

# Internal Others

## Ethnographies of Naturalism

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'Naturalism' is invoked with increasing frequency by anthropologists as a distinctively Western ontology which posits a shared unitary nature, upon which are overlain multiple 'cultures', 'perspectives', or 'worldviews'. But where, if at all, is this ontology to be found? Anthropologists working outside Europe and America have in various ways been urging colleagues to challenge 'our' naturalism in order to be able to take seriously alternative ethnographic realities. In the meantime, anthropologists and STS scholars who study European or American settings ethnographically have increasingly been arguing that 'we' were never (quite) naturalist to begin with. This double move shores 'naturalism' up as a conceptual object, but renders it ethnographically elusive, a perpetually receding horizon invoked in accounts of something else. This introduction explores this paradox and presents the subsequent articles' various experiments with what might seem an impossible task: the ethnography of naturalism itself.

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'Naturalism' is invoked with increasing frequency by anthropologists as a distinctively Western or Euro-American ontology which posits a shared unitary nature, upon which are overlain multiple 'cultures', 'perspectives', or 'worldviews'. Naturalism emerges to different effect in the work of anthropologists who are concerned with alternative ways of relating to non-humans, such as 'animism' (Descola 2005; Willerslev 2007), 'totemism', 'analogism' (Descola 2005), 'perspectivism' (Viveiros de Castro 1998; Kohn 2007; Fausto 2007), or 'shamanism' (Pedersen 2001, 2007, 2011). Yet these accounts of 'naturalism' have significant overlaps with other anthropological descriptions of characteristic aspects of a 'Western ontology': Cartesian dualism (Ingold 2000; Evens 2008), perspectivalism (Law 2004; Strathern 2011),<sup>1</sup> or 'the modern constitution' (Latour 1993).<sup>2</sup>

This special section devoted to the topic of naturalism has its origins in an ostensible paradox. On the one hand, contemporary anthropologists who invoke naturalism in their writing are often – in effect – writing *against* it. That is, they strive to deploy ethnographic and conceptual resources to suspend 'our' naturalist assumptions in order to take seriously alternative ontological possibilities, such as animism, shamanism or perspectivism. On the other hand, anthropologists and others working with purported



'Euro-American naturalists,' and particularly those studying human–animal relations in contemporary Europe or America, seem to suggest that 'we' have, in fact, never been naturalist. Indeed, ethnographic accounts of self-ascribed Western practices have tended to focus on the many ways in which the purported canon of naturalist ontology is perpetually *transgressed* in the context of pet-keeping, gardening, or even in scientific research itself (Despret 2002; Haraway 2003; Milton 2005; Degnen 2009). It is as though, in the words of Tim Ingold, 'once we get to know people well – even the inhabitants of nominally western countries – not one of them turns out to be a full-blooded westerner' (Ingold 2000: 63).

The papers in this special section start from the suggestion that Western naturalism has consequently become an exotic and unknown anthropological 'other' at the very heart of our imagined 'self'. Rather than an empirical object of study for ethnographers, naturalism features as an ever-receding horizon, a sort of vanishing point for anthropological arguments about something else (alternative ontologies elsewhere, or non-naturalist spaces and practices 'at home'). The aim of this collection of papers is therefore to ask: what would it mean to attempt to take seriously the practices and beliefs which lie at the very heart of Western naturalism? Is an ethnography of naturalists and naturalism possible?

Contributors to this collection explore a range of concrete empirical cases – from an international team of climate researchers working in Amazonia, to keepers in a Catalunan chimpanzee sanctuary; from British ecologists studying earthworms, to behavioural scientists working in the Kalahari, and Guatemalan cooking schools specializing in Western style and taste. All of these cases open up on large-scale theoretical questions. Can we really speak of a unified 'us' as individual practitioners of ethnographic fieldwork trained in the natural and social sciences – let alone speak of a naturalist ontology unifying diverse Euro-American peoples? When we utilize or examine Euro-American naturalism, what do we privilege: the Euro-Americans or their naturalism? Is naturalism a mere straw man which collapses under close ethnographic investigation of its purportedly archetypal figures, spaces and practices? Or can anthropology take naturalism seriously as an ethnographic object without dissolving either its object or itself? And what new ethical and epistemological possibilities for both collaboration and critique are opened up by such an approach?

