

A metaphysical turn?

Bruno Latour's *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence*

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A book bearing the title *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence*, but with the subtitle *An Anthropology of the Moderns*,* will immediately prompt the question: is this a work of metaphysics, as suggested by the title (which was lifted from the philosopher Étienne Souriau's 1943 work¹), or a work of anthropology, as the subtitle indicates? One thing is certain: it is not a matter of studying how certain human groups, the 'Moderns' in this case, agree to attribute 'genuine existence' to this or that thing rather than another – to bacteria, for example, rather than unicorns. Latour tells his reader at the very beginning: what we will be examining is not 'manners of speaking, as in speech act theory, but rather modes of being', going back to 'the old question of "what is X?" (what is science? What is the essence of technology?), but in the process we shall be discovering new beings whose properties are different in each case' (21). Some readers will be taken aback. Should the great battle that the social sciences fought to win their autonomy from metaphysics, for which refined procedures of objectification – statistics, surveys, ethnographic 'fieldwork' and so on – were deployed in the process, end with the restoration of Plato and Aristotle? Isn't there a choice to make here? Are we speaking of 'modes of existence' in general, or of the modes of existence for the Moderns? Metaphysics or anthropology?

Latour is far from being alone amidst his contemporaries in undertaking what we could call a *metaphysical turn* in the human sciences,² a reactivation of metaphysics in both 'analytic' and 'continental' contexts.³ But he is, perhaps, the most surprising. Is he not usually taken for a relativist sociologist, who wants to treat sciences the way Lévi-Strauss and Greimas treated myths and stories?⁴ Is this some sort of renunciation? No – it is a redefinition of metaphysics itself. Metaphysics shall no longer be seen as the enterprise of pronouncing a univocal truth

about Being in general, but as an altogether singular form of 'diplomacy', which allows us to give all our 'institutions' (both science and religion, politics and management, literature and psychology, custom and subsistence) their proper weight of reality, a weight that reducing them all to just one ('science') tends to deny.

From the semiology of scientific texts to flat metaphysics

It's been a long time since the social sciences have touched on metaphysics – it suffices to recall Durkheim's invention of what he called the *hyperspirituality* of collective consciousness.⁵ Latour, however, doesn't try to evaluate sociology's consequences for metaphysics, but to render the two disciplines *indiscernible*. Already in his short 1984 text on Pasteur,⁶ he appended an empirical study in the history of science with something like a short metaphysico-sociological treatise, entitled *Irreductions*, enumerated in the style of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, and adorned with scholia evoking Spinoza's *Ethics*. How should we understand the double regime that we find in almost all of Latour's works?

To answer this question, we will go back to the beginning, when things seemed the least conducive to metaphysics. Latour's *œuvre* begins with *Laboratory Life*, written with Steve Woolgar, where he tries to study science as an ethnologist, to understand what his hosts are saying to him, and what matters to them. But not to learn their science – the anthropologist of sciences would then *become* his object, as others have when they decided to go native – but to put his ignorance itself to use for the sake of knowledge. Anthropology is indeed characterized as a way of turning cultural difference – and thus of our initial lack of comprehension of the other's motives and customs – into an instrument of knowledge.

* Bruno Latour, *Enquête sur les modes d'existence: Une anthropologie des Modernes*, La Découverte, Paris, 2012; *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence: An Anthropology of the Moderns*, trans. Catherine Porter, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA 2013. 489 pp. £29.95 hb., 978 0 674 72499. Page numbers within parentheses in the main text are to the English translation. This article originally appeared in French in *Critique* 786, November 2012. It is translated here with kind permission.

It is not one field of knowledge [*une connaissance*] among others, because instead of presupposing a predefined theoretical framework (hypotheses that may be verified, depending on the ‘facts’ and ‘regularities’) it aims to vary the theoretical framework itself: anthropology will not accept anything as being generally true of all cultures unless it the source and target ‘cultures’ are equally seen as variants of each other.⁷ What could seem further from metaphysics?

