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INVOLVING ANTHROPOLOGY: Debating Anthropology's Assumptions, Relevance and Future

REVIEW ARTICLE

A Naturalist Abroad in the Museum of Ontology: Philippe Descola's *Beyond Nature and Culture*

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Beyond Nature and Culture, by Philippe Descola. Translated by Janet Lloyd. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2013, xxii+463 pp., foreword by Marshall Sahlins, preface, notes, bibliography, index, (hardback), ISBN:978-0-226-14445-0.

ABSTRACT

Philippe Descola is a self-confessed naturalist. Yet in his book *Beyond Nature and Culture*, he presents naturalism as just one of four possible ontologies that – for different peoples in different periods – have underwritten human thought and practice. The others are animism, totemism and analogism. In this article I explore some of the paradoxical consequences of his positing naturalism both as a frame for comparative analysis and as one of the terms enframed by it. These have to do with the logic of the ontological four-fold, the conversion of inference into schemas of tacit knowledge, the division between psychological and linguistic constructions of the self, alternative senses of interiority and physicality, the dichotomies between humanity as condition and as species, and between mind and nature, and the proper use of the concepts of production and transmission. I conclude by imagining what would happen if animism, rather than naturalism, were taken as a starting point for comparative understanding. Then life, growth and movement, rather than figuring as the exterior emanations of a world of being, would be restored to immanence in a world of becoming.

Please see the response and rejoinder to this article:

[Biolatry: A Surrender of Understanding \(Response to Ingold's A Naturalist Abroad in the Museum of Ontology\) 10.1080/00664677.2016.1212523](#)

[Rejoinder to Descola's Biolatry: A Surrender of Understanding 10.1080/00664677.2016.1212532](#)

KEYWORDS

Animism; immanence; interiority; naturalism; ontology

Prologue

Ontology has recently become a catchword in social and cultural anthropology. For many, this is part of a wider move against theories of representation that would ascribe human differences, under such rubrics as ‘world-views’ or ‘cultural constructions of reality’, to the multiple and potentially unlimited ways in which minds are able to filter the raw data of sensory experience, and to sort what they allow through into more or less coherent patterns. Ways of knowing the world, say the new ontologists, are inseparable from ways of being in it, and what these ways bring forth are worlds in themselves that can be neither reduced to elementary constituents common to all nor sublimated into superordinate structures of thought. In his magnum opus, *Beyond Nature and Culture*, Descola (2013) also paints a picture of ontological pluralism. Yet he also comes out as a scholar who is fully and unquestioningly committed to the representational paradigm. For him there is no doubt that a world exists ‘out there’, and that it has to be configured in one way or another in human minds for any sort of practical engagement to ensue. To be sure, Descola’s ‘ontologies’ are not world-views or cultural constructions in the conventional sense; they are rather the more fundamental, generative principles that give rise to them. Like the worlds of the new ontologists, they are not reducible to innate universals, nor can they be siphoned off into constellations of symbolic meaning. Yet here is the difference: Descola’s ‘ontologies’ serve to bridge the otherwise yawning gap between a universally given world and its particular representations, rather than treating both what is given and what is known as the derivative offshoots of the being of a world. For the new ontologists, worlds simply *are*, before any possibility of division between the given and the known can arise. But for Descola, this division is an a priori condition that creates the space of possibility for ontologies to mediate between them.

It is not my purpose, in this article, to essay a review of Descola’s book in its entirety, or even to summarise its contents. The sheer scale and scope of the work would render any such attempt well-nigh unachievable, though others have tried (Salmon and Charbonnier 2014; Scott 2014). I seek rather to engage with the book’s arguments, on certain fronts of my own choosing, largely in order to expose the fault lines that divide Descola’s approach from my own. These are profound, though so deeply embedded in the bedrock of the text that they are not easily discerned. As Descola is gracious enough to acknowledge, so convergent are our views on many matters ‘that the detail of what separates us comes to acquire a decisive importance’ (xxii).¹ I agree! The attempt to excavate this detail has helped me personally to clarify my own position, but I think it touches on points where anthropology is itself at a crossroads. I therefore hope that by setting out where our roads meet, and where they go their separate ways, I can also signpost alternative roads for the discipline. For differences there are, and these sometimes lead to misrepresentation. I am glad, therefore, to have this opportunity to set the record straight, and to this end I have tried to be as emphatic as I can about the parting of our respective ways, while perhaps glossing over those areas in which they converge. Some may read this as polemic, and maybe it is. No disrespect is intended. I do think, however, that Descola’s approach is an anachronistic one, and that it belongs more to the museum of ontology than to the dynamic, pulsating, weather-beaten world that we inhabit every day of our lives. I make no secret of the fact that, for me, an anthropology that does its work in

the hurly-burly of life in the world can speak more powerfully than one confined to the museum to the most pressing environmental question of our time: how *should* we live?

So let me make my position plain. I am not a new ontologist, and I do not share their obsession with the multiplication of worlds. On the contrary, that *we all inhabit one world* is, for me, a core principle of the discipline of anthropology. All too often, it seems to me, this principle has been neglected, along with the challenges and responsibilities it entails, in favour of a facile appeal to plurality. Never one world; always many worlds. Once, these were the many worlds of symbolic culture; now, in the hands of the new ontologists, we have the many worlds of elemental being. Taken to its logical extreme, every being is its own world: you name it, and there is a world for you (e.g. Harman 2011). Now one could hardly accuse Descola of this kind of ontological proliferation: to the contrary, his ‘relative universalism’ – by which he would have us understand his own approach (305) – strains to limit the number and variety of cognitive solutions to the conundrums that all humans face, always and everywhere, in coming to terms with their own existence and that of both human and non-human others. Yet for Descola it appears that these solutions are preconfigured, already available to be entered into the faculties of a human mind that comes innately and universally equipped to receive them. This is where he and I disagree. For I wonder, how can these faculties and solutions arise from nowhere? For the neonate, mental faculties are no more pre-installed than are the shapes of mature thought available for installation. These things have surely to undergo some process of development. How, then, can we distinguish this process from life itself?

Descola’s error, if we may call it that, is to posit, at the origin of human perception and action, ontological settlements that are never actually reached. For the one world we inhabit is not a world that is primordially the same for all, yet which offers a limited set of solutions for its comprehension, but a world of perpetual and potentially limitless differentiation, in which ‘coming to terms’ is a lifelong task that is carried on, just as life is, in the very conduct and unfolding of our relations with others. Constitutionally immersed in this worlding world, we humans do not look out from the security of a settlement already achieved, but long for one that forever escapes beyond the horizons of conceptualisation. We are dealing here, not with philosophies but with generations of being, not with ontologies but with ontogenies. If we must have a ‘turn’, let it not be ontological but ontogenetic! Ontological multiplicity gives us many worlds, all but closed to one another. Ontogenetic multiplicity, by contrast, traces open-ended pathways of becoming within one world of nevertheless continuous variation.