## **Naturalism and the Ontological Turn**

As Terence Turner has noted, both Descola's and Viveiros de Castro's accounts of naturalism take off, in different ways, from the problems raised by what he terms 'late structuralism', a tradition for which the relations between nature and culture were a theoretical cornerstone, and Amazonia an ethnographic source of conceptual insight (Turner 2009). For Descola, Naturalism is characterized by two combined premises: that humans and non-humans share an external physical form; and that only the former, additionally, possess an interiority: a 'mind' or 'soul'. This is the polar opposite of animism, in which all entities are continuous when it comes to interiority (all have 'souls'), but are distinguished by their bodies. Totemism (same interiority, same physicality) and Analogism (different interiority, different physicality) map the two

remaining permutations of these contrasts between interior/exterior and continuity/discontinuity (Descola 2005, 2007).

Viveiros de Castro (1998), on the other hand, proposes a binary in which the key operative contrasts are multiplicity/singularity, and nature/culture: whereas 'our' ontology is mononaturalist and multiculturalist, Amerindian perspectivism is multinaturalist and monoculturalist. Whereas Euro-American ontology has humans taking different cultural points of view on a shared natural world, Amerindian perspectivism has a singular, generic 'human' viewpoint taken by a range of beings with different natures: *homo sapiens*, as it were, but also jaguar, peccary, etc. All of these entities see the world in the same way (they have a village, manioc beer, they hunt peccary, etc.) but the things they see are different (for instance, what the jaguar would call beer, we would call blood). In an elegant recursive twist, both of these arguments introduce alternatives to 'naturalism' which are no longer *cultural* alternatives (that would be a still 'naturalist' way of thinking about them) – but, more radically, *ontological* ones.

Descola's and Viveiros de Castro's accounts of naturalism are conceptually connected to a broader set of anthropological arguments in which Western or Euro-American ontology is contrasted in various ways with alternatives drawn from the ethnography of Melanesia (Strathern 1988), Inner Asia (Pedersen 2011), circumpolar hunting societies (Ingold 2000; Willerslev 2007), or Cuba (Holbraad 2012). These works are also in communication with studies of contemporary Western science, technology and medicine, both within and beyond anthropology (Law and Mol 2002; Mol 2002; Latour 2004; Stengers 2010, 2011; McDonald 2012). The notion of an 'ontological turn' (Henare et al. 2007) has sometimes been invoked to characterize this constellation of arguments and its broader theoretical moment.

However, the authors above deploy the notion of ontology in different ways and to different effects, as both internal discussions and external commentators have shown (Latour 2009; Carrithers et al. 2010; Jensen et al. 2011; Heywood 2012; Laidlaw 2012). They differ in what they emphasize of Western, Modern or Euro-American ontology but also, and more generally, in the extent to which their use of regional designations (when they do use them) are substantive or merely heuristic. They differ in the extent to which their aim is descriptive, performative or methodological (or, more frequently, a combination of the three). They differ in the extent to which they advocate an exit from epistemological or representational concerns altogether, or simply a more reflexive reconsideration of ontological and epistemological questions in tandem. These differences operate between authors, but also at times between single authors' different works. And in some cases, it is precisely from an oscillation between different types of claims (descriptive/performative, regional/heuristic, substantive/methodological) that these arguments draw their rhetorical effect or analytical insight.