And yet anthropology has been a true Trojan Horse for metaphysics in the human sciences – thanks to yet another twist of relativism. Indeed, the ‘others’, for their part, rarely characterize themselves as *cultural* beings. They often, rather, profess a sort of ‘multinaturalism’, as Viveiros de Castro calls it. Rather than having a unique ‘nature’ to which the (Western) sciences alone have access, on the one hand, and a plurality of ‘cultures’, composed of ‘representations’, ‘symbols’ or ‘social constructions’, on the other, anthropology should insist upon a plurality of natures, the sciences being only some of many ways of making nature. And so we don’t have mind (or culture, or language) on one side, and being (or reality, or the world) on the other, but various ways of being. Ontology becomes the discourse of anthropology, because the notion of *being* appears as the most powerful of the comparative operators under investigation. This doesn’t mean that it’s the least determinate, but rather that it’s the most intense, the one that requires the greatest displacement and disorientation. The idea of culture is just the consequence of a certain ‘ontology’. We have to be radical here: what we mean by ‘ontology’ is not a ‘theory’ concerning Being, or even ideas or an ‘understanding’ [*entente*] of Being; we mean the ways in which something can be determined as a being. Evans-Prichard’s informant was right to say that witches might not exist in Europe, but they do exist over there, in the country of the Zande.⁸ Such a statement should not be understood as a simple neutralization of the question (‘to each their own’); rather, it invites us to redefine ourselves (and the Zande) by the set of operations that have to be performed on our ontology in order to understand why there are sorcerers back there, but not over here. It is not a question of accepting that whatever someone or other declares exists does, indeed, exist, but of better understanding what actually exists in *our* world by *contrast* [*différence*] with what exists in others.

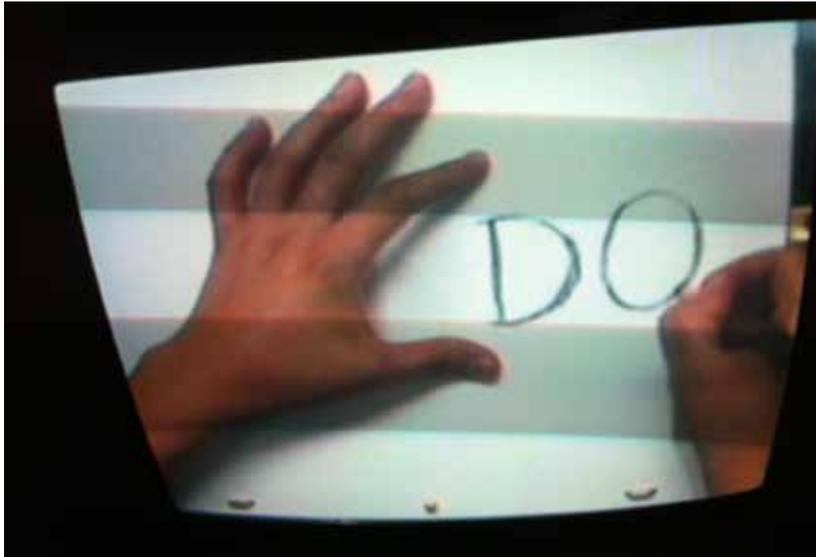
Bruno Latour has always identified as an anthropologist, and his polemic against Pierre Bourdieu’s ‘critical sociology’⁹ can be reread as one version of the

polemic between sociology (a more ‘classical’ science [*savoir*], so far as its epistemology is concerned) and anthropology (a modern *docta ignorantia*). But the ‘metaphysical turn’ cuts a peculiar figure in his work, thanks to the discipline with which it is ultimately identified: the sociology of the sciences. The sociology of the sciences, like anthropology, seems *a priori* distant from metaphysics. In fact, Latour’s work has been interpreted as the implementation of the idea that ‘scientific facts’ are produced by human actions, just as the cinematographic apparatus produces the optical illusion of movement: the scientists who consider themselves interested in elements of the external world (particles or microbes) are truly only interested in their own prestige. Latour has always rejected this reductionistic interpretation of his project. It’s not a question, so far as he’s concerned, of replacing spontaneous realism with a sociological idealism, but of overcoming this very opposition.¹⁰ Instead of a disjunction between mind and reality, knowledge and being, subject and object, or language and world, we must accept that being itself *is in the making*, and that this is just what happens in scientific activity. Instead of supposing a ‘ready-made’ [*tout faite*] reality, as Bergson put it, a reality waiting to be discovered, shouldn’t realism acknowledge that it is Being itself that is given in the work of ‘establishing the facts’, a Being in construction, ‘in the making’? Such is the intuition guiding Latour’s work from the outset: to replace a theory of the *correspondence* between a subject and an object with a theory of the *transformation* of one inscription into another – what the *Inquiry* calls ‘chains of reference’ (77). And so it is not a matter of neutralizing ontology with semiology, but of staking out another ontology, a process ontology (hence the constant references to Whitehead and James, but they could just as well be to Bergson or even Althusser or Spinoza), an ontology where the *essential* rewriting of every sign is confused with Being, understood as *mediation*.

