GAIA IS COMING TO TOWN, BUT HOW TO GREET HER?

A Radical Mapping of Environmental Activist Groups' 'Ecosophies' in and Around the Region of Flanders through the Gaia Perspective

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Abstract

Wicked problems require wicked solutions. Part of what makes environmental issues including climate change so difficult to deal with is that nearly every aspect of them is highly contested. These issues touch upon or are even deeply imbedded in the very foundational structures that make up the social and political world as we know it. This makes them interesting as a topic for academic research, but also makes them especially tricky to work on because academic work too is imbedded in these same contested structures. This is a basic observation, but its weight tends to be underestimated. One such case is that of John S. Dryzek whose categorisation of environmental discourse takes an implicit position of scientific neutrality, a position that does not exist in the context of a wicked problem. In this thesis then, I make a desk-based analysis of recent environmental activism in Flanders and surrounding regions from the self-consciously radical and normative perspective of Gaia in search for underlying worldviews. This yields three distinct 'ecosophies' based on how each ecosophy understands the human-nature relationship. Interestingly, the lines along which these ecosophies split up differ significantly from the way Dryzek categorises environmental discourses, suggesting that neutrality resulting from academic distance is not a realistic option when it comes to the study of environmental discourses or issues.

Preface

Before you lies the masters' thesis I wrote as the final part of the European Master in Global Studies, which I studied first at Leipzig University and am now completing at Ghent University. To be entirely honest, I am still not sure what exactly 'Global Studies' is supposed to study, but if my previous masters' in Philosophy has taught me anything, then that is probably a good thing. Perhaps I could say something similar about this thesis. What started as a philosophically heavy but engaging read of Bruno Latour's *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime* (2017) quickly turned into an overwhelming series of questions and reflections on what 'nature' even means and how it is related to the way we deal with climate change. At the time, I tried to make sense of this in the context of my interest in urban studies and urban planning, which led to my participation in the Stadsacademie's 'Renewal of the Urban Renewal' trajectory. Although urbanity eventually disappeared as a central theme for this thesis, I am grateful for all the interesting and refreshing conversations I had with students, academic actors, and societal actors alike, both in the context of the Stadsacademie, my masters', and outside of it. I particularly want to single out my supervisor, prof. dr. Thomas Block of course, my EMGS classmates who quickly became close friends, and my partner: thank you so much for the insight, understanding, and patience without which this thesis would never even have been possible. All these engaging conversations helped me to slowly make sense of that pesky feeling I had that something was missing in the way academics, including myself, approaches climate change. Still, it took me until April to finally grasp that red wire which I present to you here in this thesis. Personally, I am quite happy with the way it turned out. I still tend to get lost in the complexities of who says and does what for what reason, but again, that is probably a good sign.

I hope you enjoy reading this thesis as much as I enjoyed writing it and talking about it.

Linus Vermeulen
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Introduction

Something seems skewed in the way we as a society relate to the world. More and more we are bombarded with news about environmental disasters like floods, wildfires, droughts etc. (Brimicombe, 2022), yet more often than not these articles somehow go by almost without being noticed. A report on yet another wildfire two-thirds the size of Belgium in the Siberian permafrost (Torfs, 2021a), for example, (no longer?) generates significant public debate. We are somehow desensitised to ecological crisis even while the looming threat of an often vaguely understood 'climate change' is widely acknowledged. Perhaps people simply are not worried about this looming threat. After all, the most prominent government leaders and officials meet yearly to discuss climate change in what "are now among the largest international meetings in the world" (UNFCCC, n.d.). But that cannot be it, public protests demanding that politicians and governments take action do not seem to be decreasing (see for example Hodge, 2023; Willems, 2021). If anything, the issue seems to be the *way* that governments deal with climate change, as exemplified by a quote in the title of a news article on climate protests in Brussels: "Politicians are watching from the side like disaster tourists."[1] (Torfs, 2021) It feels like the way that governments deal with climate change does not reach the core of the issue.

What can we make of this situation, of this seeming failure of political institutions in the face of climate change? One way to approach this question is through the study of discourse, and environmental discourse in particular [2]. Analysing the arguments made by different actors in the context of environmental issues seems like a straightforward way to get some grip on the situation. It would give an idea of why people feel the need to protest, for example, but it might also help us understand the why's and how's of the way the political world deals with climate change. Bringing these discourses together in a general classification then makes it possible to get a general sense of the landscape. Influential scholar John S. Dryzek (2005), for example, classifies environmental discourses along two dimensions into four categories[3] and in doing so provides a 'map' to navigate the multitude of arguments and actors engaged with environmental issues.