We cannot hope to give, in such a brief introduction, a comprehensive sense of (the anyway disputed question of) where each individual author and work fits within this complex landscape – for a sense of which, readers could turn to the comments and debates mentioned at the head of the previous paragraph. In any case, the purpose of this special section is not to provide yet another discussion of the ontological turn as such, but to pick up some of the issues it raises in relation to the anthropology of naturalism. However, some of the differences within 'the ontological turn' are key to

understanding corresponding differences between the papers collected here, as they react to and probe different articulations of 'naturalism.' Neither an external critique of the ontological turn, nor an internal vindication of it, this collection presents rather a set of experiments, located part-way inside it, and part-way out.

## **Type, Bomb, and Careful Sabotage**

A common starting point for mapping differences between articulations of naturalism, and one which is picked up on by a number of contributors to this issue, is Latour's account of a debate held in Paris between Viveiros de Castro and Descola (2009). While Descola considers that Viveiros de Castro's contrast between perspectivism and mononaturalism maps broadly onto his own contrast between animism and naturalism, Viveiros de Castro seeks to distance himself from what he describes as a project of typologizing ontologies which is itself too redolent of naturalism. Perspectivism, Viveiros de Castro maintains, should be conceived of rather as a 'bomb' placed under Western philosophy, than as a 'type' sitting neatly alongside the others.

Although the type/bomb contrast may be slightly overdrawn,<sup>3</sup> it speaks to a crucial difference in the reasons why neither Descola nor Viveiros de Castro bring much direct ethnographic evidence in support of their accounts of the position they describe as 'ours' (naturalism or mononaturalism): at stake are two definitions of anthropology, and two definitions of 'us.' For the latter, as we shall see, the exclusion is constitutive of anthropology, whose role is to take seriously the worlds of 'others.' Anthropology's proper objects are therefore '*everywhere* except precisely where *we* are – for methodological reasons, precisely, if no other' (Viveiros de Castro 2011:135). For Descola, by contrast, the matter is empirical. He writes: 'As for the general principles of our shared cosmology, the problem is not a lack of information which we must fill, as I have done in the case of animism or totemism, but rather an over-abundant knowledge which must be purified in order to recover its main traits' (2005: 244, translation MC).

The first two papers in this collection, by Yates-Doerr and Mol and by Bertoni, respectively, start from the concern that such 'purification' may lead to a reification. They seek to engage naturalism ethnographically with tools drawn from Science and Technology Studies, Actor-Network Theory, and Annemarie Mol's own distinctive approach to tracing the ways in which 'ontologies are brought into being, sustained or allowed to wither away in common, day-to-day, sociomaterial practices' (Mol 2002: 6).

Building on the recombinant (Fischer 2007) traditions of anthropologies of the contemporary and science studies – which, as Maryon McDonald points out, have since the 1980s accumulated 'ethnographic treatments of the constitution, practices, regulation and effects of both medicine and science [which] mean perhaps that anthropology is finally coming home' (2012:460; see, for instance, Latour and Woolgar 1979; Haraway 1989; Strathern 1992; Martin 1994; Edwards 2000; Edwards et al. 2007) – both papers take up the challenge of examining Euro-American concerns with nature. However, when naturalism does not look as one might expect it to look (according to Descola's definition for example), they seek to expand the definition through a careful tracing of their interlocutors' practices. Rather than asserting that we have never been naturalist, they suggest that naturalism is not what we thought it was.

Yates-Doerr and Mol are particularly concerned that rigid contrasts between ‘us’ and ‘them’ may leave just a few natural scientists and philosophers speaking for the whole of the West. By examining a ubiquitous mediator between humans and non-humans – meat – the authors argue that the single ‘naturalism’ which is invoked by certain anthropologists is a window-dressing which belies practices which are far more complex. Meat marks a physical continuity between humans and non-humans but, pace Descola, this continuity is not necessarily a mark of similarity. Meat is ‘enacted’ in many different ways by butchers, apprentice chefs, nutritionists and eaters.