Note that this idea that there is no contradiction between the rewriting of signs and the very revelation of Being is something that Latour comes to through his religious and theological commitments. In his inspired thesis on Péguy and Bultmann, defended in 1985,¹¹ he argued that God is not a transcendent absolute withdrawn beyond human discourse, but the *very being* that reveals itself when one exegesis is resumed [*reprend*] by another. We sense God when we take the Word back. The very strain and difficulty we feel – our ‘stammering’ – makes up our experience of God, and there’s no need for anything beyond

this.¹² This *test* that we're subjected to is sufficient to account for the experience.¹³ Latour thus applies to the sciences an idea that comes from theology. We see it at work everywhere in the *Inquiry into the Modes of Existence*: instead of a great obscurantist Transcendence, we find a multitude of well-defined 'mini-transcendences' (210–11) that let a chain of rewriting (and thus a semiotic line) go on, leaping across the characteristic 'hiatus' that perpetually threatens to interrupt it.

But there's a more specific reason for Latourian sociology's metaphysical turn, which has to do with



his use of the concept of *actor-network*, elaborated with Michel Callon.¹⁴ Scientific texts may (partially, provisionally, processually) capture or reveal certain beings, which might not be contained in *what is being spoken about*, but which actually *act in* the text. Thus Pasteur's microbes are not merely effects of discourse, but altogether real agents, even if their entire existence is contained in the *tests* to which they subject not just Pasteur and Pasteurians' writings, but also the architectural and political apparatuses [*dispositifs*] that they sought to put in place or reorient [*réaffecter*]. This entails a new ontological thesis: what we are dealing with here is not speaking beings, or minds tasked with representing the world, or the beings that are spoken of, or things waiting to be 'discovered', but an ensemble of actors all in the process of *acting* on one another, and which at any given moment are *distributed* between what may be considered [*relève de*] means of knowledge (Pasteur, his pipettes, his sheets of paper, etc.) and what may be considered things known. Instead of the dualism of knowledge, we encounter a *network of actors*.

This leads to a flattening out of all entities: actors everywhere, distributed on a single plane where they

have only a relational, molecularized existence – in the sense that the actor is not a global individual but a tiny operational element whose exact determination depends on its local operation in a scientific (or technical, religious, etc.) network. Humans and non-humans, large and small, artefacts and organisms, *all equally exist*. Manuel de Landa has coined the expression 'flat ontology' to characterize such a metaphysical position, an expression that would come to be widely adopted.¹⁵ The version of this position that we get with Latour has certain very specific traits: the object isn't mute, but speaks and acts. Conversely, the subject is not an extra-being: it 'knows' to the extent that it manages to 'enlist' other actants (*actants*, in Greimas's sense) into its own action, and *translate* others' interest. And so Pasteur becomes the apparent 'subject' of the 'revolution' that is attributed to him because he manages to *simultaneously* translate incompatible interests: the interests of microbes, hygienicists, and so on. The scientific text should be considered not as a description but as a compromise between various demands.¹⁶

This gives us a new definition of science, one that is closer, moreover, to the understanding that scientists have of themselves: it consists not in representing reality such as it is in the tissue of human symbolisms, but in creating apparatuses of translation that let us *make non-humans speak*. In any case, this simultaneously relational, active (and even always already reactive, involving actions on actions) and 'translational' Being is never wholly given: it is processural. We would need many pages to unfold all of this metaphysics' subtleties and snarls. We won't dwell on it any further: not only has Latour put it to use in various works, but Graham Harman, has devoted an entire book to its reconstitution and critical discussion.¹⁷ What matters to us is to show how Latour has gone from a semiology of scientific texts to an original metaphysics, which is at once relational, actantial [*actantielle*], processural and flat.

In the current situation surrounding the development of 'flat' metaphysics, this proposal's strength – and thus its remarkable capacity to *translate* others' positions – has to do with the fact that it's not, for Latour, an *a priori* metaphysical system, but a consequence and instrument of *empirical* work on

sciences, technologies, politics, religion, organizations, all this propounded with, in the backdrop, the ecological crisis.¹⁸ The breadth of this enterprise, its coherence, and its capacity to federate and renew a variety of empirical fields all the while building a bridge to some of the most refined developments in metaphysics, achieves something rare, and indeed unique, in the contemporary landscape.