Now it is my contention, in this article, that Descola’s relative universalism – with its assumed bifurcation between a given reality that is complete and fully formed, and a knowledge of it that is partial, selective and perspectival – is in truth a thinly disguised version of what otherwise goes under the rubric of naturalism. Time and again this bifurcation is asserted, not as a peculiar inflection of modernity, but as an unassailable truth. In what follows I shall accordingly devote particular attention to Descola’s characterisation of naturalism, and to what he presents as its mirror opposite, namely animism. I shall argue that to accommodate animism within the naturalist settlement is to neutralise the forces and energies of the lifeworld, such that growth, movement, even life itself come to be seen as mere after-effects, the outward manifestations of an interior principle that remains trapped and immobile within its physical casing. My alternative is not to refute naturalism, or the science that is built upon it, but to unsettle it – to recognise that even the practices of

natural science, and the knowledge to which they give rise, are suspended in the currents of animate life, in which practitioners are as much immersed as the things they study. This reanimation of science reveals that what we might have thought to be a solid bedrock of reality is as charged and turbulent as the incessant churning of our own minds. Yet if the price of animism is ontological unsettlement, its reward is an understanding, founded on immediate apprehension, which goes beyond knowledge.

A Finite Number of Combinations

Introducing the work that effectively launched the systematic comparative study of cultural forms, the two-volume *Primitive Culture*, Edward Tylor asserted that human culture was subject to laws of development ‘as definite as those which govern the motion of waves, the combination of acids and bases, and the growth of plants and animals’ (1871, 2). Though no evolutionist, the sentiment behind this remark is one of which Descola, I think, would approve. Perhaps more than the physics of wave motion or the biology of organic growth, it is the possibilities of chemical combination that most attract his attention. Indeed he goes so far as to argue, in a concluding chapter, that ‘if anthropology were ever to discover a source of inspiration in a better-established science, it should turn to chemistry rather than physics or biology’. As the laws of chemistry limit the possible combinations of matter, so likewise those of anthropology, Descola continues, reveal that regardless of their inventiveness or creative prowess, it is simply not possible for humans ‘to create functional hybrids out of components that possess irreconcilable properties’ (392). There is reason to believe, however, that this logic of combinatorial finitude has deeper roots in the annals of Francophone science, which hark back to the era of pre-evolutionary biology when plants and animals, too, were viewed as working combinations of elementary components. No-one was more outspoken in this view than the celebrated naturalist and acknowledged founder of vertebrate palaeontology, Georges Cuvier.

Cuvier had a legendary knack of being able to reconstruct the forms of extinct organisms, in their entirety, from mere fragments of their fossilised remains. This knack rested on his conviction that the organism, as a thing of parts, can be assembled into a functioning whole in only a limited number of ways. From one part, the palaeontologist can therefore hazard a reliable guess as to the others. Cuvier called this the principle of the ‘correlation of parts’. According to this principle, every species represents one of a finite set of possible combinations or permutations of organic components. Forms intermediate between combinations could not exist, for with their component parts out of joint, the wholes composed of them would not be viable. Thus there could be no variability among the individuals of a species, nor could any gradual change lead from one species form to another: there could be no evolution, in this sense. It follows that every species must have arisen abruptly and persisted unchanged until, equally abruptly, it went extinct. For Cuvier, each successive moment of extinction and genesis amounted to a ‘revolution’ that punctuated the long history of life on earth.

Cuvier’s most influential work was published in the early 1800s. Almost a century later, in setting out the rules for the new discipline of sociology, Emile Durkheim found himself arguing along exactly the same lines.² Every society, he maintained, is a structured combination of original elements; nevertheless these elements – and in turn the combinations derived therefrom – can viably combine with others in only a finite number of ways. Every

society, then, is not just the same for all the individuals who belong to it; it is also possible – at least in theory – to construct a table of essential social types prior to seeking out their empirical manifestations in the form of particular instances. Even a single representative would suffice to establish the existence of the type. ‘Thus’, Durkheim reasoned, ‘there are social species for the same reason that there are biological ones. The latter are due to the fact that *the organisms are only varied combinations of the same anatomical unity*’ (Durkheim 1982, 116). What Durkheim offers here, in the passage I have highlighted for emphasis, is no more, and no less, than a restatement of Cuvier’s principle of correlation. There could be no clearer proof that Durkheim was thoroughly familiar with Cuvier’s comparative method, and that he took it as the model for his own inquiries.

And now, yet another century further on, we have Descola, veritably the Cuvier of social and cultural anthropology, arguing – just like Durkheim before him – that human beings can organise their relations with one another and with the world they inhabit, and render this world intelligible, in ways that, while remarkable in their diversity, are nevertheless limited by requirements of logical compatibility and operational consistency. His entire work, Descola admits, is founded upon a hypothesis: namely, ‘that it may be possible to analyse human relations with the world and with others in terms of finite combinations’ (98). Precisely because these combinations are limited in number, they are liable to reappear in the course of history, in periods and regions so far removed as to rule out any direct connection. And it is this reappearance that allows for comparison. Here again, Descola’s comparative anthropology rests upon the very premise which underpinned both Durkheim’s comparative sociology and Cuvier’s comparative anatomy: that repeatable combinations of parts yield comparable results in the properties of the whole. Moreover since intermediate forms are liable to be unstable, even inoperable, transitions will likely be discontinuous and abrupt.

Nor do the parallels end there. Cuvier was a naturalist, and so – ultimately by his own admission – is Descola. He is a naturalist of social and cultural variation, just as fascinated by the permutations of human thought and practice as was Cuvier with the permutations of anatomy. Along with naturalists of every discipline and field of interest, Descola delights in systematising: in arranging everything that is, and that can possibly be, into the cells of tables generated through the intersection of more fundamental criteria of distinction. Minimally, the number of cells invariably comes down to four, generated by the intersection of just two distinctions. For Cuvier, all living organisms were of four kinds: *radiata*, *mollusca*, *articulata* and *vertebrata*. For Descola, all schemes of human thought and practice – all ontologies, as he calls them – are of four kinds: *animism*, *totemism*, *analogism* and *naturalism*. It would be tempting to match up the two series, such that, for example, naturalism would become ontology with backbone, and analogism an ontology of wormlike articulation, in which every part microcosmically enfolds the whole. Perhaps that would be to push the parallel too far. I would however like to highlight the paradox that for Descola, naturalism – or more specifically that branch of naturalism known as cognitive science – is implicated in the very delineation of the cells within which, among others, it finds itself incarcerated.³

