

State of Nature – War against Nature.

Bruno Latour's Hobbesianism

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Abstract

This paper has two aims: On the one hand we show how certain life-forms lead to certain metaphysical and ontological conceptions and world views. We specifically concentrate on Thomas Hobbes and Bruno Latour – Hobbes being influenced by the English Civil War and Latour by climate change and the Covid-19 pandemic. On the other hand, we show how Latour's work has been influenced by Hobbesian thought throughout his whole career and how he tries to adapt Hobbesian concepts such as state of nature, contract, Leviathan to his actor-network-theory and the later Gaia-hypothesis. Both thinkers share a critique of bifurcation of nature that divides reality into the artificial and the natural, premodern and modern. Due to the influence of the English Civil War and climate change and Covid-19, we concentrate on the concept of war.

Keywords: Thomas Hobbes, Bruno Latour, State of Nature, Gaia Hypothesis, Actor-Network Theory, Anthropocene

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1. Signals from other Life-Forms

Long ontological or cosmological reasonings start from inferences built on fundamental presuppositions. The latter however becomes only evident in certain life-forms. Many different authors have come up with such meta-philosophical observation: Karl Marx, Wilhelm Dilthey, Ludwig Wittgenstein, William James and Paul Feyerabend¹. They all have different understandings of “life” or experience. In Dilthey for example it seems that the individual experience (“Erlebnis”) forms interpretations of life in which certain presuppositions are favored².

If this observation is correct than ontologies and cosmologies that operate with different words might seem very alien to us and might be – to use an idiom like in science fiction – *signals from a different form of life*. In this case, it seems as if we might be dealing with life forms that are placed on other continents or that took place a long time ago.

But the fact that we recognize them as signals from a different form of life means that we recognize them nevertheless as signals from a life-form, meaning, they cannot be *totally* alien to us. When Wittgenstein says that we would not understand

¹ K. Marx, *Deutsche Ideologie*, in K. Marx, F. Engels, *Gesamtausgabe*, I. Abteilung. Band 5, Berlin 2017; W. Dilthey, *Das Wesen der Philosophie*, in Id., *Gesammelte Schriften*, V. Band: *Die Geistige Welt*, Stuttgart and Göttingen, 1990; L. Wittgenstein, *Über Gewissheit*, Werkausgabe Band 8, Frankfurt am Main 1984; W. James, *Pragmatism. A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking*, in Id., *Works of William James*, Vol 10, Harvard 2000; P. Feyerabend, *Farewell to Reason*, New York 1987.

² W. Dilthey, *Das Wesen der Philosophie*, cit., pp. 401, 405.

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the lion if he would speak³, he might have meant that the lion's life-form is too far away from ours to recognize its signals as signals. A conceptual scheme which is recognized as a conceptual scheme cannot be, as Davidson has put it, entirely different from ours⁴. Thus, to receive a signal from a different life-form means that it cannot be too different from ours, otherwise we would not recognize its effects as signals at all. Let us now look at some old texts to apply these methodological reflections onto philosophical remarks about nature.

The very famous saying by Anaximander which is reported by Simplicius, a Commentator of Aristotle's *Physics*, can be taken as a signal from an alien life-form in this sense, a form of life that is long gone:

And the things out of which birth comes about for beings, into these too their destruction happens, according to *obligation*: for they pay the *penalty* (*dikê*) and *retribution* (*tisis*) to each other for their *injustice* (*adikia*) according to the order of time—this is how he says these things, with rather poetic words.⁵

Simplicius himself seems to take this saying as a *poetical* expression because he tries to understand it in the conceptual framework of his own form of life, which is the one we still live in, in Europe and North America, and the alleged

³ L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, in Id., *Werkausgabe*, Band 1, Frankfurt am Main 1984, Part II, §568.

⁴ D. Davidson, *On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme*, in «Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association», 47 (1973), pp. 5-20.

⁵ DK 12, A 9, Loeb (2016): *Early Greek Philosophy*, pp. 282-285.

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Western society.⁶ In this form of life the human realm of morality and justice is strictly *separated* from nature, the realm with strict necessities, not open to human bargaining. This remark by Simplicius in his commentary on Aristotle's *Physics* dates back to probably 520 CE. By then Plato let Socrates establish the distinction between *nature* (*physis*) and the *human world*, where justice and laws (*nomoi*) do not represent a necessity, but rule as a result of human *decision*⁷. Anaximander himself was born more than 900 years *before* that (611 BE). This gap is the reason, why Simplicius believes that Anaximander talked in a "poetic way" by which he probably meant: a *metaphorical* way. At some time between 611 BE and 520 CE the life form from which Anaximander was talking was lost, disappeared, and what was self-evident in it stopped to be self-evident. Direct relations between justice and nature could not be meant literal anymore, because it was not evident that justice was taking place in nature. To read Anaximander's quote in this way is neutral to the alternative of the "mystical" and the "naturalistic" (or cosmological) interpretation.⁸

When later authors like Hobbes and Latour try to unify the natural and the moral or legal again, they try, in our interpretation, in a sense to move back at least in writing, to

⁶ Concerning the concept of "the West" or "western society" cf. I. Morris, *Why the West Rules – for Now: The Patterns of History, and What They Reveal About the Future*, New York, 2010.

⁷ cf. Phaedros 230d, Phaidon 96a-d, *Nomoi*, passim.