Portrait of the metaphysician as a diplomat

We must, however, clear up an ambiguity regarding the status of this metaphysics. It aims to be resolutely 'non-critical', or, to use an expression introduced by the analytic philosopher Strawson, 'non-revisionist': it doesn't try to challenge our ontologies, just describe them. But, despite everything, doesn't it end up constructing *one* particular ontology *as opposed* to any other – the ontology of actor-networks? This tension is palpable in Graham Harman's book. In it, Latour appears as a metaphysician of the same rank as Leibniz, Spinoza or Avicenna. Harman *reifies* the methodological concepts of actants, networks, relations of force, and so on, into something like a conception of the world, or, more technically, a formal ontology. Harman is aware of this presentation's approximate character, since he admits to covering only what he calls the second period of the Latourian *œuvre*, which, he points out, was elaborated in a major work composed *at the same time* as the books of the first period, even if it remained unpublished when Harman's commentary appeared.¹⁹ This work was none other than the *Inquiry into the Modes of Existence* that Latour has just published. So has there been a turn within the turn?

More like a clarification [*mise au point*]. The 'network', in fact, is not Being-qua-Being, but merely *one* mode of existence among others. Formulating a *general ontology* – however 'experimental', like Whitehead's or Bergson's (which is to say, as hypothetical, provisional, progressive, and revisable as the sciences), and 'flat', like Meinong's, Harman's or Garcia's (which is to say minimal and non-exclusive) – is, for Latour, out of the question. What he opposes to all this is the 'principle of *irreduction*': 'Nothing is, by itself, either reducible or irreducible to anything else.'²⁰ It is possible that Latour had not, by 1984, grasped the full extent of the sort of pluralism that such a principle would demand. Because it deploys *just one* conceptual apparatus, *Irreductions* gives the impression of formulating the ontology of the 'matter' that, according to Latour, the phenomena he studies would be made of. But it is not enough to promote a flat ontology if

one is still trying to formulate the truth of the being of *every* being. This is just the sort of monotony that Latour objects to in his own concept of network, the monotony that led him, whatever the domain in question (religion, law, economics, science, etc.), to say

almost *the same thing* about all of them: namely, that they are 'composed in a heterogeneous fashion of unexpected elements revealed by the investigation'. To be sure, [we] are indeed moving ... from one surprise to another, but ... this stops being surprising, in a way, as each element becomes surprising *in the same way*. (35)

This quotation shows us that the difference between Latour and his predecessors is not in his metaphysics' contents, but in the way that it's employed: *diplomatically*. It is used to negotiate encounters and confusions of ontologies *in the plural*. This metaphysics is thus thoroughly anthropological, if we do define anthropology as the science that uses only the clashes experienced between our most deeply-rooted beliefs to produce not a body of knowledge [*un savoir*] about something, but a *redescription of ourselves* in the light of alterity.

The *Inquiry* begins with what Latour considers to be the failure of actor-network theory as an anthropology: 'the alternative *versions* my colleagues and I have proposed in order to account for the fabrication of objectivity have been hotly contested by some of the very researchers whose values we were trying to make comprehensible, at last, to others' (12). The allusion to the 'science wars' is transparent, and Latour magnanimously holds himself responsible for the misunderstandings to which his work has fallen victim at the hands of the 'rationalists'. For it is indeed 'Reason' that is being redescribed, and the anthropologist cannot be in the right *over and against* the ones he represents. If, before the scholastic judges of his day, Bartolomé de las Casas had been unable to *translate* the forms of life and thought that he sought to preserve from extermination, in such a way that those judges might see the 'Indians' as being like themselves, then we'd be right to say that he'd failed. In the same way, if the 'rationalists' don't accept the way that Latour redescribes them, in the light of their internal alterity, it's because he didn't do his job. The anthropologist is a *diplomat* and has no other aim: for him, war is defeat. He tries to dissipate misunderstandings by forcing *everyone* to think of themselves differently to make themselves equivalent to the other, modulo [*moyennant*] certain transformations. 'To speak well to someone about something that really matters to that person' (46) while 'standing

in the agora' (67), which is to say, to do it in such a way as to expose oneself to everyone's criticism: such is the ultimate norm that Latour gives his own discourse, and we might never find a more just and simple principle to characterize the epistemology of the social sciences in general.

How does any of this concern metaphysics? The conflicts it seeks to settle diplomatically bear, precisely, on Being. The problem comes not just from people having a poor understanding of the sciences, but from their having (imposingly, Latour would say) entrusted it with a monopoly on the truth of Being: nothing 'really exists' except for what can be 'scientifically established'. The rest depends on something else: on belief (religion, for example), interest (politics or economics), obedience (laws), and so on. But what Latour proposes in his *Inquiry* is a way of rendering the sciences and other 'practices of truth' (to take up an expression of Foucault's) both *comparable* and *differentiable*. What they all have in common is that they imply a 'hiatus' (a discontinuity, a gap to jump across – for the individual, for example, this could be the possibility of destruction; for a scientific demonstration, the risk of a gratuitous assertion; for law, the suspicion of a procedural flaw, etc.), a 'pass' (a continuity – for science, for example, this could be a structural identity, like that between the marks on a map and visible landmarks; for religion, faith in the reinterpretation of texts, etc.), and 'conditions of felicity or infelicity' that determine whether or not a 'pass' succeeds in jumping the 'hiatus'. With these three concepts, Latour redescribes almost everything that matters to us – including the persistence of things and the weight of habits – in a common vocabulary: all the 'modes of existence' are redefined as different kinds of discontinuities, which allow for different kinds of continuity, relative to variable truth-criteria. For example, the continuity of the sciences should go in two directions: one should be able to go from the farmyard cow to Pasteur's laboratory and back; by contrast, the continuity that characterizes the persistence of things is unidirectional.