Acquiring the Schemas of Practice

From the outset, Descola insists that naturalism is but one scheme of the ontological four-fold, and should not be taken as the yardstick by which others are judged (xviii). As the

work proceeds, however, it becomes ever more apparent that this is precisely how the others are being judged. Just as Cuvier's project for a comparative palaeontology rested on a vertebrate paradigm of what it means to be an organism – to be self-supporting and capable of autonomous movement directed from a central nervous system – so Descola's comparative anthropology is framed by a naturalistic paradigm of what an ontology is. It is, in his account, an implicit cognitive schema that enables an interior consciousness, divided from its exterior conditions of existence, to know and to practise in a world of others. Elsewhere, in a summary statement of his position, Descola posits, as a feature of the cognitive process universal to humans, an 'awareness of a duality of planes between material processes (which I call "physicality") and mental states (which I call "interiority")' (Descola 2014, 274). But is it not in the very distillation of consciousness from physicality, leading to the transcendence of mind over nature, that naturalism is constituted as an ontological regime? Indeed it seems that naturalism, in this sense, is itself installed as the very backbone of Descola's comparative project, not only serving as the guarantor for its own confinement but also ensuring that the other pretenders for ontological supremacy – animism, totemism and analogism – remain imprisoned within their cells so as not to upset the terms of comparison. For, were any one of them to break out, the entire comparative exercise would be thrown into jeopardy.

Descola, to his credit, is well aware of this, although we have to wait some three hundred pages before he openly admits to it. 'It goes without saying', he writes in a confession as startling as it is disarming, 'that my own starting point is without doubt rooted in the familiar soil of naturalism' (303). Indeed, if the four ontologies take hold of the minds and bodies of their respective adherents to the degree that Descola supposes they do, then how could it be otherwise? How could he, Descola, a scholar educated in the great tradition of western natural philosophy, ever truly escape from it? 'What allows ... an anthropologist, whose mind has been formatted by a naturalist ontology', as Gérard Lenclud asks in a critical comment, 'to learn in situ and later explain the perspective of an interlocutor raised within an animist environment?' (2014, 364). It is not unreasonable to indulge in anthropological speculations of the 'if-I-were-an-animist' kind, or their totemist or analogist equivalents, but it would surely be out of the question, as Descola himself acknowledges, 'for any modern subject fully to become animist or totemist ... or even to return consistently to the ancient attractions of analogism' (303–304). At the end of the day, one can only dream of what it is *like* to be the Other; one can never actually *be* the Other. This does rather beg the question, however, of how Descola came to be a naturalist in the first place.

In his classic treatise on *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, Claude Lévi-Strauss observed that 'every new born child comes equipped, in the form of adumbrated mental structures, with all the means ever available to mankind to define its relations to the world in general and its relations to others' (1969, 93). The infant Descola, then, could have ended up an animist. Had he grown up in Amazonia, where he was later to carry out long-term ethnographic fieldwork, he would undoubtedly have done so. Had he been born in France, not in 1949 but five centuries previously, in 1449, he could have become an analogist. But in truth, he ended up a naturalist. What happened? It appears that he underwent a process of induction in the course of which his naturalism became 'deeply internalised' (92). In like fashion, his Amazonian hosts 'deeply internalised' their animism, medieval Europeans their analogism and the Aboriginal people of

the Australian continent their totemism. This is not through any explicit instruction but rather through the myriad interactions, observations and experiences by way of which children are raised within a community of consociates. This is the classic model of socialisation, according to which common language and uniformity of experience lead to homogeneity of results (105). Without knowing it, everyone learns the same thing.

This model of learning, according to which an acquired schema is taken in by innate mental structures primed to receive it, is naturalistic through and through. Lodged in a region of the human mind somewhere between the universally adumbrated structures posited by Lévi-Strauss and the particularity of people's explicit representations, the acquired schema – whatever form it happens to take – lends shape to the input of raw sensation from a world 'out there' and direction to the dealings that human beings have with one another and with non-humans. This, as Christina Toren has pointed out, is to appeal to the very divisions between mind and world, between form and substance, and between cognition and practice, that lie at the roots of naturalism, even to the extent of being its defining features (2014, 406–407). Consider this, for example: 'All the concrete objects of ethnological investigation lie within the zone of overlap between collective institutions and the biological and psychological factors that confer upon social life its substance but not its form' (78). Thus do collective schemas lend form to the bio-psychological substance of humanity in its natural state. So shrouded are these schemas in habits and customs, however, and so far are they removed from verbal articulation, that seldom if ever do they rise to the level of reflexive deliberation (98). It is in this, according to Descola, that their practical effectivity resides.

Producing the Tacit

But how are we to detect these practical schemas – these so-called ontologies – if they are so buried that not even those whose lives are governed by them can explain them to us? Since they are not open to direct observation, their presence, as Descola readily admits, can only be *inferred* on the basis of their organisational effects (104). It stands to reason, moreover, that such inference can be more easily done in societies that are small in scale and uniform in the kinds of experience to which their members are exposed. This, says Descola, is why anthropologists like to study remote and isolated peoples: it is not because of some nostalgia for other-cultural authenticity but because among such peoples, the underlying schemas that govern their lives are more open to detection, less obscured by the clutter that comes from the intense traffic of interactions and proliferation of external contacts characteristic of more populous and cosmopolitan societies (105). Whether such isolates have ever existed save as politically bounded enclaves, and whether the experience of people in remote communities is any more homogeneous than in the hurly-burly of life in the mainstream, are both extremely doubtful, but let us pass over these questions for now. Of more immediate concern is the ontological status of the schemas themselves. In whose minds do they really exist, ours or theirs?

This is an old anthropological chestnut, endlessly rehearsed in debates between Lévi-Strauss and Radcliffe-Brown and their respective followers conducted over half a century ago, and now again in this volume (94–95), concerning the idea of social structure. It comes as no surprise that Descola takes the side of his mentor, Lévi-Strauss, in criticising Radcliffe-Brown's identification of social structure with a kind of snapshot or cross-section

of the actual configuration of social relations as it might be observed at a particular moment in time. As Lévi-Strauss famously put it, “social structure” has nothing to do with empirical reality but with models that are built up after it’ (1968, 279). The structure is a model, and as such, a summary description or formalisation, in our own minds (or, more likely, in the papers we write), of what we have observed. Yet no sooner does Lévi-Strauss admit to this than he turns the logic around. Observable social relations, he contends, ‘render manifest the social structure itself.’⁴ The structure, it turns out, stands *before* empirical reality, not *after* it; it exists proactively in the minds of the people, not retroactively in ours, and orchestrates their activity from behind the scenes yet without their conscious knowledge.