Western natures, in sum, have their own multiplicities – which are not, however, reducible to that multiplicity described for Amazonia by Viveiros de Castro, but something else again. Euro-American mononaturalism (one nature, many cultures) and Amazonian multinaturalism (one culture, many natures) propose poles which are the point-for-point inversion of each other. Not so much ‘in between’ these, but simply elsewhere, Yates-Doerr and Mol open up a space for tracing another kind of multiplicity (many nature-cultures). In the process, they also offer up a reflection on the possibility of characterizing the West as a *style* rather than a location.

Readers will find much food for thought in reading this article alongside Marilyn Strathern’s contribution to the current issue of this journal (Strathern, this issue), which itself draws upon Mol and colleagues’ recent work on eating, accounts of eating and predation from Amazonia, and reinterpretations of materials on eating and feeding from Strathern’s own Melanesian ethnography.

Bertoni’s paper also searches for the multiplicities of Western naturalism, by focusing on earthworms and the scientists who study them. By tracing worms through different carefully described empirical locations, Bertoni shows that the earthworm as scientific object is multiple, emerging through different practices, each of which articulates slightly different worlds and slightly different natures. Naturalism is not therefore an ontological schema (a set of fixed propositions about the relationship between nature and culture), so much as a particular kind of achievement – of unity. His account of the scientists’ work on the worms shows how ‘a transient, contingent, multiple, and – yet – still bound-together nature may result from careful coordination practices’.

Both of the first two contributions, in other words, are in the business of ‘interfering’ (Yates-Doerr and Mol) with Western philosophical tradition, a project shared in various forms with Viveiros De Castro and Latour – but they do so, like the latter rather than the former, from the inside. An empirical engagement with the West shows that it is not as (or indeed, for that matter, where) we thought it was: one can find difference by looking in, as much as by looking out, and the latter project should not make us forget the former. The method is also gentler: where stark ontological contrasts between us and them aim to detonate a ‘bomb’ under Western naturalism, which risks leaving certain fieldsites ‘concealed beneath the rubble’ (Alcayna-Stevens, this issue), a careful tracing of concrete empirical multiplicity of western naturalism(s) is more akin to a ‘slow and careful sabotage’ (Bertoni, this issue).

## **Taking Seriously**

Nevertheless, in introducing a focus on coordination practices through which multiple natures are brought together, Bertoni's paper touches on a theme which is central to the next two contributions to this special section: the question of how one might 'take seriously' what matters to self-defined naturalists themselves.

In a recent definition of what it means to 'take seriously,' Viveiros de Castro argues that while it should not be anthropology's aim to describe people's 'worldviews' in terms of belief or fantasy, neither should anthropologists seek to validate or *believe in* the worlds of others, 'fantasizing about them as leading to the true reality' (Viveiros de Castro 2011: 137). Rather, Viveiros de Castro argues, an anthropology of alterity should multiply our world with the 'possible worlds' of others – worlds which do not rely on *our* verification, critique or assent. When taking 'others' seriously, he argues that it is therefore imperative for anthropology to find, in a reciprocal move, a way not to take seriously 'almost all of the things ... near to or inside of us' (Viveiros de Castro 2011: 133).

What this means in concrete terms, however, depends very much on the way lines between 'us' and 'them' are drawn in the first place (Candea 2011, and this issue). Contrasts between ontologies are frequently articulated in terms of geographic demarcations (Euro-American, Amazonian, Inner Asian) – but how literally are these to be taken? Clearly the picture of bounded ontologies mapped onto particular named groups of people – a kind of 'closet-culturalism' (Pedersen, pers. com.) – is untenable. Such a position would raise the kinds of questions articulated by Laidlaw in a recent review which was critical of the 'ontological theory':

[W]hat on earth happens at the boundaries between these different ontologies, and when things or people cross from one to another? What kind of meta-ontology does one have to postulate to make sense of the thought that the world could be made up of different stuff in different places? (Laidlaw 2012: np.)