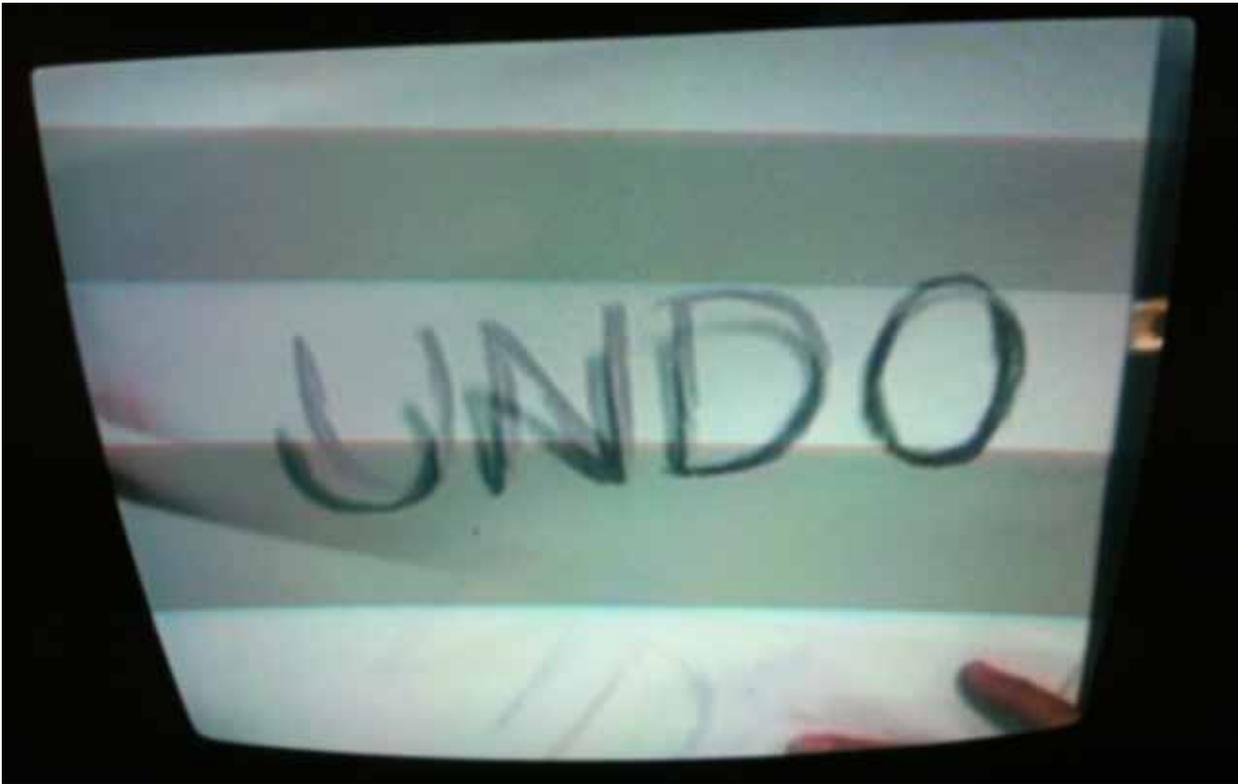
Latour thus resituates the different spheres of experience relative to one another in a table of three

abstract terms that – without failing to evoke Hegel – capture the entire diversity of the world in the different modalities of a contradictory game of identity and difference. This, however, is a Hegel who is neither dialectical nor linear but tabular and disjunctive (and more readable, to boot!). In doing this, Latour accomplishes something that, according to Deleuze, is the mark of every great philosopher: he carves the world up differently [*il redécoupe le monde autrement*]. And so psychology becomes a kind of sorcery, language a sort of fiction (and not conversely), technology something that long precedes humanity, and so on. The *Inquiry* is both a summary and a masterpiece: in it, Latour gathers together the fruits of his prior studies, and at the same time displays a project in all its force and coherence.²¹