This inversion, by which – as Pierre Bourdieu would say – we transfer onto the object of study the exteriority of our relation to it, ‘conceiving of it as a totality intended for cognition alone’, is one of the hallmarks of naturalist ontology (Bourdieu 1977, 96). It is what allows biologists, for example, to pretend that their generalised models of the observed (‘phenotypic’) behaviour of organisms, across a range of environmental contexts, are actually installed in the organisms themselves, in the guise of context-independent (‘genotypic’) specifications, whence they generate the behaviour in question. Thus do formal descriptions *of* behaviour become explanations *for* it (Ingold 2000, 382–383). So too with Lévi-Strauss, whose structures, built up a posteriori from the data of observation, are converted, in the blink of an eye, into a priori mental templates awaiting expression in overt social behaviour. Yet the gap between these ‘unconscious structural invariants’, as Descola calls them, and ‘the remarkable diversity of instituted customs’ – between a level of analysis that could not be more abstract and general and one that could not be more concrete and particular – seems so wide as to be well-nigh unbridgeable. Descola’s ambition is to bridge the gap by introducing a level intermediary between these extremes. It is on this level that he hopes to unearth the schemas of practice, the ‘tacit frameworks and procedures of objectivization’ (110), which, bypassing language, generate action more or less unthinkingly.

But the logic by which Descola produces the ‘tacit’ is no less circular than that adduced by his predecessors. It, too, rests on the trick of inversion, of implanting into the minds of the people models that have, in truth, been built up after the fact through empirical observation and rational analysis. The products of this procedure are the varieties of animism, totemism and analogism. Naturalism, in short, is not so much a variety of tacit knowledge as a machine for producing it, for naturalising the ontological regimes of the Other – regimes that might otherwise challenge the monopoly of its own way of working. That is why, when Descola turns his sights on the regime of naturalism, its underlying principles turn out to bear such an uncanny resemblance to those that underwrite his own comparative inquiry. And it is also why, in a move strikingly at variance with his treatment of animism, totemism and analogism, he goes so far as to appeal to studies in the natural sciences, of biology and psychology, to verify these principles. There need be no shame – Descola seems to be saying – in framing his entire work in terms of naturalism, because at the end of the day, naturalism has got it right! By some miracle, it has finally arrived at a mode of apprehending things that corresponds to the way things really and truly *are*. And how do we know how things really are? Because we have the sciences of the natural to tell us!

The Divided Self

Introducing his celebrated essay on the notions of person and self, originally delivered as the Huxley Memorial Lecture for 1938, Marcel Mauss made it absolutely clear that self-awareness is a psychological universal. ‘There has never been a human being’, he declared, ‘without the sense not only of his body, but also of his simultaneously mental and physical individuality’. The investigation of this universal sense of self, says Mauss, is a matter for psychologists, and is not his concern. As an ethnologist and social historian, he has a different agenda. It is to show how, across societies and through history, ‘not the sense of the “self” but *the concept that men of various times have created for it*, [has] slowly been elaborated’ (Mauss 1979, 61, my emphasis). Underlying Mauss’s entire project, then, is an unassailable ontological division between individual psychology and collective representation: the first universal, the second socially and culturally variable. This division, of course, is definitive of the ontology of naturalism. And it is one which Descola endorses without reservation: none of the notions ever raised against it, he contends, justifies its dismissal (117). In this ontology, as he would put it (78), the psychology of selfhood confers upon social life its substance but not its form. The form comes from the very schemas of practice into which the individuals of different societies are socialised, and which comprise the subject matter of his investigation.

Is it not strange, then, that Descola should seek to defend his assertion of the universality of the psychological self by resort to the data of linguistics? For if languages give voice to collective representations, then they should surely provide us with evidence of the conceptions that speakers have of themselves, and not of the selves that they more fundamentally *are* – or rather, that psychologists of the self imagine them to be. Indeed in his appeal to language, Descola finds himself on shifting sands, forced to make manifestly undemonstrable claims to the existence of syntactic and semantic universals. How could one possibly prove that *all languages*, as Descola confidently asserts, have ‘pronominal forms or affixes such as “I” and “you”’, attesting to an ‘egocentric conception of a subject’ (117)?⁵ And even if this were somehow proven, Descola’s own logic (following that of Mauss) would disallow direct inference from any conception of the subject to the psychological reality of self-conscious individuation. What leads Descola to stake so much on unproven and unprovable assertions? The risk is that one single negative example would send the argument crashing to the ground. It is a risk he is forced to take, however, in order to dodge the accusation that his entire comparative project is founded upon the particular conceptual vocabulary of naturalism. To do this he has to establish a solid baseline for comparison that is apparently neutral, untainted by linguistic-conceptual bias. This baseline lies in what Descola feels safe to accept as a ‘universal fact’: namely the individuation of a consciousness that is reflexively self-aware.

This fact, however, while laying a necessary foundation for the comparative edifice that Descola builds upon it, is not in itself sufficient. By his own admission, he needs something more, and this is the aforementioned division of the self between ‘interiority’ and ‘physicality’. The first term is meant to cover what commonly goes by such names as mind, soul, consciousness, intentionality, subjectivity, reflexivity, feelings, and the capacities to express oneself and to dream. The second, by contrast, embraces the physiological and sensorimotor dimensions, in perception and action, of our bodily engagement with the world (116). The reason why the reflexive sense of self, though necessary for the experience of

interiority, is insufficient, is that for much of our waking lives, we do not feel it to be in any way distinct from the experience of physicality. Commonly, interiority and physicality are merged. Nevertheless there are situations in which they are dissociated: in ritual, in various states of trance, and most usually in dreaming. All this is enough to persuade Descola that not just the sense of self, but its division into interior and physical components, is ‘an innate characteristic of human beings’ (119). Here he finds support not only from ‘recent work in developmental psychology’⁶ but once again from linguistics.

‘It would seem’, Descola asserts (though without a shred of evidence to support the claim), that ‘all languages distinguish between a level of interiority and a level of physicality’ (119), and even that the distinction is ‘borne out by all lexicons’ (121). In European languages it is common to use words such as ‘soul’ or ‘mind’ (or their non-Anglophone equivalents) for the first, and ‘body’ for the second. But far from accusing those who would detect similar dualisms in other regions of the world of the ethnocentric projection of western values, we should realise – according to Descola – that the body/mind dichotomy is no more than a regional variant of a division that is to be found, in one form or another, among all the peoples of the world. What, then, is distinctive about this western variant? The answer we receive from Descola’s text (184) is surprising: it is unique, he avers, in attributing those powers of interiority we call ‘mind’ *exclusively to humans*. Just why this answer is so surprising is a matter to which I shall return; suffice it to note that by this circumlocution, Descola contrives to hide the naturalism that frames his comparative project by narrowing the term to a specific claim to human exceptionality. It no longer appears naturalist to assert a distinction of some sort between physical processes and mental states: everyone does that, Descola assures us, for no other reason than that it is a matter of obvious common sense. Not everyone, however, reserves interiority for individuals of the species *Homo sapiens*, and here, the people whom Descola calls ‘Moderns’ are alleged to be the exception (185). This, we are now told, is the defining feature of naturalism, and not the universal theme of interiority/physicality dualism on which it is a particular variation.