⁸ Cf. J. Mansfeld, *Anaximander's Fragment: Another Attempt*, in «Phronesis», 56 (2011), pp. 1-32, p. 10, esp. footnote 33. The mystical interpretation sees the separation of individual things from the apeiron as a sin, a fall, for which they have to pay, the cosmological one sees a description of becoming and destruction of worlds or world-orders in this fragment.

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Anaximander's life-world. The problem with this though is that philosophical texts alone cannot change life worlds or cultures.

After showing the differences and relations between metaphorical and literal meanings, by relying especially on the theories from Max Black, we will analyze more concretely Hobbes' state of nature and Latour's interpretation of Hobbes' philosophy for his actor-network-theory and his latest work in *Facing Gaia*, that is the war against nature. Of special interest will not be Hobbes' political theory of representation, but rather the ontological fundament that underlies it theoretically⁹. We will show not only that Hobbes and Latour try to go back to Anaximander's life-form, but that experiences of war, distress and misery such as the English Civil War for Hobbes or the Covid-19 pandemic and cancer for Latour can be seen as experiences forming presuppositions for their cosmological and ontological reasonings. We conclude that current crises such as Russia's aggressive invasion of Ukraine, the Israel-Gaza war, consequences of climate change, and other conflicts can be looked at from a Hobbesian and Latourian perspective of the state of nature, or a war of each against each.

⁹ The relationship between Latour and Hobbes has been analyzed mainly in political philosophy in regard to the concept of representation of non-human actors (M. Brown, *Speaking for Nature: Hobbes, Latour, and the Democratic Representation of Nonhumans*, in «Science and Technology Studies», 31 (2018), pp. 31-51) and the concept of constitution (R. van Krieken, *The Paradox of the two Sociologies: Hobbes, Latour and the Constitution of Modern Social Theory*, in «Journal of Sociology», 38 (2002), pp. 255-273). For a reading of Latour as metaphysician especially in regard to object-orientated philosophy see (H. Harman, *Prince of Networks, Bruno Latour and Metaphysics*, Melbourne 2009).

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2. Separations and Unifications of Semantic Fields and the Bifurcation of Nature

According to Max Black metaphors create new meanings by the *interaction* between *two different subjects or realms*¹⁰. An example from science for such an interaction can be found in electromagnetism. Physicists say that electromagnetism travels *in waves*. According to Mary Hesse, who picks up Black's view in order to interpret the role of metaphors and models in science, this means that a semantic interaction between the description of electromagnetic phenomena and the description of water-waves is introduced, which in turn leads to a new conception of waves without a medium¹¹. Accordingly, two separated semantic "fields" start interacting with one another and create a new meaning.

Today we are assuming that the realms of nature, the realm of justice and the realm of human artifacts are described in separate semantic fields. We talk even of nature and norms or nature and technology as opposites. But what we often forget is that separate semantic fields have to be *created*. That *a* has "nothing to do" with *b* is not an ahistorical linguistic fact. Rather, these separations are established at certain times. It is a matter of historic research to find out when, how and why this took place. The establishment of separate semantic fields might not only reveal differences and be an epistemic gain. It can also conceal interactions between phenomena and thus have epistemic costs. Probably both is the case in most such developments, that is, developments of separation and unification of semantic fields. Separations might take place by developing more and new differentiated

¹⁰ M. Black, *Metaphors*, in Id., *Models and Metaphors. Studies in Language and Philosophy*, Ithaca, 1962.

¹¹ M. Hesse, *Models and Analogies in Science*, Notre Dame, 1963.

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terminologies and unifications happen by inventing metaphors that were able to freeze into new general terms. Thus, metaphors being the root for concepts as Nietzsche assumed¹². The Greek “hyle”, originally a term used for construction timber, was used by Aristotle as a metaphor for the stuff out of which something is made. It then became a very general concept, “matter”, without which we could not imagine the discipline of physics.

Our hypothesis is therefore that Anaximander’s saying was *not* metaphorical *in his time*, because the separation between the semantic fields of terms for natural phenomena on the one hand and for norms on the other hand was not established yet. Thus, justice and injustice (*dike* and *adike*) could be applied to *all* things and not just to humans. Only later it became metaphorical – at least after Plato – when these two realms were distinguished firmly from one another. The gain of this development was perhaps more detailed description and then also a more creative activity in the realm of human norm creation. The loss of this separation was what Alfred North Whitehead called later on «the bifurcation of nature», that is, the separation into a creative mind being related to values and norms versus a blind matter as being the supposed essence nature¹³. Latour considers the bifurcation as an illusion of the modern mind and wants to dissolve it¹⁴. But the revolt against this bifurcation started long before Latour¹⁵.

¹² F. Nietzsche, *On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense*, in Id., *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, Vol. 11, Stanford 1999.

¹³ A. N. Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, London 1925.

¹⁴ D. Debaise, *Nature as Event. The Lure of the Possible*, translated by M. Halewood, Durham 2017.

¹⁵ In the context of the bifurcation of nature, Latour also speaks about the difference between matters of concern and matters of fact (B. Latour *What Is the Style of Matters of Concern? Two Lectures in Empirical*

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3 Hobbes' Revolt against the Bifurcation between the Natural and the Artificial

An early revolt against the bifurcation of nature, but which is usually not considered as such, can be found in the works of Thomas Hobbes. Although Hobbes was in many aspects of his thinking an Aristotelian, he did not accept Aristotle's distinction between the artificial and the natural, between *techné* and *physis*. Insofar as artifacts are the result of normative decisions and the constructive creativity of humans ("this gadget should follow the rules xyz in order to fulfill the goals abc") they are not natural. The field in which Hobbes dissolved the distinction between the natural and the artificial is politics, which he related to the natural phenomenon of fear. Hobbes' theory of politics is well known, but to put it in a nutshell: Hobbes considers states as artifacts and organisms, created by man, to get out of the natural state of war in which they live in constant fear, considering organisms as artifacts made by God. Thus, humans imitate Nature's or God's creativity when they enter the peaceful political state and leave the fearsome natural realm.