Faced with such challenges, proponents of ontological multiplicity have in the main responded that the ontological contrasts they have in mind can emerge anywhere and on any scale since, ultimately, 'each person is a people unto him- or herself' (Viveiros de Castro 2011: 136; also Alcayna-Stevens, this issue), or indeed, 'there are as many ontologies as there are things to think through' (Henare et al. 2007: 27). Furthermore, these arguments can be compared along a scale of their own, ranging from an implied empirical concreteness of such contrasts (or at least, their status as a purification of reality, necessary for typologizing and comparison) to an emphasis on their status as conceptual artifacts internal to anthropological argument. Near the former end of the scale lies, for instance, Descola's project of categorizing ontologies as empirical objects in the world – although he too, explicitly notes these are not crudely regionalized.<sup>4</sup> Near the opposite end of the scale lies Strathern's reflexive attention to the (productive and careful) artificiality of the contrasts she draws. Thus, in a frequently-overlooked moment of *The Gender of the Gift*, Strathern explicitly notes:

I wish to draw out a certain set of ideas about the nature of social life in Melanesia by pitting them against ideas presented as Western orthodoxy. My account does not

require that the latter are orthodox among all western thinkers; the place they hold is as a strategic position internal to the structure of the present account. (1988: 12)

Wherever one places it geographically or otherwise, however, Naturalism (in which multiple cultural points of view can be contrasted to a single natural reality) is the one position which, on Viveiros de Castro's account, anthropologists *cannot* take seriously if they are to take seriously other ontological possibilities as more than mere 'representations'. So what then are we to do, as anthropologists, with informants who explicitly espouse naturalist positions – just as insistently as others elsewhere claim that they are in meaningful relations of reciprocity with non-human animals, for example?

The final three papers in this collection explore these intertwined questions of scale, alterity and seriousness. Like the first two papers, Alcayna-Stevens focuses on the multiple worlds within a purportedly 'naturalist' location: a chimpanzee sanctuary in Catalunya, where keepers encourage the primates to learn to 'speak chimpanzee'. Through an engagement with Deleuze's writings on 'taking seriously' the paper asks how it might be possible to take seriously both the apparently unbridgeable dualisms utilized by ethnographic interlocutors, 'and the simultaneous disappearance, dissolution and intermittent irrelevance of these dualisms in their encounters and reflections'. Alcayna-Stevens deploys ethnographic detail to enquire into a set of tensions which necessarily fall out of broad schematic accounts of ontologies: what happens when people explicitly disagree with each other, or indeed with themselves from one moment to the next? Whom (and when) should we be taking seriously – and how?

A case in point is the alternation between unambiguous claims that other beings' minds are unknowable and equally strong statements made by the same person at a different moment which imply that such empathetic knowledge is straightforward. Alcayna-Stevens returns to her own earlier concept of 'doublethink' (2009) as an anthropological heuristic for 'suspending actualization of the worlds of several people, or of one person, by refraining from describing these worlds in the terms of one or the other, as well as refraining from bringing them together with a third set of terms, those of the ethnographer'. In this recension, however, she adds a reflection on what happens when these multiple, simultaneously *possible* worlds, are actualized, when multiplicity gives way to a temporary singularity, a world united and asserted for the sake of action or argument.

Such moments are often those when people disagree with each other explicitly about ontological or epistemological matters, when 'they offer their worlds up for critique or assent, as we do our own'. Alcayna-Stevens builds on this crucial observation to recast the central asymmetry of Viveiros de Castro's notion of taking seriously, which introduces a sharp distinction between the people whose worlds one can challenge and those whose worlds one seeks to leave in a state of possibility. Alcayna-Stevens maintains this distinction, but unmoors it from a West/rest dichotomy; such a distinction, then, is no longer based on *who* people are and a subsequent categorization of their worldviews, but on 'a very functional distinction made by the anthropologist as she engages these two sets of interlocutors (those who have alienated a world for debate, and those who have not) in the process of ethnographic writing'.