But is it really ‘an offence to common sense’ to deny the universality of the theme? Descola thinks so (119). We might well agree with him that it would be absurd to suppose a living person could be either a soul without a body or a body without a soul, despite the fact that scientists and philosophers have come up with such notions from time to time. Common sense is not always as high on the list of priorities for scientists and philosophers as it is for ordinary people. However, ‘physicality alone’ and ‘interiority alone’ are not the only alternatives to dualism. Could we not work our way upstream, to a world in which interiority and physicality have yet to be prised apart?

Containment and Immanence

Let us return to Mauss. Can we be so sure, as was he, that every living human being has a sense of his or her mental and physical individuality, regardless of the manner of its conceptual expression? Any being born of man and woman is human, yet it is by no means clear that the human infant has such a sense. It seems rather to undergo development, in a process that has no obvious point of completion. We cannot assume, then, that the self is always already individuated. Far from having been magically completed before life begins, individuation – the fashioning of ourselves as the selves we are – is in truth a life-historic,

ontogenetic project (Toren 2014, 407). Selves *are* not; they *become*. This project is more-over carried on, not in isolation, but in the company of others and with their material assistance. It is, of course, a process of social life. We might say that in this process, social relations are enfolded in the structures of consciousness, and contrarily, that consciousness unfolds in social relations (Ingold 1986, 248). The boundaries of the self, such as they are, would then be emergent *within* the process rather than constituted a priori. This 'within', however, suggests another sense of interiority, and points indeed to a critical ambiguity in the meaning of the term. Interior is on the inside, but inside what? Do we mean inside the *process* of our social self-fashioning? Or do we mean inside the *bounds* of the selves so fashioned?

We seek in vain for clear answers to these questions in Descola's text. But reading between the lines, it seems evident that his 'interiority' is of a consciousness that is bounded and contained, and that stands over and against a world of exteriorities which it can know only through internal representation. For it is in the work of representation that the schemas come into play. Only in this sense, moreover, can interiority be *opposed* to physicality. With this opposition, the boundary separating self and world is posited as a given. In short, in Descola's notion of physicality there is an assumption as to the externality of the world. Consciousness is 'in here', while physicality allows the being to engage with a world 'out there'. For the most part this assumption remains implicit, but the occasional offhand remark gives it away. One example comes in Descola's introduction to the first of his four ontologies, namely animism. There is one characteristic of animism, he writes, that 'everybody can accept'; this is 'the attribution by humans to non-humans of an interiority identical to their own' (129). By this he means that plants and (especially) animals are taken to be endowed with souls which enable them to act both normatively and ethically as social beings, just as humans do. This idea of the soul as an inner attribute of being only makes sense if we understand interiority as *containment*, and it is true that in the anthropological literature on animism, this is how the soul-endowment of non-human beings is usually described.

We should not assume, however, that these descriptions are necessarily correct, and I, for one, would dispute them. My understanding is that among people credited by the literature with an ontology of animism, beings of every kind are seen to be ever-forming as concentrations of vital materials and energies that are, and must remain, perpetually in circulation. There is continuity here, in that everything that is – or rather that occurs – is immersed in the flow. There is interiority here as well, but this is the interiority of a consciousness that is immanent in the world itself, that participates directly in its relations and processes, and that knows by way of an enfoldment of these relations and processes into its own constitution. Let us call this the interiority of *immanence*. Quite contrary to the interiority of containment, which is consistently opposed to the physicality of the exterior world, the interiority or immanence runs seamlessly into physicality, like the singular surface of a Möbius strip, without any breach of continuity. Such interiority, indeed, can no more be distinguished from physicality than can the form of an eddy in the stream be set apart from its substance. It is the logic of naturalism, operating from behind the scenes in the production of anthropological accounts, that has contrived to wrap every being up in itself, thus converting the generative currents of its emergence into a vital agent, or 'soul', that inhabits an interior divided off from the exterior world of its interactions with others.

The very idea of the soul, in short, comes from looking at animism through naturalistic spectacles. Remove the spectacles, and we find that what people have actually been talking about, in words that have been translated as ‘soul’ or sometimes ‘spirit’, is not an agency hidden inside each and every being, whence it pulls the strings of action, but the current of vitality which makes it so that the being is really a becoming, not a subject (taking the grammatical form of the pronoun) but a verb, launched in a process of endless self-creation. You encounter such becomings in their going on, or in their continual emergence. Every encounter is different, and cannot be known in advance. Just as, to echo Heraclitus, you can never step twice into the same waters of a flowing river, so no experience of spirit is ever precisely repeatable. That is why animism cannot be understood as the simple inverse of naturalism. For Descola, naturalism is defined as the combination of continuity of physicalities and discontinuity of interiorities; animism as the combination of continuity of interiorities and discontinuity of physicalities (172). But on closer inspection, not only does the a priori opposition between interiority and physicality prove problematic; so also does the opposition between continuity and discontinuity. It is to this latter opposition that I now turn.

The Dilemmas of Naturalism

The problem is that both continuity and discontinuity are brought under the rubric of what Descola calls ‘modes of identification’, by means of which one can establish resemblances and differences, or similarities and dissimilarities, through analogy and contrast, between oneself and others (112). But to equate continuity with similarity is to assume an already divided world, populated by discrete, self-contained entities whose intrinsic properties are to be compared. A property that is universal is then understood as one common to every entity; one that is particular is limited to a narrower class of entities, or is perhaps even unique to a single entity. Now under naturalism, according to Descola, there is a fundamental continuity – or in his sense of the term, a similarity – among all entities, considered in their physicality. What can this possibly mean? After all, so far as living things are concerned, natural science tells us that they come in innumerable kinds, or species, and that even within species every individual is a little bit different from every other. No continuity here! But the same science – though now masquerading as psychology rather than biology – also tells us that all humans are identical in their possession of a sense of self. And that sounds like interior continuity, in Descola’s terms.

Naturalism, it seems, could be defined just as well by the combination of physical discontinuity and interior continuity as by its opposite. For in the same breath that it imagines human cultural diversity to be written on the tablet of universal nature, it also pictures biodiversity as reflected in the mirror of universal humanity. And if that is so for naturalism, then how can it any longer be distinguished from animism? After all, if we follow Descola, under animism ‘humanity’ is extended to all beings deemed to be in identical possession of interior soul-stuff, while the physicality of bodies is infinitely diverse. Naturalism, in short, reveals a world of interiority that is just as continuous as the lively and enspirited world that animism gives us. And it simultaneously reveals a world of physicality that is just as replete with difference as is the phenomenal world of animism. This does not mean, however, that naturalism and animism are one and the same. The point is rather that, compared with those of animism, the continuities and differences of naturalism are of another

kind. Its continuities are indices of identity or sameness, not of movement, growth or circulation. And its differences are indices of diversity rather than of differentiation. It is not that these differences are on the inside rather than the outside, but that that they have already precipitated out from the matrix of their generation.

