti, Rosi (2002), *Metamorphoses. Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming*, Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Braidotti, Rosi (2013), *The Posthuman*, Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Comte, Auguste (1975[1830]), *Cours de philosophie positive* (1830-1842), 2 vols., Hermann, Paris.
- Connolly, William E. (2017), *Facing the Planetary. Entangled Humanism and the Politics of Swarming*, Duke University Press, Durham.
- Cooper, John W. (2006), *Panentheism. The Other God of the Philosophers*, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids (Michigan).
- Deleuze, Gilles & Guattari, Félix (1980), *Mille-Plateaux. Capitalisme et schizophrénie 2*, Minuit, Paris.
- Dunham, Jeremy, Grant, Iain Hamilton & Watson, Sean (2011), *Idealism. The History of a Philosophy*, Routledge, New York.
- Gabriel, Markus (2015), *Fields of Sense. A New Rationalist Ontology*, Edingburgh University Press, Edingburgh.
- Gabriel, Markus (2011), *Transcendental Ontology. Essays in German Idealism*, Continuum, London.
- Galinier, Jacques & Molinié, Antoinette (2013), *The Neo-Indians. A Religion of the Third Millennium*, University of Colorado Press, Boulder.

Guattari, Félix (2013), *Qu'est-ce que l'Écosophie*, Lignes, Paris.

Guattari, Félix (1992), *Chaosmose*, Galilée, Paris.

Habermas, Jürgen (2019), *Auch eine Geschichte der Philosophie. Die okzidentale Konstellation von Glauben und Wissen*, vol.1; *Vernünftige Freiheit. Spuren des Diskurses über Glauben und Wissen*, vol.2, Suhrkamp Verlag, Berlin.

Hartmann, Nicolai (1942), *Neue Wege der Ontologie*, Kohlhammer, Stuttgart.

Hösle, Vittorio (1999), *Die Philosophie und die Wissenschaften*, Beck, München.

Hösle, Vittorio (1997), *Moral und Politik. Grundlagen einer politischen Ethik für das 21. Jahrhundert*, Beck, München.

Hösle, Vittorio (1990), *Philosophie der ökologischen Krise*, Beck, München.

Kastrup, Bernardo (2014), *Why Materialism is Balony. How true Skeptics know there is no Death and Fathom Answers to Life, the Universe, and Everything*, IffBooks, Hampshire.

Latour, Bruno (2017), *Facing Gaia. Eight Lectures on the Climatic Regime*, Polity Press, Cambridge.

Latour, Bruno (2015), *Face à Gaïa. Huit conférences sur le Nouveau Régime Climatique*, La Découverte, Paris.

Latour, Bruno (2010a), *On the Modern Cult of the Factish Gods*, Duke University Press, Durham.

Latour, Bruno (2010b), "An Attempt of a 'Compositionist Manifesto'", in: *New Literary History*, no. 41, p.471-490.

Latour, Bruno (1999), *Politiques de la nature. Comment faire entrer les sciences en démocratie*, La Découverte, Paris.

Latour, Bruno (1994), *Pasteur, une science, un style, un siècle*, Perrin, Paris.

Latour, Bruno (1991), *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes. Essai d'anthropologie symétrique*, La Découverte, Paris.

Lovelock, James (2020[2019]), *Novacene. The Coming Age of Hyperintelligence*, Penguin, London.

Lovelock, James (2015[2014]), *A Rough Ride to the Future*, Penguin, London.

Lovelock, James (2009[1979]), *Gaia. A New Look at Life on Earth*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Lovelock, James (2006), *The Revenge of Gaia. Earth's Climate Crisis & the Fate of Humanity*, Basic Books, New York.

Lovelock, James (1995[1988]), *The Ages of Gaia. A Biography of our Living Earth*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

McDowell, John (2009), *Having the World in View. Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (M.).

McGilchrist, Iain (2021), *The Matter with Things: Our Brains, Our Delusions, and the Unmaking of the World*, perspectiva, e-book version.

Prigogine, Ilya & Stengers, Isabelle (1984), *Order out of Chaos. Man's New Dialogue with Nature*, Bantam Books, New York.