Walford's paper deftly weaves together the different ways in which Viveiros de Castro (2011), Strathern (1987) and Riles (2000) have each engaged the difficulties

which proximity and distance, continuity and discontinuity, pose to ethnographic exegesis. If dealing with alterity requires the suspension of our own desire to reduce it to the familiar, then dealing with the overly familiar necessitates other analytical strategies. But what if the difficulty is ascertaining precisely whether one is looking in or looking out?

The anthropology of science is a *locus classicus* of this conundrum, as the papers by Walford and Candea illustrate. On the one hand, 'Western science, inured by Cartesian metaphors of mechanical nature' (Scott 1996: 76) is constantly invoked as the quintessential figure of the 'us' which anthropologists studying animism, for instance, have to suspend. Anthropology after the ontological turn becomes the point-for-point opposite of natural(ist) science: it is non-representational, non-propositional, engaged in multiplying natural-cultural worlds, rather than discovering the pre-existing properties of the single natural world. On the other, this very orientation itself makes science into anthropology's other. What then would it take, to take science itself seriously?

Drawing on her own ethnography of an international research project, the Large Scale Biosphere Atmosphere Experiment in Amazônia (LBA), Walford notes that the relevant lines of contrast, of distance and proximity, were shifting and difficult to pin down: now they were drawn between Brazilians and foreign researchers, now between the scientific project and its 'political substrate', now between those who produced data and those who used it in publications. Walford suggests that to 'take science seriously' is not a matter of deciding ahead of time how near or far science is from anthropology, nor whether the anthropologist should be seeking us/them divisions along national lines, say, or science/society ones. Rather, what is required is precisely an ethnographic attention to the ways 'the science in question might negotiate its own matters of identity and difference'. At the LBA, Walford argues, this was principally done through concerns about the flow and stoppage of data: 'Who were "us" and who were "them" were often questions of who did what with data.'

Taking seriously the ways in which LBA researchers articulated their own insides and outsides in terms of data flow and how to control it, also produces some reflexive insight into what was at stake in the 'science wars', namely the transformation of scientific knowledge, and its rendering back to its producers in alien terms. 'The difference between the scientists and those studying them', Walford concludes, 'was embedded in concerns to control this dissemination, but was framed by a common understanding that knowledge *can* flow and be owned. Thus what might end up separating anthropological enquiries from scientific ones also might end up bringing them together.'

Finally, Candea's paper reprises and fleshes out his earlier suggestion (2011) that the role of anthropology 'at home' might be to keep in view the always contrived and fragile nature of lines drawn between 'us' and 'them'. Candea finds an echo to Viveiros de Castro's contrast between perspectivism and mononaturalism within mononaturalism itself: while many naturalists, including some scientists, are indeed concerned with 'how animals see the world' in a perspectivalist sense, the discipline of behavioural ecology by contrast tends to portray human and non-human animals alike as enacting self-propagation, a type of very abstract shared perspective, which is concretized and differentiated by the specific forms of their bodies and corresponding environments.



This internal comparison has two aims: the first is to shed some light on the complex dynamics of concerns about anthropomorphism in behavioural ecology: these are not straightforwardly the effect of a stable naturalist ontology in which non-humans are by definition devoid of interiority, and in which uses of human-derived terms is by definition incorrect. Rather the use or avoidance of human-like terminology to speak about non-human animals tracks a complex, empirically grounded sense of what humans and non-humans in fact share, and where they in fact differ, which is not easily categorized in terms of nature/culture or mind/body dualisms. The second aim of this comparison is reflexive. It points to the fact that echoes between external and internal contrasts, such as the one explored in Candea's paper, open up a series of epistemological issues for anthropologists which are in some ways analogous to the scientific problem of anthropomorphism. Is the seeming fit between perspectivism and behavioural ecology a coincidence, or a proof of the existence of universal cognitive schemes? Is it a sign of the fact that any attempt to render an alternative ontology such as perspectivism into our own terms necessarily draws on resources internal to our own tradition (such as for instance the quasi-vitalist, post-Darwinian philosophy of Deleuze)? Or is this apparent fit just the effect of mistakenly glossing over crucial differences (such as that between Amerindians and Westerners) or crucial similarities (such as the shared naturalist commitments which underpin behavioural ecology and other Euro-American positions)? Irrespective of one's answer to these questions, the point is that such questions matter for any serious attempt to 'take seriously'. Furthermore, it is difficult to envisage how such questions can even arise without some at least residual attachment to both epistemology and empiricism. Candea suggests that perhaps after all what 'we' (anthropologists) have never been is post-representational.