The differences of animism, we could say, are like the growing shoots of a rhizome; those of naturalism have broken off from the current of life and lie strewn upon that plane of indifference we commonly recognise as 'nature'. The former are emergent and interstitial; the latter resultant and superficial. Whereas animism, then, gives us a world of becoming, naturalism gives a world of being. One is in the making, the other ready-made. And what Descola presents to us, under the rubric of animism, is a world in which every becoming is always already being, every making ready-made. Not only are the concepts of physicality and interiority at stake here, however. So also is the concept of humanity. Early on in the book, Descola explains that in Amerindian thought – or more specifically, in those variants that are exemplary of animism – 'the common referent for all entities that live in the world is ... not Man the species but humanity as a condition' (11). By the species, he means a particular physicality, and by the condition a universal interiority. But once again, this is a distinction that has its roots in naturalism and in its founding dilemma, namely, that true knowledge of nature, and of ourselves as a species of nature, can only be had by attaining a condition that transcends it, and that makes us, in essence, creatures of a 'more-than-natural' kind. Arguably, indeed, the very concept of the human, in its duplicitous reference to both species and condition, is an expression of this dilemma.

Descola, too, is trapped in it, and one indication of this is the knot into which he ties himself when it comes to the meaning of the human under a regime of animism. 'In the animist world', he assures us, 'relations between nonhumans or between humans and non-humans are characterized as relations between humans, rather than the reverse' (251). Here he slithers from a conception of humans and non-humans as distinct species, in the first part of the sentence, to the conception of humanity as a shared condition in the second. If the reverse characterisation does not occur, it is only because the ascription of shared nonhumanity to humans would be tantamount to the denial of life itself.⁷ Nor do the confusions end there, for having acknowledged that under animism, humanity is a condition open to all living beings, he goes on to tell us that 'any being that occupies a referential point of view, being in the position of subject, sees itself as a member of the human species' (139). This idea, that the human is the species form of the subject point of view, is the defining feature of what has come to be known, following Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, as perspectivism. According to Viveiros de Castro – and Descola agrees – perspectivism is the 'ethno-epistemological corollary of animism' (143, see Viveiros de Castro 1998). Are we to conclude, then, that the common referent for living beings, under animism, is not after all the condition but the species? To what does 'human' really refer: the condition, the species, or both at once?

The correct answer, I suspect, is none of these. For with animism, the human is neither a transcendent condition nor a species-division in the domain of nature transcended. It is rather a realm of incipience, of becoming rather than being, or of what philosopher Gilles Deleuze (2001) calls 'immanent life'. Under an ontological regime of animism, in short, the human refers to the immanence of a life that is as yet unformed. Ordinarily, beings of different kinds reveal themselves for what they are, with their various species-specific

attributes. Where the ontology of animism comes into its own is in the transition from the quotidian to the numinous, or from waking life to dreams, for only then are these attributes seen to peel away to reveal a protean humanity. This is not however a move across a boundary from the physicality of exterior attributes to a contained interiority. It is rather a movement ‘upstream’ in the genesis of things, from the manifest to the immanent, from being to becoming, from the appearances of the world to the world in its appearing. Now Descola, too, urges us ‘to explore further upstream’, in order to discover the original matrices from which all action and perception flows (94). But again, our ‘upstreaming’ is categorically different from his. Where Descola wants to swim against the tide of representation that otherwise flows from the given to the known, or from the ontological to the epistemological, the current against which we swim is that of ontogenesis, in the generation of being. And to breast this tide is to dissolve the very dualism, which for Descola is a point of departure, between the physicality of the world and the interiority of our knowledge of it.

The Collapse of Mind and Nature

This is the point at which we can return to naturalism, and to Descola’s attempt to distinguish naturalism from among the variants of a supposedly universal dualism by way of its exclusive attribution of the powers of mind, or of conscious intentionality, to human beings. On this criterion of distinction, should non-human animals be discovered to be in possession of interiorities akin to those attributed to humans, the premises of naturalism could be seriously compromised. That is why Descola devotes some attention to ethological studies purporting to show that certain non-human animals are capable of representing and acting upon intentions. For example, Griffin (1976) – renowned for his discovery of the uses of echolocation in navigation among bats – has claimed that even insects are in possession of mental faculties that enable them to think and plan for the future. In his view, only anthropocentric prejudice prevents us from recognising that animals make conscious choices with the intention to produce certain results, just as we humans do. Others dismiss Griffin’s claims as anthropomorphic fantasy, and the issue remains intensely controversial among specialists in animal behaviour. After reviewing some of the evidence, Descola sides with the sceptics. This, in itself, is unsurprising. What is surprising is Descola’s assessment of the ontological consequences, should Griffin and his followers turn out to be right.

‘Are we ready to accept’, Descola asks, ‘that some [non-human animals] may have an interiority comparable to our own, *which would open up a considerable breach in the citadel of naturalism?*’ (184, my emphasis). Why should he think that the discovery of mental capacities in animals could possibly sink the naturalist paradigm? After all, Griffin was by no means the first to attribute mentality to non-humans. Even Darwin (1881), who never doubted the distinction between reason and nature, or between intelligence and instinct, accorded a measure of intelligence to the lowly earthworm, and progressively more to creatures further up what he – along with a long line of predecessors – saw as the scale of nature. Was Darwin not a naturalist? And how about Lewis Henry Morgan, the grandfather of modern anthropology, whose still unsurpassed studies of the American beaver led him to insist that like any human engineer, the animal would hold up an image of its work before its beaver mind as a guide to construction? The

beaver has its thoughts just as we do, Morgan insisted, but being mute it cannot tell us about them (1868, see Ingold 1988). It is true, of course, that the attribution to non-humans of powers of symbolic representation and self-conscious deliberation would loosen to breaking point the connection, epitomised in the modern concept of the human, between the condition and the species. But it does nothing to undermine the foundations of naturalism itself, of which the division between condition and species is a *product*. For in the entire debate about human and non-human mentality, the paradigmatic naturalistic understanding of mind, as a cognitive capacity to form interior mental representations, and to act upon them, remains unchallenged.