Primavesi, Anne (2008), *Gaia and Climate Change. A Theology of Gift Events*, Routledge, London.

Primavesi, Anne (2003), *Gaia's Gift. Earth, Ourselves and God after Copernicus*, Routledge, London.

Primavesi, Anne (2000), *Sacred Gaia. Holistic Theology and Earth System Science*, Routledge, London.

Safranski, Rüdiger (2007), *Romantik. Eine Deutsche Affäre*, Hanser Verlag, Hamburg.

Serres, Michel (1990), *Le Contrat Naturel*, Flammarion, Paris.

Taylor, Bron (2010), *Dark Green Religion. Nature Spirituality and the Planetary Future*, University of California Press, Berkeley.

Toulmin, Stephen (2003), *Return to Reason*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (M.).

Toulmin, Stephen (1992[1990]), *Cosmopolis. The Hidden Agenda of Modernity*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Tylor, Colin (2017), *Common Good Politics. British Idealism and Social Justice in the Contemporary World*, Palgrave MacMillan/Springer, Cham.

Wandschneider, Dieter (2009), *Naturphilosophie*, in: *Faszination Philosophie*, Buechner Verlag, Bamberg.

REFERÊNCIAS

- AUDIER, Serge. **La Société écologique et ses ennemis**. Pour une histoire alternative de l'émancipation. La Découverte: Paris, 2017.
- AUDIER, Serge. **L'Âge productiviste. Hégémonie Prométhéene, brèches et alternatives écologiques**. La Découverte: Paris, 2019.
- BARAD, Karen. **Meeting the Universe Halfway. Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning**. Duke University Press: Durham, 2007.
- BARROW, John. **Frank Tipler. The Anthropic Cosmological Principle**. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986.
- BEISER, Frederick. **German Idealism**. The Struggle against Subjectivism, Harvard University Press: Cambridge (M.), 2002.
- BENNETT, Jane. **Vibrant Matter**. A Political Ecology of Things, Duke University Press: Durham, 2010.
- BOURDEAU, Michel. **"Auguste Comte"**, in: Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Stanford University: Stanford, 2014.
- BRAIDOTTI, Rosi. **Metamorphoses. Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming**. Polity Press: Cambridge, 2002.
- BRAIDOTTI, Rosi. **The Posthuman**. Polity Press: Cambridge, 2013.
- COMTE, Auguste **Cours de philosophie positive (1830-1842)**, 2 v. Hermann: Paris, (1975[1830]).
- CONNOLLY, William E. **Facing the Planetary**. Entangled Humanism and the Politics of Swarming. Duke University Press: Durham, 2017.
- COOPER, John W. **Panentheism**. The Other God of the Philosophers, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids (Michigan), 2006.
- DELEUZE, Gilles; GUATTARI, Félix. **Mille-Plateaux. Capitalisme et schizophrénie 2**. Minuit: Paris, 1980.
- DUNHAM, Jeremy; GRANT, Iain Hamilton; WATSON, Sean. **Idealism**. The History of a Philosophy. Routledge: New York, 2011.
- GABRIEL, Markus. **Transcendental Ontology**. Essays in German Idealism. Continuum: London, 2011.
- GABRIEL, Markus. **Fields of Sense**. A New Rationalist Ontology, Edingburgh University Press: Edingburgh, 2015.
- GALINIER, Jacques; MOLINIÉ, Antoinette. **The Neo-Indians**. A Religion of the Third Millennium. University of Colorado Press: Boulder, 2013.

GUATTARI, Félix. **Chaosmose**. Galilée: Paris, 1992

GUATTARI, Félix. **Qu'est-ce que l'Écosophie**. Lignes: Paris, 2013.

HABERMAS, Jürgen. **Auch eine Geschichte der Philosophie**. Die okzidentale Konstellation von Glauben und Wissen, v.1; Vernünftige Freiheit. Spüren des Diskurses über Glauben und Wissen, v. 2. Suhrkamp Verlag: Berlin, 2019.