However, as a 'wicked problem' (Incropera, 2016), climate change, and by extension environmental issues, are highly political and highly uncertain. There is no sure-fire way to deal with them and each possible way to do so is deeply embedded in political questions. Scientific and academic studies of these issues are not any different, they too are embedded in social and political power relations. In this sense, the same argument that Dryzek (2005, p. 10) makes about environmental discourses, that they "embody power in the way they condition the perceptions and values of those subject to them", can also be made for the academic study of these environmental discourses. This raises the issue of the positionality of academic research on environmental discourses, including that of Dryzek's classification,

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[1] This is a translation from the Dutch: "Politici staan als ramptoeristen te kijken."
[2] In Dryzek's (2005, pp. 3–9) account, environmental issues are more general than climate change but are characterised by a deep interconnectedness. In this sense, the study of environmental discourse encompasses discourses on climate change, but also pays attention to its interconnectedness to other issues.
[3] I deal with this in more detail in chapter 1.

although Dryzek does not seem to explicitly discuss this issue. If anything, his classification seems to implicitly ascribe to the (modernist) ideal of a science that takes distance from its subject to ensure its political neutrality (Jasanoff, 2004). In the context of a 'wicked problem' however, the view from nowhere does not exist and taking a distance is still taking a position. More specifically, it is taking a position in whatever perspective is hegemonic, which I discuss in more detail in chapter 1.

In this thesis, I aim to do the reverse. Rather than trying to take a 'neutral' position, I explore what it means to study environmental discourses from an explicitly 'radical' and normative perspective, that is, from the perspective of 'Gaia' (Latour, 2017; Stengers, 2015a, 2015b). The point is to tinker and tweak at foundational concepts relating to climate change in order to show how deep and often unnoticed the influence is of dominant modernisation-thinking, which stands in the way of a thorough and effective approach to the climate crisis. This thesis aims to point out that this modernist influence is there by showing how different assumptions about the human-nature relationship connect to a different understanding of environmental activism. However, what exactly a non-modernist approach to climate change would look like is left for further research.

More concretely, I analyse the online presence of environmental activist groups[4] through the lens of Gaia in search for their underlying 'worldviews'. It is a discourse analysis of some sorts, except in that I search for the assumptions underlying the discourses rather than for the discourses themselves, specifically assumptions regarding the human-nature relationship. For this reason, it is more appropriate to search for 'ecosophies', philosophies of harmonious environmental relations (Naess, 1995; Stibbe, 2018), rather than for 'worldviews'. This I also discuss in more detail in chapter 1, which serves roughly as a state of the art. To run ahead a little bit, and as is perhaps already clear from this introduction, the argument made in this thesis is mainly in reaction to the work of Dryzek (2005), although I also position it in the context of Critical Discourse Studies (Flowerdew & Richardson, 2018b). In chapter 2, I elaborate on the Gaia perspective mainly based on the work of Bruno Latour (2017) and Isabelle Stengers (Stengers, 2015a, 2015b) and construct a theoretical framework. In order to do so, the first section (section 2.1) of this chapter elaborates on the 'diagnosis' that the Gaia perspective makes for the failure of us, as a society, to deal with climate change. There, I historicise the problematics of the 'modernist worldview' identified from the Gaia perspective, trace its influence to this day and discuss how climate change provides a unique challenge to this worldview. In the next section, section 2.2, I then set up the 'prognosis'. Dealing with the unique challenge of climate change requires a revision of what it means to have 'agency'. In the Gaia perspective, rather than considering agency an innate property exclusive to rationally thinking human beings, agency becomes the 'structuring intersubjectivity of regimes of activity' and can be attributed to human and non-human beings alike. This yields a requirement for new worldviews developing in the context of Gaia's intrusion on the modernist worldview: nature needs to be animated in some way, it can no longer be considered simply dead material there to be exploited.

This requirement then provides the entry point for the analysis of activist ecosophies in chapter 3. In this chapter, I look at the online presence of environmental activism in and around Flanders in recent years

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[4] 'Activist' is meant very broadly as anybody actively involved in trying to bring about (societal) change.

in search of their ecosophies. In practice, and through the lens of Gaia, this means that I look for ways in which environmental activist groups (implicitly) animate nature, and more specifically for their (implicit) assumptions about the human-nature relationship. This analysis in section 3.2 is of course preceded by a section on methodology (section 3.1) and followed by a section with a discussion and some reflections (section 3.3) on the results of this analysis and what it means for the central question of this thesis. As will become clear, the Gaia perspective in combination with a focus on worldviews rather than discourses brings about a shift in analytic complexity and yields a different categorisation than Dryzek's implicitly modernist one. What are three 'reformist' discourses merge into a single ecosophy under the Gaia perspective, and what is a single 'radical' discourse splits into two distinct ecosophies.