What *would* blow a hole in the paradigm – and by the same token, in Descola’s comparative project – would be to collapse the most fundamental division on which it rests, namely between the ‘two kingdoms’, respectively interior and exterior, of mind and nature. A number of modern scholars have indeed challenged this division along with its corollaries: that the domains of mind and world are mutually exclusive and separated at the skin, that to know the world is to represent it in the mind, that to act is to execute a prior intention. To shore up his defences, Descola needs to show that what these scholars are proposing, despite their subversive or heterodox posturing, are really but thinly disguised versions of naturalism. To this end, he reviews the so-called enactivism of Francisco Varela and his collaborators, the ecological psychology of James Gibson and the neuronal determinism of Pierre Changeux, all of which seek, in different ways, to topple the mind from the high point of its interior seclusion and to restore it to the hurly-burly of organism-environment interactions (185–191).⁸ This, too, is to repudiate any absolute division between human and non-human realms. There is a certain irony here. How can Descola, at one and the same time, question the naturalism of those would raise non-human animals onto a plane of mentality shared with humans, while insisting on the naturalism of those who would level the playing field by bringing the mind, as it were, back down to earth? If the denial of human exceptionality disqualifies the naturalism of the former, despite their appeal to the duality of mind and nature, how can it reveal the naturalism of the latter, despite their denial of the duality?

To take Gibson as a case in point, it is true that despite protestations to the contrary, there are elements of naturalism in his thinking. Nevertheless, Gibson remained an implacable critic of cognitivism, refusing outright any ontological division between an interior consciousness and the physicality of its conditions of existence. Perception, he argued, is an achievement of the whole organism (human or non-human), moving around in and exploring its environment, not of an isolated mind in processing the data of sense. Descola, however, is out to show that at heart, Gibson adhered to the dualism of mind and nature. The argument he adduces to do so runs along the following lines. Imagine a machine such as a digital computer, which is designed on the principles of artificial intelligence with functions of data processing and symbolic representation. This machine would possess all the features that, according to Gibson, living organisms lack. Therefore, the division between mentality and physicality is still there, though here transposed onto one between machines and organisms. We would have ‘on the one hand, machines that possess interiorities because human artifice so designed them and, on the other, human and non-human animals which, given their intrinsic vitality, can dispense with interiorities altogether’ (188). The former have minds, even if the latter do not!

This argument is frankly bizarre. What seems to have happened is that Gibson's *epistemological* opposition to cognitive science has been converted into an *ontological* opposition between the physical and the mental. In this conversion, both Gibson and his opponents, the theorists of artificial intelligence, have become ciphers, standing in respect-ively for physicality and interiority! Indeed Descola's inability to think outside his *own* epistemological box leads to profound misrepresentation, for quite apart from the fact that Gibson had nothing to say about digital computers, Descola fails to appreciate the force of the distinction that Gibson (1979, 8) draws between 'physical world' and 'environment'. The difference is that environment is a relational term: it refers not to the reality of a world that exists in itself, quite independently of the presence of any organism to perceive it, but to reality *for* the organism whose environment it is (Ingold 2000, 167–168). Taken in this sense, it defies any distinction between interiority and physicality. That is why it makes no sense for Descola to suggest that for Gibson or for any other theorist critical of naturalism, bodies are seen to be merely 'plugged in' to their environments (187). By thus collapsing environment into 'nature' and then invoking mind as its necessary complement, Descola contrives to make Gibson sound like a closet mind-nature dualist when in reality he was nothing of the sort. For all his faults – and these were many – Gibson at least pointed a way out of the fallacies of naturalism within which Descola remains irretrievably mired.

Production and Transmission

In the final part of the book, Descola turns from modes of identification to modes of relations, and the possibilities opened up by their comparison. He identifies six major categories of relations, under the terms *exchange*, *predation*, *gift*, *production*, *protection* and *transmission* (311). Here I want to focus on just two of these, production and transmission.

Descola begins with a sense of production taken directly from what he calls 'the heroic model of creation', underwritten by the authority of classical Greek philosophy and the Judaeo-Christian tradition. This is the idea of production as the active imposition of ideal form upon formless matter. It is this paradigm of creation-production, Descola thinks, that accounts for the prevalence in western discourses of metaphors of craftsmanship. For the craftsman, he continues, 'possesses his own plan of the thing that he will bring into existence and gives himself the technical means to realize his intended purpose by projecting his will upon the matter that he manipulates' (323). There is no doubt that the heroic model has earned a central place in modern discourses on production. It is not the case, however, that craftsmen of the western world have always thought of their work in this way. Throughout the medieval period, and even into early modernity, craft was understood as a devotional task – a kind of wayfaring – which, through practice and discipline, could bring the maker closer to the experience of God (Carruthers 1998). The work of the craftsman was to open up a path, a way of life even, along which immanent form would gradually be revealed.

This is about as far from the heroic model as can be imagined. The humble craftsman, rather than standing aloof and imposing his designs upon a world ready and waiting to receive them, is but an accomplice in among the processes that give rise to the forms we see around us; his role to assist in bringing them forth (Ingold 2013, 21). Now to 'bring forth' is to *produce* in its most literal sense. There seems no good reason, therefore,

to limit the meaning of production to the sense that the heroic model has conferred upon the term. When, according to Chinese philosophy, the order of things is understood to be not imposed from above but emergent from their continuous development, or when basket-makers among the Wayana of Amazonia reveal in their weaving the bodily forms of their animal spirits – to take two examples adduced by Descola (322–324) – the idea of production as an engendering or bringing forth seems entirely apt. Descola, however, will have none of it. Whether our concern be with ‘the concept of a continuous autopoietic process as expressed in Chinese thought or the priority that, in Amazonia, is granted to reciprocal transformation over fabrication *ex nihilo*’, he writes, ‘to speak of “production” ... is at best ... an abuse of language that leads to false parallels’ (325).

Abuse of language? This is a grave accusation to level at those who might seek to reclaim ‘production’ in its original sense. Even Karl Marx, in his struggle to demonstrate the ultimate priority of production over consumption, had resort to this sense in arguing that, fundamentally, what the labours of human beings produce are not objects of use but the ‘actual material life’ of the producers themselves (Marx and Engels 1977, 42). Nor is it only human lives that are brought forth in this endeavour. For example in helping to establish the conditions for the growth and flourishing of plants and animals, farmers and herdsmen also produce the lives of their crops and herds. Could we not, therefore, apply the notion of production equally to work with animals, as in herding or stock-raising? Descola thinks not, ‘since the direct action exerted upon the animals is of an *entirely different order* from the work of a craftsman or worker in fashioning an artefact out of inorganic material’ (326, my emphasis). Once again, it seems, Descola’s naturalism has got the better of him: it is what leads him to draw an absolute distinction between making, as the imposition of mind *on* nature, and growing as a *sui generis* process *in* nature. Most practising husbandmen and craftsmen would disagree. They would say that to produce is not to impose upon but to *join with* and *attend to* plants, animals and materials, to enter into the processes of their formation and to bend these processes to an evolving purpose. This is as much about growing as it is about making. Or more strictly, it is about making-in-growing, a process wherein the practitioner’s interventions do not so much creatively transform the world as assist in the world’s creative transformation of itself (Ingold 2011, 6, 2015, 120–124).