Couldn't this all be done in a way that spares us the detour through the 'modes of existence', and just makes do with speaking about 'practices of truth', for example? No, because any reticence regarding ontological vocabulary risks giving the impression that the anthropologist says nothing about Being as such, but only about the ways of 'relating' to it, 'accessing' it, or 'referring' to it, and so on, as if



Being remained forever withdrawn. We have nothing to gain by avoiding the vocabulary of metaphysics, since the point is to challenge the exceptional (and self-destructive) privilege of the sciences, and show that this privilege is strictly metaphysical in nature, because it is grounded in the idea of a special access to Being in the form of objectivity.²² Latour simply turns this privilege against itself: there are not *praxes*, on one side, where the being of activities is contained (religion, for example, or psychology), and *poësis* on the other, where beings are really at stake (sciences,



technologies, perhaps economics, etc.); there are different ways of instituting objects, of making them exist (understanding 'objects' in the sense that Simondon gives the term in his book *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*,²³ from which Latour also claims to have taken the term 'mode of existence', in addition to Sourai). The aim of metaphysics is not to propose *an* ontology, but rather to exhibit the ontological singularity of technical objects, economic values, ordinary things, and so on. To each of these domains corresponds a different table of categories. 'To be' does not mean the same thing for a Higgs boson as it does for the Argentinian peso, but both equally *are*, and the task of the metaphysician is to exhibit that equality and that diversity.

A new task, a new method. Metaphysics shall not proceed by speculative anticipation, as it did with Whitehead, but by what we could call *contrastive recategorization*. The point is to learn not to confuse two different modes of existence, so that we can refine our categorial understanding of ourselves. The method, again, is anthropological. It sets out from *misunderstandings*, like any anthropologist interested in those equivocations without which 'intercultural' communication would not even be possible – as when someone mistakes a ceremonial gift for a form of barter or mysterious generosity. Metaphysical misunderstandings have to do with what Latour calls 'category errors', like the one that 'victims' of a penal process commit, for example, when they expect a

judgement to follow the logic of their pain and indignation. Or, typically, the one that leads sceptics to ask those who believe in ghosts to pass through science's 'chains of reference'. These errors, for Latour, are not contingent accidents that should be corrected. They are the true terrain of inquiry – its experimental condition and instrument of thought. Just as the anthropologist can only enter into the other's thought by turning it into a set of variations that must be carried out in order to correct immediate misunderstandings, the metaphysician will always define a mode of existence *by contrast* with another mode with which it has been confused. The *Inquiry* does not propose *one* ontology, but an experimental protocol that may allow others, perhaps, to continue the inquiry. It is thus an experimental metaphysics, but in a different sense of the term than what we get with Bergson or Whitehead: it's not a matter of attending to the revisable and hypothetical character of ontological theses, but of defining a genuinely anthropological or comparative method in metaphysics.

We can still, if we like, speak of Being in general – but only to say this about it: Being isn't the Separate (what should be reached) but the Confused (what should be disintricated, contrasted). What ontology has to resolve are not the problems of access, but the problems of equivocation. Its supreme value is not adequation, but precision, as Bergson says. It is not just a matter of saying that 'being' is said in many senses – which is what the entire doctrine of

categories is about – but of showing that it is only in the disjunction of its senses that ‘being’ has sense at all. Nothing *is* except for what has been *confused*. Once again, this does not require us to suppose a distinct reality behind the confusion, a reality whose rights we must re-establish; it is in *disambiguation*, or, to be a bit more technical, *contrastive recategorization* – and not in anxiety and death, as the existential tradition would have it – that we should seek out what Heidegger called the very phenomenality of Being and not, as the existentialist tradition would have it, in anxiety and death... Latour has delineated the conditions under which the question of being can be posed anew, tailored to our times. It is a doubly paradoxical ontology, indeed, because it makes not only *mediation* but *equivocation* its native element. But perhaps it is more coherent, and, above all, more pertinent to the contemporary context, less separable from our lives and knowledge, than any of those proposed by the great metaphysicians of the twentieth century, from Heidegger to Badiou. It’s to Badiou that we are tempted to compare and oppose Latour today: on the question of the universal and other subjects, they represent a decision that our times must make.