It is well known that it was Hobbes' own personal experiences of the English Civil War that encouraged him to come up with this political theory in the "Leviathan"¹⁶. No reader of Hobbes, including Latour, to which we will turn shortly, misses to highlight Hobbes' personal experiences in this context. With "Behemoth" Hobbes even wrote a history of the English civil war. In his Autobiography Hobbes even relates his birth, that is to say, a very natural event to the political facts of war amongst nations, by identifying his own coming into this world

Philosophy, Spinoza Lectures at the University of Amsterdam, published as independent pamphlet, Van Gorcum, Amsterdam 2005).

¹⁶ A. P. Martinich, *Hobbes: A Biography*, Cambridge 1999.

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with the birth of fear as the key-term of philosophical theorizing:

In Fifteen Hundred Eightyeight, Old Style, when the armada did invade our isle, [...] I'th early spring, I, a poor worm was born [...] And herupon it was my mother dear, did bring forth twins at once, both me and Fear.¹⁷

Hobbes's autobiography is not an argument for his fundamental position in political philosophy. It can be understood as a philosophical gesture through which he refers to his life and his basic plausibilities, similar to what Adorno does in *Minima Moralia*, an autobiographical collection of aphorisms about the life of the educated German exile in capitalist California in the 1940s.¹⁸ It is fear as a natural phenomenon which is aroused by any type of violence, also by war among humans, that drives the development of political units as artifacts according to Hobbes. Fear is a fundamental philosophical emotion for Hobbes. And he refers to its relevance for his thinking by pointing to his early life. It is out of fear that humans create the artificial organism of the state in which they can find a refuge from the dangers of natural war. "Fear" is thus the concept that can be used as both a *natural* and a *political*

¹⁷ T. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, With Selected Variants from the Latin Edition of 1668. Ed. Edwin Curley, Cambridge 1994, p. LIV.

¹⁸ On the philosophy of gestures in general, see G. Maddalena, *The Philosophy of Gesture and Technological Artifacts*, in T. Breyer, A. Matthias Gerner, N. Grouls & J. F. M. Schick, *Diachronic Perspectives on Embodiment and Technology: Gestures and Artifacts*, Heidelberg & New York 2024, pp. 97-110. For an essayist account of reflexive or autobiographical gesturers as a means in philosophy, see M. Hampe, *Pointing to oneself, Simone Weil and What it Could Mean to Write a Philosophical Diary*, in *Handling ideas*, 2025: <https://handlingideas.blog/author/collectionvibrantb4631a01c1/>.

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term, like “dike” in Anaximander. To preserve your organic life is the most elementary motif of any animal and also of humans. Putting this preservation into danger necessarily leads to fear. Threatening others with weapons can be considered the most elementary political move that is aiming at causing fear in your competitor for resources. The costs of weapons and the unpleasantness of a life in constant fear are the causes for the foundation of the political state. Thus, the limits between the natural and the political disappear once you think about the state in a Hobbesian way as a child of fear. It is therefore significant that the very first word of the book in which Hobbes develops this political thoughts, “The Leviathan”, is not “Norm” or “Contract”, but “Nature”, which he defines implicitly as follows:

Nature (the art whereby God hath made and governs the world) is by the Art of man, as in many other things, so in this also imitated, that it can make an Artificial Animal. For seeing life but as motions of limbs [...] why may we not say, that all Automata [...] have artificial life? [...] For by Art is created that great Leviathan, called Commonwealth, or State (in latine Civitas) which is but an Artificial Man [...] and in which the sovereignty is an artificial Soul.¹⁹

In this way Hobbes dissolves at the very beginning of his theory of politics the Aristotelian distinction between *physis* and *techne* or the *natural* and the *artificial* by considering natural creatures as artifacts of God produced for certain aims, and the artifacts of man as imitations of nature. Not only machines but also the state is an artifact in this sense: it is an

¹⁹ T. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, cit., p. 6.

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artificial animal, an artificial man, created for the protection of natural man.

By reasoning in this manner Hobbes moves back to Anaximander: dissolving the boundary between nature and the human realm, which Socrates and Plato erected. Before Hobbes the terms “competition”, “power” and “war” were not applied to the realm of nature in the Socratic/Platonic setting of bifurcation. Hobbes applies them to what he calls in Ch. 13 of the *Leviathan* «the Natural Condition of Mankind as concerning their Felicity and Misery».

Additionally, he might also be the first philosopher who thinks about nature as a realm of resources: «if any two men desire the same thing, which nevertheless they cannot both enjoy, they become *enimies*; and in the way to their End [...] endeavour to *destroy* or *subdue* one another»²⁰ Later on he calls this “competition”. War is thus a conception that is not only a situation between established states, but a much more general term. It can be applied inside and outside the realm of politics because there is war, according to Hobbes, *before* there is a political state. War is just the known *disposition* among humans *to fight*, a disposition not limited to political man:

For War consists not in battel only, or an act of fighting, but in a tract of time, wherein the Will to content by battel is sufficiently known: and therefore the notion of *Time*, is to be considered in the nature of war; as it is in the nature of weather [...] So the nature of War consists [...] in the known disposition thereto (actual fighting, M.H.) during all the time there is no assurance to the contrary. All other time is Peace²¹

²⁰ *Ivi*, Lev., 87*, our emphasis.