## **Coda: Two Proposals**

Imagine what debates between 'physical' and 'cultural' anthropologists might look like once the notion of multi-naturalism is taken into account.  
(Latour 2009: 2)

The final contribution to this collection is a dialogue between Agustín Fuentes' proposal for an interdisciplinary ethnoprimateology (cf. Fuentes 2010) and Eduardo Kohn's proposal for an 'anthropology beyond the human' (cf. Kohn 2007). This dialogue acts as a coda, drawing together various themes examined in the other papers, but inverting the flow of the discussion – turning it, as it were, inside out. Rather than anthropologists and others examining naturalism, the piece brings together two anthropologists from purportedly different sides of our discipline's bio/social divide, in a joint attempt to reimagine their mutual differences and common ground. Naturalism, with its division between nature and culture, is not the object of enquiry here, but rather the problematic disciplinary starting point which both discussants seek to challenge in pursuit of new epistemological and ontological vistas.

Both Kohn and Fuentes challenge classic divisions of labour which assign mutually exclusive spheres of reality to social and biological scientists. Furthermore, both do so by drawing on our shared human and animal bodies and evolutionary past, our shared ecologies and planet – echoing the suggestion in Candea's paper that there are

many sources of internal communication between evolutionary explanations and the ontological turn.

However, they give this shared evolutionary history a radically different sense. Fuentes seeks to integrate insights from twenty-first-century evolutionary theory and sociocultural anthropology by expanding evolutionary concepts, such as niche construction, to encompass biosocial realities. Kohn, by contrast, argues that what this shared evolutionary history speaks of is the extension of meaning well beyond the human. He argues that human semiotics, symbolism and language emerge from and continuously relate to other modalities of representation: 'it is through our partially shared semiotic propensities that multi-species relations are possible, and also, analytically, comprehensible'.

Do these two proposals 'meet in the middle', or do their paths lead in productively different directions? We shall not seek to summarize this already brief and pithy debate here nor give away the ending (which may well look different depending on where one stands) but suffice it to say that what is reconfigured in these two partially connected proposals are not just the distinctions between nature and culture, biology and the social, humans and non-humans, and fact and value, but also the very question of what it would mean for an interdisciplinary anthropology to make general claims about the world.

## Notes

1. 'To be perspectivist acts out Euro-American pluralism, ontologically grounded in one world and many viewpoints; whereas perspectivism implies an ontology of many worlds and one capacity to take a viewpoint' (Strathern 2011: 92).
2. Although we cannot hope to summarize Latour's complex book-length argument about modernism here, a key aspect of the modern constitution is the radical separation between nature and society, guaranteed by the 'separation between the scientific power charged with representing things and the political power charged with representing subjects' (1993: 29). We have never been modern however, according to Latour, because the modern constitution was only honoured in the breach, by constant hybridization of these two supposedly independent realms.
3. As Latour notes in his comment, holding naturalism up for examination – even as part of a typology – is already potentially a game-changer. With the advent of an 'Anthropology of Nature' (the title of Descola's chair at the Collège de France): 'nature has shifted from being a resource to become a highly contested topic' (Latour 2009: 2). Descola elsewhere explicitly notes that his aim was not to typologize so much as to explain why different social phenomena tend to be bunched together in different places (2007: 242).
4. For Descola, animism, naturalism, totemism and analogism are cognitive possibilities present *in nuce* in humans everywhere (Descola 2007; cf. Candea, this issue).

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