There is no diplomat of the Whole in itself

A work of such breadth can’t help but expose itself to both sweeping and detailed objections of every sort. But such objections will be meaningful only to the extent that they allow us to either contribute to Latour’s project, or propose an alternative version. We will limit ourselves to just one, which touches on the status of his metaphysics. The comparison with diplomacy is admirable, but it leaves one question unanswered. At the end of the day, who is Latour representing? Every diplomat is a representative, and has an impassioned interest in the one they represent. The diplomat cannot be a mercenary. He is not someone who, above the fray, tries to construct a habitable world for everyone out of love for us all, but someone who, to defend a mode of existence to which he is particularly attached, decides to lobby the *representations* that other modes have of it, and, conversely, to let that mode *represent* the others. His interest in the Whole is only ever secondary. It is what we could call a *singularity’s* excessive (but never absolute) difference from what it retroactively determines as *particularities* (subdivisions of a common genus, which are thus neutral and non-singular) which gives the Whole a ‘theoretical’ interest (something that can be spoken of, that has a meaning) or a ‘practical’

interest (a value to protect, something that counts and that matters in the calculus of our decisions).

Of what, or of whom, is Latour the representative? Of networks? Sure, but you could say that, these days, he is just as much the representative of ‘prepositions’ (i.e. of what allows us to read each mode of existence in its own key), and, increasingly, of each mode of existence, all of which he defends with passion. But is he, then, not something of a double, triple, quadruple, and so on, agent? Shall we say that he represents the ‘Moderns’ in general? In this case, diplomacy would not be exercised directly between the modes of existence themselves, but between different ways of making those modes of existence *coexist*, and we’d be dealing with a very classically oriented piece of anthropology. Unless it’s all on behalf of Gaia, that value-entity that Latour has reclaimed?²⁴ But Gaia does not constitute a ‘mode of existence’ in so far as it doesn’t take part in *this* negotiation.

Should we, then, say that Latour is the diplomat of religion? Biographically speaking, there’s no doubt about it. Latour himself has recounted that it was his Catholic commitments that led him to the idea that Being itself is mediation.²⁵ Indeed, we can’t help but notice that his definition of religion is very restrictive, in so far as it makes *Love* the essential concept of religion, in a way that could appear excessively Christian-centric. Perhaps this is a symptom of the anthropologist’s incapacity for complete self-estrangement, despite his great talent in recategorizing the rest of us. But in the end he must be his own judge on this score. He hasn’t ceased striving for a ‘modern’, which is to say *secularized*, world that could make a place for religion that would not be merely secondary, that would not relegate religion to the inoffensive space of ‘personal convictions’ or ‘moral values’ – but this has been at the price of a complete redefinition of religion. There is a bit of Pascal in Latour, but a happy Pascal, unlike the morose Pascal that Bourdieu imagined – it’s not by chance that Latour’s Pascalian meditations bear the title *Rejoicing*. A Pascal addressing the libertines, to convince them to join him through one more turn of libertinism. Or, more accurately, a Leibniz who, while obstinately seeking out ways to a compromise between the sciences and religion, discovers that that compromise implicates a wealth of beings that go far beyond the meagre dualism that the ‘first modernity’ proposed, the modernity of Descartes and Galileo.

Throughout, Latour formulates the most convincing and hospitable version of the contemporary metaphysical turn: it’s the one that satisfies both our

conscience by not suturing Being to any positivity whatsoever, and our passion for the variety of empirical sciences [*savoirs*], whether natural or social; it's the one that forges the strongest allegiance between the demand for systematicity, without which there can be no metaphysics worthy of the name, and the suspicion of unique and homogeneous ontological discourses, however 'flat' they might be; it is the one that surmounts both the hypercritical relativism of deconstruction and the rather ostentatious dogmatism in which the new, so-called 'speculative', metaphysics basks. There is no doubt about it: the *Inquiry into the Modes of Existence* has cleared a path. Latour has produced what will henceforth stand as one of the great philosophical proposals [*propositions*] of our time.