²¹ *Ivi*, p. 88f.

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With this generalized conception of war Hobbes made it possible for later theoreticians, such as Latour, to speak in a non-metaphorical way about a «war against nature» or a war against entities that cannot be described as organized in a political way. Latour's reframing of our understanding of the natural and the political can thus be understood as a direct consequence of Hobbes' attempt to unify the natural and the artificial and thereby the world of human values and norms with the realm of natural necessities²².

This becomes even more clear, if we look again at Hobbes' own experience of many different plague epidemics in England and on mainland Europe, and the social and political chaos they entailed²³. Moreover, Hobbes was not just a vivid reader, but also the translator of Thucydides' History of the Peloponnesian War, in which the Athenians have to fight both, the Spartans at the doorstep of their walled city and the lethal outbreak of the plague, which Thucydides himself gets infected with and Pericles dies of. Hobbes thus knew that not just conflicts between humans, but also natural catastrophes can be harmful for the Leviathan as an organism. This becomes especially evident in chapter 29 of the Leviathan, where Hobbes compares for example rabies as a danger to the health of the body politic²⁴.

²² In this way, Hobbes anticipates dissolutions of the boundary between the natural and the artificial as they have occurred in the work of Donna Haraway, see D. Haraway, *A Cyborg Manifesto*, New York 1999. For an overview about this development, see M. Hampe, *Das Ende der Natur, Beobachtungen zum Verschwinden einer kategorischen Unterscheidung*, in «Zeitschrift für Kulturphilosophie», 1 (2023), pp. 63-74.

²³ L. Ribarevic, *Thucydides and Hobbes on Epidemics and Politics: From the Plague of Athens to England's Rabies*, in «Croatian Political Science Review», 60 (2023), pp. 7-30.

²⁴ *Ibidem*. From this perspective, the power of and security provided by the Leviathan is not just due to the fear of war, but also the fear of epidemics such as the plague, see D. J., Kapust, *Plague and the Leviathan*, in «Hobbes Studies», 36 (2023), pp. 221-233.

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4. Latour's Translations and the Omnipresence of Leviathans in a World of Fractals

Hobbes' theory has had, throughout history many admirers and opponents. One of those admirers is Bruno Latour. In 2012, Bruno Latour and Graham Harman met on a sidewalk in Copacabana and discussed political theory, an encounter, Harman processed two years later in his book entitled, *Bruno Latour, Reassembling the Political*.

Interestingly, Harman writes in this book to have asked Latour that day in Brazil «about his earliest enthusiasm in political philosophy»²⁵. Without hesitation, Harman continues, Latour answered: 'Hobbes'. Harman then concludes that in «retrospect, it was a question that hardly needed to be asked»²⁶.

Indeed, while looking at Latour's entire body of work, Hobbes plays over and over again a central role. Hobbes appears as early as the 1980's and the beginning of the development of the actor-network-theory. Later then, in the 1990's he plays a significant role in what is one of Latour's most famous books, *We Have Never Been Modern*. Yet, still in his latest works on Gaia and climate change, Hobbes enters Latour's thought. In the following paragraphs, we will reconstruct Latour's interpretation of Hobbes' political theory and show how his usage of Hobbesian thought has changed throughout time and how Latour has integrated more and more Hobbesian concepts and ideas into his own theories²⁷.

It is perhaps in Latour's rather neglected book, *Irreductions*, from 1984, that his systematic Hobbesianism can be found first. Already, after the first pages, he mixes Hobbesian concepts such as force with the recently developed actor-network-theory: «What

²⁵ H. Graham, *Prince of Networks*, cit., p. 5.

²⁶ *Ibidem*.

²⁷ Thus, Latour cannot only be accounted as a «Neo-Hobbesian», his Hobbesianism itself has changed over time, because Latour has changed his theories over and over again, see D. Inglis, A.-M. Almila, *Fabricating the Truth About Bruno Latour(s)*, in «Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia», 79 (2023), pp.. 1143-1162.

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is a force? Who is it? [...] In place of 'force' we may talk of [...] "actants"»²⁸. But such force is of course never atomistic and isolated, but relationally directed towards another actor, or body as Hobbes would say: «No actant is so weak that it cannot enlist another. Then the two join together and become one for a third actant, which they can therefore move more easily. An eddy is formed, and it grows by becoming many others. [...] An actant can gain strength only by associating with others. Thus it speaks in their names»²⁹. Hence, by not only relating to one another, but also forcing each other into association, networks are for one formed and two growing. They become bigger.

Such bigness, or growth, however, is not necessarily to be understood materialistically. Latour, being a vivid critique of classical dualisms, or premodernism as he would say, cannot accept to speak of actors as material entities. Hence, when actors are relating to one another in order to form networks, association happens through a so-called translation process. Or, as the last quote says: an actor speaks in the name of another.

Many times, Latour has highlighted that he borrowed the concept of translation from Michel Serres³⁰ but what does it mean concretely? Earlier than *Irreductions*, Latour co-authors a paper with Michel Callon in 1981, in which the concept of translation is explained:

By translation we understand all the negotiations, intrigues, calculations, acts of persuasion and violence, thanks to which an actor or force takes, or causes to be conferred on itself, authority to speak or act on behalf of another actor or force:

²⁸ B. Latour, *Pasteurization of France*, Translated by A. Sheridan, J. Law, Cambridge/London 1988, p. 159.