HARTMANN, Nicolai. **Neue Wege der Ontologie**. Kohlhammer: Stuttgart, 1942.

HÖSLE, Vittorio. **Philosophie der ökologischen Krise**. Beck: München, 1990.

HÖSLE, Vittorio. **Moral und Politik. Grundlagen einer politischen Ethik für das 21. Jahrhundert**. Beck: München, 1997.

HÖSLE, Vittorio. **Die Philosophie und die Wissenschaften**. Beck: München, 1999

KASTRUP, Bernardo. **Why Materialism is Balony. How true Skeptics know there is no Death and Fathom Answers to Life, the Universe, and Everything**. IffBooks: Hampshire, 2014.

LATOUR, Bruno. **Nous n'avons jamais été modernes**. Essai d'anthropologie symétrique. La Découverte: Paris, 1991.

LATOUR, Bruno. **Pasteur, une science, un style, un siècle**. Perrin: Paris, 1994.

LATOUR, Bruno. **Politiques de la nature. Comment faire entrer les sciences en démocratie**. La Découverte: Paris, 1999.

LATOUR, Bruno. **On the Modern Cult of the Factish Gods**. Duke University Press: Durham, 2010a.

LATOUR, Bruno. "An Attempt of a 'Compositionist Manifesto'", in: **New Literary History**, no. 41, p.471-490, 2010b.

LATOUR, Bruno. **Face à Gaïa. Huit conférences sur le Nouveau Régime Climatique**. La Découverte: Paris, 2015.

LATOUR, Bruno. **Facing Gaia. Eight Lectures on the Climatic Regime**. Polity Press: Cambridge, 2017.

LOVELOCK, James. **The Ages of Gaia. A Biography of our Living Earth**. Oxford University Press: Oxford, (1995[1988]).

LOVELOCK, James. **The Revenge of Gaia. Earth's Climate Crisis & the Fate of Humanity**. Basic Books: New York, 2006.

LOVELOCK, James. **Gaia. A New Look at Life on Earth**. Oxford University Press: Oxford, (2009[1979]).

LOVELOCK, James. **A Rough Ride to the Future**. Penguin: London, (2015[2014]).

LOVELOCK, James. **Novacene. The Coming Age of Hyperintelligence.** Penguin: London, (2020[2019]).

MCDOWELL, John. **Having the World in View. Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars.** Harvard University Press: Cambridge (M.), 2009.

MCGILCHRIST, Iain. **The Matter with Things: Our Brains, Our Delusions, and the Unmaking of the World, perspectiva.** E-book version, 2021.

PRIGOGINE, Ilya; TENGERS, Isabelle. **Order out of Chaos. Man's New Dialogue with Nature.** Bantam Books: New York, 1984.

PRIMAVESI, Anne. **Sacred Gaia. Holistic Theology and Earth System Science.** Routledge: London, 2000.

PRIMAVESI, Anne. **Gaia's Gift. Earth, Ourselves and God after Copernicus.** Routledge: London, 2003.

PRIMAVESI, Anne. **Gaia and Climate Change. A Theology of Gift Events.** Routledge: London, 2008.

SAFRANSKI, Rüdiger. **Romantik. Eine Deutsche Affäre.** Hanser Verlag: Hamburg, 2007.

SERRES, Michel. **Le Contrat Naturel.** Flammarion: Paris, 1990.

TAYLOR, Bron, **Dark Green Religion. Nature Spirituality and the Planetary Future.** University of California Press: Berkeley, 2010.

TOULMIN, Stephen. **Cosmopolis. The Hidden Agenda of Modernity.** University of Chicago Press: Chicago, (1992[1990]).

TOULMIN, Stephen. **Return to Reason.** Harvard University Press: Cambridge (M.), 2003.

TYLOR, Colin. **Common Good Politics. British Idealism and Social Justice in the Contemporary World.** Palgrave MacMillan/Springer: Cham, 2017.

WANDSCHNEIDER, Dieter. Naturphilosophie, in: **Faszination Philosophie.** Buechner Verlag: Bamberg, 2009.