Turning to transmission, for Descola this is ‘above all what allows the dead, through filiation, to gain a hold over the living’ (329). It is the weight of ancestral past that ever presses on their descendants in the present, ‘passed on inexorably from one generation to the next’ (331). Now while I would not go so far as to accuse Descola of an abuse of language – as he accuses those who would use the term ‘production’ in any sense other than that bequeathed by high modernity – I would point out that the concept of transmission is ill suited to describe the pressure of the past upon the present. It suggests, to the contrary, the communication, across the generations, of a package of heritable attributes that are given, independently and in advance of the life that is undergone by successive cohorts of recipients.

The assumption that what is passed on across generations are only the attributes of identity, while the lives that enact them are expended in each generation in turn, is foundational to what I have called the ‘genealogical model’ (Ingold 2000, 134–139). Here there is no acknowledgement of what the present owes to the past for its continuation, nor are the people of the present tasked with carrying on the work of their forbears. For with transmission, what is ‘passed on’ is not the current of life itself but the specifications for living it. Carrying on or perdurance is one thing, transmission quite another, and

the consequences of confusing the two are all too apparent in Descola's discussion of the genealogical model (333). No-one could deny that around the world and throughout history, people have been telling their stories by retracing the genealogical trails of their ancestors. It is not they, however, who are applying the genealogical model. It is rather anthropological analysts such as Descola, who, having first collected and recorded these stories of perdurance, would cut them up into successive generational moments, each collapsed into a point, only to reconnect them by lines of transmission (Ingold 2007, 116–119). What this procedure returns to us is not living memory but the ghost of history.

Epilogue

Beyond Nature and Culture is an intensely conservative book. It takes us back to the venerable traditions of comparative anthropology, secure in the academy and undisturbed by the intellectual and political turmoil of the contemporary world. Beautifully wrought in prose of rotund elegance, it could be likened to a skilfully carpentered and elaborately ornamented chest of drawers, such as might be found in a French *château* or, in its exquisite translation by Janet Lloyd, in an English country mansion. Today, the mansion is no longer inhabited by its erstwhile aristocratic owners but has been turned into a museum. Visitors to the museum have the opportunity to examine the chest and its contents.

The chest, we suppose, has four drawers. Open the first, and you will find it packed with masks, drums, feathers and other shamanic regalia. Inside the drawer they seem sad and lifeless, even dull; without the winds of vitality that once animated them, they are but empty shells. Open the second, and it turns out to be full of bones and pieces of wood, some straight like sticks, others curved like boomerangs, and yet other hollowed out. The bones are of both humans and animals; indeed it is hard if not impossible to tell them apart. Etched into the wooden pieces, however, are strange designs of almost geometric abstraction but unfathomable meaning. In the third drawer you find an assortment of curious instruments – of magic, divination, astrology and alchemy – that might have once been used for detecting or influencing the course of events in a world where anything can affect anything else and nothing is as it seems. Open the fourth, however, and it turns out to contain a pile of papers, on which are drawn plans and diagrams for the chest itself, with full details of its construction. The drawers, of course, are respectively of animism, totemism, analogism and naturalism. And as with Descola's book, it is the fourth drawer, of naturalism, that contains the template for the entire work.

How different it would be, were the contents of the drawers returned to the open air! Here, the papers in the fourth drawer would not fare well. Lashed by wind and rain, the lines of the diagrams would soon wash out, and the paper would become crumpled and torn. The instruments in the third drawer would do better: restored to the hands of human practitioners, they could once again help them navigate a course among the elements and under the stars. Returning the bones of the second drawer to the earth would re-establish the bonds between the people and animals to which they once gave substance, and the land that bore them. No sooner is this done than the designs on the wooden objects would start to speak and sing. But the contents of the first drawer would fare best of all. For life, growth and movement – evidenced in wind and weather, in the seasonal flourishing of plants and reappearance of migratory animals – are the beating heart of animism. Put the contents back inside the drawer, however, and this heart is ripped out, only to be

added as an appendage. Life, growth and movement: within the drawer these things can only be imagined as the derivative emanations of an exterior physicality, masking an invisible and immobile interiority that vanishes on the instant that the drawer is opened. It is my contention that if we are truly to go beyond nature and culture, then we must abandon the chest of drawers for the atmosphere, the museum for the world of earth and sky. For this is the world that we human beings, along with other creatures, actually inhabit.

Notes

1. Here and in what follows, page numbers refer to the English translation of *Beyond Nature and Culture* (Descola 2013). This is the point at which to acknowledge my profound intellectual debt to Philippe. We have sparred for many years, but in a spirit of conviviality and friendship. He would tell me that it was in order to get away from the surfeit of heavy-duty philosophy to which young scholars are subjected in France that he took flight into ethnography. My education in Britain was just the reverse: I endured a surfeit of ethnography but received no proper training in philosophy at all. Running away from ethnography, it is the philosophy that now lures me on. Our respective ships pass, sometimes in the night, sailing in opposite directions.
2. Durkheim's *The Rules of Sociological Method* was first published in 1895.
3. This paradox is also noted in an appreciation by Feuchtwang (2014, 384), who observes that Descola 'is still bound to consider human and cognitive sciences in the very establishment of his four-cell grid of ontological families of universes'.
4. In the French original, '... rendent manifeste la structure sociale elle-même' (Lévi-Strauss 1957, 306). Curiously, this passage is worded quite differently in English translation, Here, it is stated that social relations comprise 'the raw materials out of which the models making up the social structure are built' (Lévi-Strauss 1968, 279). We can only suppose that the translator was attempting to be consistent where the author is not!
5. It is worth noting that later on in the work, Descola completely contradicts his earlier assertion of the universality of the subject. 'Rather than assume the existence of the universal subject, it will be necessary to determine what kind of a subject is produced by each mode of identification' (282).
6. The work to which Descola refers is Paul Bloom's *Descartes' Baby* (Bloom 2004). Bloom claims that the distinction between physical properties and mental states is biologically hardwired in human brains from birth. This finding is predictable, given that infant responses are filtered through the very same distinction, which naturalism brings to the study of child development. What it finds in the children, unsurprisingly, are the premises of its own inquiry. For universality, read circularity.
7. As Praet (2014) has shown, in the world of animism, to be beyond humanity is to be beyond life. Or in other words, the condition of non-humanity is death.
8. It is rather surprising that Descola makes no reference to Gregory Bateson, whose work has perhaps offered the most consistent and anthropologically informed challenge in this regard. See, for example, Bateson (1980).

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