²⁹ *Ivi*, pp. 159-160.

³⁰ B. Latour, M. Callon, *Unscrewing the big Leviathan, or How Actors Macrostructure Reality and How Sociologists Help Them to Do So?*, in K. Knorr, A. Cicourel (eds), *Advances in Social Theory and Methodology*, London 1981, pp. 277-303, Footnote 6, p. 301.

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“Our interests are the same”, “do what I want”, “you cannot succeed without going through me”.³¹

Seen ontologically, translation could not be described in more Hobbesian terms. Yet again, and most interestingly, all these concepts are not materialistic. Negotiating, intriguing, persuading and calculating are all rather features of the mind, or even of rationalization, than of the body. Exempt is violence, which indeed refers usually to physical violence, unless Latour and Callon mean symbolic violence, a specification not given by the authors.

Moreover, translation is a process happening neither automatically nor smoothly. It is a process that is marked by strain and effort. Negotiation implies listening, demanding and compromising. Intriguing entails secret planning. Calculating means reasoning and evaluating. Persuading is linked to will power and relentlessness. And violence signifies to trespass.

Lastly, translation also means to grow quantitatively and to gain strength, because more and more actors are associated and represented. Manpower is expressed by a common will, a common spokesman: «Whenever an actor speaks of “us”, s/he is translating other actors into a single will, of which s/he becomes spirit and spokesman. S/he begins to act for several, no longer for one alone. S/he becomes stronger. S/he grows»³². The emergence of a spokesman, the gain in strength and the submission under one common will, obviously means that there are first, micro- and macro-actors, and second, power relations. Some actors are simply controlling more than others: «*There are* of course macro-actors and micro-actors, but the difference between them is brought about by power relations and the constructions of

³¹ *Ivi*, p. 279.

³² *Ibidem*.

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networks»³³. Defined like this translation means in the end nothing more than to sign a contract: «The contract, however, is merely a specific instance of a more general phenomenon, that of translation»³⁴. And once a contract is formed, well, consequently, a Leviathan emerges.

Before, quoting a longer passage that describes such an emerging Leviathan, two remarks have to be made: One, as is famously known, actors are for Latour not solely human beings, but are conceptualized in an anti-anthropocentric way. In Latour's paper examples for actors are colonies of baboons and Électricité de France, including electrical engines, engineers, batteries and so on. Two, before the Leviathan emerges, for Hobbes a state of nature reigns in which there is a war of all against all. It is the negotiations, intrigues, calculations, acts of persuasion and violence that describe this brutal and atrocious state of nature:

You want peace, so do I. Let us make a contract. Let us return to the baboons: Sara is eating a nut. Beth appears, supplants her, takes her place and her nut. Let us return to EDF: a laboratory is studying the fuel cell. The engineers are questioned, their knowledge simplified and summed up: 'we shall have a fuel cell in 15 years'. The Leviathan once more: we have made a contract, but a third party appears who respects nothing and steals from us both. The baboons once more: Sara yelps, this attracts her faithful friend Brian. He is now enrolled, he approaches and supplants Beth. The nut falls to the ground and Brian grabs it. The EDF once more: the Renault engineers read through the literature again and alter their conclusions: 'There will be no fuel cell in 15 years.' All this is still 'the war of all against all'. Who will win in the end? The one who is able to

³³ *Ivi*, p. 280.

³⁴ *Ivi*, p. 279.

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stabilize a particular state of power relations by associating the largest number of irreversibly linked elements.³⁵

It is interesting to see how for Latour Leviathans are omnipresent, since they are not only transgressing classical ontological domains such as politics, economy, technology and nature, but also present as soon as there is some form of a translation. If a translation happens as soon as two actors are associating, then Leviathans must be almost everywhere, because single and isolated actors are rather uncommon. Yet, it is important to highlight at this point the *fractal* structure of Latour's actor-network-theory. That is to say, every actor contains in himself again a certain number of actors, which in turn again can be decomposed in other actors. This process is *ad infinitum*. In other words: Leviathans structure other Leviathans. It is a constant powerplay of negotiations, intrigues, calculations, acts of persuasion and violence between Leviathans, and only those that are capable of maintaining peace *within*, are stabilized.

Yet, such multiplicity of fighting Leviathans begs the question, if such combat situation is not rather a state of nature – a state of war between Leviathans – than an actual peace state. Latour and Callon do not answer this question affirmatively, but negatively, because for them it is rather simple: there is no meta-discourse or meta-perspective that allows anyone to overlook the messy situation of combatting Leviathans. The answer rather lies in the epistemological stance of *following the actors* and this means to observe how actors grow or shrink, how they transform and evolve. And since Leviathans are constantly translating and evolving and transforming, it is not so much about finding an end-state of

³⁵ *Ivi*, pp. 292-293.

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peace and stabilization but uncovering the dynamics of interacting Leviathans.

6. From the Leviathans to Gaia. Latour's later Anti-Modern Developments

In contrast to such ontological emphasis on Hobbesian concepts, Latour's *We Have Never Been Modern* interprets Hobbes' political philosophy from a rigorous exegetical point of view. Hobbes is here, together with Robert Boyle, an inventor of the modern world, meaning that he finds himself on the side of subjects, politics and values; whereas Boyle is situated on the side of objects, nature and facts³⁶. Hobbes is thus rather a creator of modern dualisms than somebody who tries to avoid them. But is Latour's interpretation of Hobbes in *We Have Never Been Modern* then not contradicting his interpretation of the 1980's, where Hobbesian concepts are translated into the actor-network-theory?