Translated by Olivia Lucca Fraser

Notes

1. É. Souriau, *Les Différents Modes d'existence* [1943], preface by B. Latour and I. Stengers, Paris, PUF, 2009.
2. Let us mention the works of Eduardo Vivieros de Castro (*Métaphysiques cannibales*, PUF, Paris, 2009; trans. P. Skafish as *Cannibal Metaphysics*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2014), Philippe Descola (*Par-delà nature et culture*, Gallimard, Paris, 2005), Tim Ingold (see especially *Lines: A Brief History*, Routledge, London, 2007) or Marilyn Strathern (in particular, *The Gender of the Gift*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1988). In another manner, consider the reflection on the ontology of social objects conducted by P. Livet and R. Ogien, eds, in 'L'Enquête ontologique. Du mode d'existence des objets sociaux', *Raisons pratiques* 11, 2000.
3. For the 'analytic' context, see E. Garcia and F. Nef, eds, *Métaphysique contemporaine*, Vrin, Paris, 2007; and for the 'continental' context, the works of Quentin Meillassoux (*After Finitude*, trans. Ray Brassier, Bloomsbury, London, 2010), and Tristan Garcia (*Form and Object*, trans. J. Cogburn and M.A. Ohm, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2014), to cite only the most notable texts.
4. See B. Latour and S. Woolgar, *Laboratory Life: The Construction of Scientific Facts*, Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ, 1986 [1979]. This is the reason why Latour is the privileged target of those who have been led in the name of 'rationalism' to fight in the so-called 'Science Wars', especially Sokal and Bricmont (*Intellectual Imposture*, Profile Books, London, 1998; published in the USA as *Fashionable Nonsense*, Picador, New York, 1999).
5. See É. Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method, and Selected Texts on Sociology and Its Method*, trans. W.D. Hall, Simon & Schuster, London, 2014 [1894]. See also P. Maniglier, 'Institution symbolique et vie sémiologique. La réalité sociale des signes chez Saussure et Durkheim', *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, vol. 2, no. 54, 2007, pp. 179–204.
6. B. Latour, *The Pasteurization of France*, trans. Alan Sheridan, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 1993 [1984].
7. For an elaboration of this definition of anthropology, see R. Wagner, *The Invention of Culture*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1981; de Castro, *Métaphysiques cannibales*; and P. Maniglier, 'Le tournant anthropologique d'Alain Badiou', in I. Vodoz and F. Tarby, eds, *Autour d'Alain Badiou*, Germina, Paris, 2011.
8. 'I once heard a Zande say about us: "Perhaps in their country people are not murdered by witches, but here they are".' E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1937, p. 540.
9. B. Latour, *Changer de société, refaire de la sociologie*, La Découverte, Paris, 2005.
10. On this point, see the beginning of *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. C. Porter, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 1991. 'I am really talking about the peptides themselves, not simply their representation in Professor Guillemin's laboratory' (p. 5).
11. One article remains of this thesis: 'Pourquoi Péguy se répète-t-il ? Péguy est-il illisible?', *Péguy écrivain*, Klincksieck, Paris, 1977, commented upon and developed by M. Gil, *Péguy au pied de la lettre*, Cerf, Paris, 2011.
12. On all of this, one may consult Bruno Latour, *Rejoicing, or the Torments of Religious Speech*, trans. Julie Rose, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2013 [2002], and chapter XI in *Inquiry*, which is dedicated to religion. Latour has, himself, explained the importance of this theological discovery: see, in particular, B. Latour, 'Biographie d'une enquête – à propos d'un livre sur les modes d'existence', to appear in *Archives de Philosophie*, and available at www.bruno-latour.fr.
13. The concept of *test* [*épreuve*] is the one that Latour ends up using to characterize the ontological experience. See B. Latour, 'Irreductions', in *The Pasteurization of France*, p. 170 and *passim*.
14. See M. Callon, 'Some Elements of a Sociology of Translation: Domestication of the Scallops and the Fishermen of St Brieuc Bay', in J. Law, ed., *Power, Action and Belief: A New Sociology of Knowledge?*, Routledge, London, 1986, pp. 196–223.
15. See M. de Landa, *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy*, Continuum, New York, 2002, p. 47.
16. On all of this, one must go back yet again to M. Callon's foundational article, 'Some Elements of a Sociology of Translation'.
17. G. Harman, *Prince of Networks: Bruno Latour and Metaphysics*, re.press, Melbourne, 2009.
18. On this last point, see, in particular, B. Latour, *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy*, La Découverte, Paris, 1999.
19. See Harman, *Prince of Networks*, p. 6.
20. Latour, *Pasteurization*, p. 158.
21. Each mode of existence silently harks back to at least one earlier book by Latour or one of his colleagues: the mode he calls REF (reference) evokes his numerous works on the sociology of science; politics (POL), his *Politics of Nature*; psychology (which he calls MET, for metamorphosis), the works of Tobie Nathan; TEC, his own works on the sociology of technology (in particular, *Aramis, or the Love of Technology*); religion (REL), *Rejoicing*; LAW, *The Making of Law*; ORG, his works on the sociology of organizations, etc.
22. This is what Latour means when he explains that metaphysics is the metalanguage of the Moderns (pp. 21–2), in terms of which they ultimately evaluate each practice's value.
23. Gilbert Simondon, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*, forthcoming from Univocal.
24. 'It is now before Gaia that we are summoned to appear' (p. 9). See also B. Latour, 'Steps Toward the Writing of a Compositionist Manifesto', *New Literary History* 41, 2010, pp. 471–90, as well as the interview published in the same issue.
25. Latour, 'Biographie d'une enquête', p. 126.