The crux obviously lies in the anti-anthropocentric conception of an actor. Yet, Latour is fully aware of the fact that Hobbes never intended to extent his political theory onto other realms such as Électricité de France and baboons. In fact, two times Latour highlights in *Unscrewing the Big Leviathan* that they are leaving Hobbes behind³⁷. The interpretation of *We Have Never Been Modern* must consequently be understood as a literal reading, whereas the texts from the 1980's represent an extension of Hobbesian thought to the actor-network-

³⁶ B. Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, Translated by C. Porter, Cambridge 1993, p. 27.

³⁷ B. Latour, M. Callon, *Unscrewing the big Leviathan*, cit., pp. 281, 286.

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theory. The latter is thus an update of Hobbesian concepts onto an anti-anthropocentric ontology³⁸.

Facing Gaia in turn, published in 2015, stands rather in the continuation of the extension of Hobbes' thought, even though the dualisms of the moderns is fully acknowledged. *We Have Never Been Modern* must therefore be considered as an important intermediary.

First, it needs to be highlighted that Gaia is in the end nothing else than a wider and bigger network of associating and dynamic actors:

Lovelock describes a planet that is alive [...], meaning that any time you add an entity, even if it's a gas, a rock, a worm or a mat of microorganisms, it vibrates with all the historical specificity of the other agencies intertwined in it.³⁹

Gaia is not a so-called God of totality, a whole-part relationship, but an actor-network.

Second, Gaia is exposed to the state of nature of a war of all against each, but with the very crucial difference that this time the state of nature is not diminishing. Leviathans are thus not capable of establishing peace. Rather, the state of nature is growing and expanding into the present and future:

Today, what is strange is that this state of nature is not situated, as it was for Hobbes, in the past; it is coming toward us, it is our present. Worse still: if we are not inventive enough, it could well become our future, too. [...] we have a war of all against each, in which the protagonists henceforth may not

³⁸ For a more detailed discussion between Hobbes and Latour and the attempt of reading Latour as a thinker of the Enlightenment (A. Blok, Anders, T. E. Jensen, *Bruno Latour, Hybrid Thoughts in a Hybrid World*, Oxon 2011).

³⁹ B. Latour, *Why Gaia is not a God of Totality*, in «Culture and Society», 34 (2017), pp. 61-81, p. 73.

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be just the wolf and the lamb, but also tuna and CO₂, plant nodules or algae, in addition to the numerous human factions that disagree about almost everything.⁴⁰

As the quote shows Gaia remains anti-anthropocentric, but this time in the form of a state of nature of war. In other words: a growing state of nature is a war against nature, or put more simply: facing Gaia.

Such is the view of pre-moderns. Moderns however believe that they are protected by a so-called State of Nature (in capital letters to distinguish from the Hobbesian state of nature) that «encompasses everything and that has *already* unified the world in a single whole»⁴¹. Therefore, the moderns refuse to wage war, to have enemies and consequently they renounce politics.

This last conclusion is only understandable, if we have a look at Latour's Carl Schmitt reference in *Facing Gaia*. The important reference in this context is Schmitt's distinction between friend and enemy. This distinction states that war between friend and enemy can only be determined by a sovereign, that is, a political unity such as a nation state for example⁴². All forms of conflicts happening within the boundaries of a sovereign state are thus only small fights that can be solved through simple rules of organization and police force⁴³. Hence, Schmitt's famous utterance that the sovereign is he who decides on the state of emergency, the state of *exception*, the state of war.

⁴⁰ B. Latour, *Facing Gaia, Eight Lectures on the New Climate Regime*, Translated by C. Porter, Cambridge 2017, p. 201.

⁴¹ *Ivi*, 209.

⁴² C. Schmitt, *Der Begriff des Politischen*, Berlin 2015, pp. 43-44.

⁴³ B. Latour, *Facing Gaia*, cit., p. 305.

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Following Schmitt, Latour's war against Gaia allows only two possibilities: on the one hand one can give up the distinction between friend and enemy, but then one also gives up the political and the possibility of being at war so that one must accept the State of Nature as a sovereign with its norms and natural laws; or, on the other hand, one distinguishes between enemy and friend and thus accepts the political and the definition of a sovereign by going to war, that is, in this case: facing Gaia⁴⁴. Even though Latour would like to opt for the pacifistic alternative, he chooses the bellicose one out of reasons of security. The result is Latour's works on a new republic, a new assembly, a *res publica*, a so-called *Dingpolitik*, that brings together representatives of different territories struggling, debating, arguing with one another⁴⁵. Latour's state of war is a state of adequate representation and willingness to discuss and *fight symbolically* in an assembly amongst representatives of human and non-human actors alike:

[we must not abandon the project of seeking security and protection, peace and certainty, under another Leviathan yet to be invented [...]. The desire to build the Republic, the veritable *res publica*, is always before us. Thanks to the emergence of Gaia, we are becoming aware that we had not even begun to outline a realistic contract, at least a contract that might hold up on this sublunary Earth of ours.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Ivi, pp. 310-311.

⁴⁵ B. Latour, *From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik. An Introduction to Making Things Public*, in B. Latour, P. Weibel, *Making Things Public. Atmospheres of Democracy Catalogue of the show at ZKM*, Cambridge 2005.

⁴⁶ B. Latour, *Facing Gaia*, cit., p. 201.

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As this quote shows, Latour seeks once more not only Hobbesian terminology, but also Hobbesian ends of security and protection, peace and certainty by a Leviathan – even though the concept of fear is not as present in Latour as in Hobbes. Carl Schmitt's political philosophy remains theoretically at this point only a means to an end. More precisely: Latour needs Schmitt to show that the Hobbesian state of nature is growing, to *declare* war on nature, in order to then abandon Schmitt, and to build and construct a new Hobbesian Leviathan. Again, Latour's war remains of rather symbolic than physical character⁴⁷.

Such physicality changes in another later publication, *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climate Regime*, in which Latour does not mention Hobbes, but clearly adopts a Hobbesian perspective. He tries to show that class struggle and other sorts of fighting underlie a so-called geo-logic, meaning that social and political struggles are dependent on places, *loci* or *territories* as he says⁴⁸. We have shown above that Hobbesian state of nature resides on territorial fights over resources such as materials, women, property, minerals and so on.

⁴⁷ An overview of Latour's reading of Schmitt is given by S. Turner, *Latour and Schmitt: Political Theology and Science*, in «Perspectives on Science», 31 (2023), pp. 40-56. Similarly to (M. Brown, *Speaking for Nature*, cit.), Turner highlights the important role of human representation of non-human actors in Latour, going thereby beyond Hobbes and also Schmitt, especially the latter's political meta-theology. This opens up the question to what extent Latour can be seen as an adherent republicanism, first in the sense of Philip Pettit, meaning that language plays an important role for representation, see P. Pettit, *Made with Words: Hobbes on Language*, in Id., *Mind, and Politics*, Princeton 2008; second in the sense of Quentin Skinner, as rhetoric and persuasion play also an important role for Latour, see Q. Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes*, Cambridge 1996.

⁴⁸ B. Latour, *Down to Earth, Politics in the New Climate Regime*, Translated by C. Porter, Cambridge 2018, p. 119.

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Yet, again, Latour tries to argue specifically against materialism by highlighting that is not the paradigm of nature as a resource for production that prevails, as materialism usually does according to him:

Thus, as early as the seventeenth century, when economists began to take “nature” into account, they took it as a mere “factor in production,” a resource that was precisely external, indifferent to our actions, grasped from afar, as if by foreigners pursuing goals that were indifferent to the Earth.⁴⁹

Hence, the problem that

[we can indeed take nature as a resource to exploit, but with Lovelockian agents, it is useless to nurture illusions. Lovelock’s objects have agency, they are going to react – first chemically, biochemically, geologically – and it would be naïve to believe that they are going to remain inert no matter how much pressure is put on them.⁵⁰

So, again it is actor-network-theory that ontologically criticizes materialism that according to Latour looks at matter as a passive resource.

To contrast materialism, Latour highlights an anti-anthropocentric *system of engendering* that

brings into confrontation agents, actors, animate beings that all have distinct capacities for reacting. It does not proceed from the same conception of materiality as the system of production, it does not have the same epistemology, and it does not lead

⁴⁹ *Ivi*, p. 139.

⁵⁰ *Ivi*, pp. 143-144.

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to the same form of politics. It is not interested in producing goods, for humans, on the basis of resources, but in engendering terrestrials – not just humans, but all terrestrials. It is based on the idea of cultivating attachments, operations that are all the more difficult because animate beings are not limited by frontiers and are constantly overlapping, embedding themselves within one another.⁵¹

Yet, the problem is not so much that Latour does not believe in the effectiveness of resources. The problem of materialism is that it believes to be able to exploit resources without harmful consequences, because the resources are themselves agents and active: "We have benefited from every resource; now these resources, having become actors in their own right, have set out, like the Birnam Wood, to recover what belongs to them." (Latour 2018, 191) Once, the multiplicity of actors on territories become active and fight each other, the consequence is migration of innumerable people and animals and natural phenomena in general:

we shall have to identify these migrations also, migrations without form or nation that we know as climate, erosion, pollution, resource depletion, habitat destruction. Even if you seal the frontiers against two-legged refugees, you cannot prevent these others from crossing over.⁵²

This also means that, once such war against Gaia is waging, there is no home for anybody in this new perspective on territories. Everybody is migrating and fleeing. The problem about the fight over resources in the Hobbesian sense is thus

⁵¹ *Ivi*, p. 153.

⁵² *Ivi*, p. 28.

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that human actors need to understand the resources they are exploiting are being defended by non-human actors.

To flesh out all this rather theoretical work, Latour has published a book, *After Lockdown: A Metamorphosis*, in which he delivers yet another Hobbesian point of view, this time however a personal *experience* of war: the war against Covid-19 and cancer⁵³.

For, as the French title of *Où suis-je?*, *Where am I?* makes explicit, it is now the body of the individual that becomes a cartography, a territory that allows different other actors to adhere. War is now a state of the body itself. The body becomes the battlefield:

I don't just sense this war of each against all through one country's occupying another, as in the past, but through the undue occupying of one or other of the beings that allow me to subsist. This particular insect, this chemical product, this metal, this atom – yes, it's down to atoms – to say nothing of the climate – ah, the good old climate which we'd like so very much to forget about but which will never let go of us⁵⁴

This time it is thus not solely an anti-anthropocentric and growing state of nature, but a *bodily* state of nature, with so-called new lines of conflict:

⁵³ J. Birnbaum, *Bruno Latour: "L'apocalypse, c'est enthousiasmant"*, in «Le Monde» 2019, https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2019/05/31/bruno-latour-l-apocalypse-c-est-enthousiasmant_5469678_3232.html. For an intellectual biography on Bruno Latour see H. Schmidgen, *Bruno Latour in Pieces. An Intellectual Biography*, translated by G. Custance, New York 2015.

⁵⁴ B. Latour, *After Lockdown. A Metamorphosis*, Translated by J. Rose, Cambridge 2021, p. 189.

There, no need to go far to recognise new lines of conflict: they cut across our lungs. [...] The whole planetary respiratory system is disrupted and at all levels, whether it's a matter of the masks we're gasping behind, the smoke from fires, police repression or the sweltering temperature imposed on us, all the way up to the Arctic. The cry is unanimous: 'We're suffocating!'⁵⁵

In other words: the new lines of conflict are now felt and experienced physically. War is not only symbolical, at last it has become physical, or bodily.

This reformulation has to do with the experience of the Covid-19 pandemic, its consequent lockdown, Latour's experience of having cancer, or put more generally: personal experiences of the body. In fact, Latour admits to connect to the philosophies of William James and Alfred N. Whitehead – as he has done so many times – to highlight the role of the body:

That was the inspiration behind the great alternative philosophical tradition of last century, the tradition spearheaded by William James and Whitehead. Having a body means learning to be affected. The antonym for 'body' is not 'soul, or 'mind', or 'consciousness', or 'thought'; it is 'death' – just as the antonym for Gaia is Mars, the inert planet.⁵⁶

6. A topical Conclusion

Extreme violence by organized crime in South and Central America, civil war in Haiti, Libya, Myanmar, Sudan and in the Congo, nation states fighting each other such as Ukraine and

⁵⁵ *Ivi*, pp. 188-189.

⁵⁶ *Ivi*, p. 169.

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Russia, India and Pakistan, mass surveillance and population control of the Uighurs in China, territorial disputes in the South China Sea, terrorism active in Sahel and the Middle East.⁵⁷ According to the UN Refugee agency, as of 2023, around 117.3 Million people were forcibly displaced⁵⁸. Similarly, climate change entails mass movement of migratory and non-migratory animals⁵⁹. Territories are re-shaped, actors on the move, human and non-human alike. The sheer multiplicity of types of warfare and conflicts is expressed by what Mark Galeotti has called, *The Weaponization of Everything*⁶⁰. In a world in which all sorts of modes of existences, as Latour would say, are highly developed, everything can become a weapon: social media and information, finance and economic sanctions, the law and lawfare. Today, wars are not just fought on land, sea and air, but also in outer space and in cyberspace⁶¹. Accordingly, for Galeotti the «war/peace binary» has become a fruitless conception. Rather «we are heading into an age when everyone may be in at least some kind of state of “war” with everyone else, all the time, and it is just a matter of degree»⁶². According to Galeotti, even though having enemies and allies will not disappear, the old concepts of war, enemy, victory

⁵⁷ See in this regard the impressive map (Global Conflict Tracker) by the Council on Foreign Relations: <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker>.

⁵⁸ UNHCR, *Figures at a glance*, 2024 <https://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/who-we-are/figures-glance>.

⁵⁹ S. J. Cooke, *Animal migration in the Anthropocene: threats and mitigation options*, in «Biological Reviews» 2024.

⁶⁰ M. Galeotti, *The Weaponization of Everything. A Field Guide to the New Way of War*, New Haven and London 2023.

⁶¹ F. Ledwidge, *Whether we like it or not, war is coming to space. The Insider*, in «Reorts, Analytics», 2024, <https://theins.ru/en/opinion/frank-ledwidge/269008>.

⁶² M. Galeotti, *The Weaponization of Everything*, cit., p. 209.

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need to be re-thought. He concludes in a Hobbesian fashion: «Welcome to a potential world of permanent, sublimated conflict, of the political struggle of all against all»⁶³.

Similarly, in March 2022, Latour wrote in a slightly different Hobbesian style, that he is doubly filled with *fear*: on the one hand, the war in Ukraine, the result of a land grabbing Russian prince in the old-fashioned style of the Moderns and on the other hand, the most recent published report by the IPCC on the severity of climate change – also, the result of the Moderns⁶⁴. Closely connected to Galeotti and Latour, the historian Ian Morris, in his book, *Why the West Rules for Now*, has highlighted five horsemen of apocalypse that make empires and world orders disappear: mass migration, epidemic disease, climate change, state failure, famine⁶⁵. The first three of these points are already fully present. The last two should follow soon, if Morris is right. Geography has always been the motor for change in history, Morris concludes, war the mechanism to reach it. Hobbes and Latour would probably agree.

The state of nature is a conception useful when reality is growing in instability, when violence and social-political chaos are on the rise, and classical terms of ontological dualisms do not suffice to make events understandable. Hobbes and Latour wanted to grasp the dangerous and violent reality of their times, beyond any conceptual bifurcations. For Hobbes it was the life-form during the English Civil War and the exposure to plague pandemics, while for Latour it was Climate Change. Both, civil war, plagues and climate change,

⁶³ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁴ B. Latour, *Quelles entre-deux Guerres?* AOC, 2022, <https://aoc.media/opinion/2022/03/02/quelles-entre-deux-guerres>.

⁶⁵ I. Morris, *Why the West Rules*, cit.

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are still around, which in turn is the reason why Hobbes' and Latour's thoughts are still relevant today.

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