1. Environmental Discourse, Worldview, and Ecosophy

Of course, issues relating to what is now called the 'environment' have existed as long as there have been people. But the notion of 'the environment' as the overarching arena for a changing range of issues was only conceptualised in the 1960's. It started out as a collection of concerns about pollution, wildlife conservation, and natural resource depletion, and now among others it also includes issues about climate change, ecosystems, and the human relation to non-human beings. Concern for the environment and its interrelated issues increased, but there is no consensus on how this concern should be integrated in a singular approach. Different sets of values, arguments, views, common senses etc. compete for the terms of this debate, but since this debate determines the direction of the kind of policy that is implemented among other things, it also has consequences for what happens with the environment. The stakes of the debate are high. (Dryzek, 2005, pp. 3–8)

One way to make sense of this debate is through the study of discourses. Borrowing from John S. Dryzek, a discourse is "a shared way of apprehending the world. Embedded in language, it enables those who subscribe to it to interpret bits of information and put them together into coherent stories or accounts." In doing so, discourses help to "define common sense and legitimate knowledge." (Dryzek, 2005, p. 9) Part of what it means to study discourses, according to Dryzek, is looking at the "[b]asic entities whose existence is recognized or constructed" and the "[a]ssumptions about natural relationships" that constitute a discourse. (Dryzek, 2005, pp. 17–18) Important here is that Dryzek's discourses are by definition *shared*. This means that groups can be identified with a shared way of interpreting information in the formation of stories, and by extension in the formation of an analysis of what is at stake and how it should be dealt with. Additionally, defining discourses as a way to apprehend the world also blurs the boundary between 'discourse' and 'worldview', as the latter of which can broadly be defined as "a set of assumptions about physical and social reality that may have powerful effects on cognition and behavior." (Koltko-Rivera, 2004, p. 3) It should therefore also be possible to study the worldviews of groups in a similar way as the discourses of specific groups would be studied.[5]

One kind of group that is especially suited to this kind of research, is groups of environmental activists. Activists gather in groups along the lines of what they consider to be an urgent issue and how to address it. This goes even more for environmental activism because environmental issues lie at the intersection of a complex environment and a complex human society, as Dryzek (2005, pp. 8–9) argues, and are therefore particularly difficult to find a consensus on. This means that each issue connects to a multitude of other issues with plenty of both human and non-human interests involved, while at the same time these all come together under the single frame of 'environmental issues'. The rise of 'the environment' as an overarching notion for these interconnected issues since the 1960's is presumably related to a rising awareness of their interconnectedness. The same can be said about climate change, as part of

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[5] See also the similar way in which Hajer (2005, pp. 60–61) approaches discourse, his notion of discourse is also close to that of a worldview as mentioned above.

the wide range of environmental issues, it is also a topic that increasingly encompasses more and more interrelated issues.

Activists gathering in groups to address climate change thus also deal with a broad range of other related issues, including ecosystems, fossil fuel, industry, social and environmental justice etc. This means that an individual deciding about which group to join generally does not have to join whatever group is dealing with one particular local issue. They can choose the group they think is most suitable among a range of approaches to climate change, its related issues, and how to deal with them. Since there are presumably also multiple groups ascribing to a similar analysis, this implies that these groups can be categorised along different discernible notions of what the issue is and how to deal with it. At least, that is the working assumption of this thesis: a climate activist group shares an analysis of what the problem behind climate change is and how to best deal with it, while their analysis can at least partially overlap with the analysis of other groups. And of course, analysing such a multi-facetted topic like the environment or even just climate change, requires a distinct set of assumptions about reality that impact behaviour.

To get a more concrete idea of what such an 'analysis' entails in the context of the environment, I borrow the concept of an 'ecosophy' from Arran Stibbe (2020, pp. 502–503), who borrows it from Arne Naess (1995). Naess developed the idea of an ecosophy to describe a philosophy about harmonious environmental relations. That is, relations between humans and the environment, but also relations between humans relating to the environment. An ecosophy contains, on the one hand, a descriptive idea of the state of affairs, about the status quo of harmony in environmental relations, and on the other hand a set of openly normative ideas, values, postulates etc. about the ideal state of environmental relations. In the context of this thesis, I use the term 'ecosophy' to mean a 'worldview' relating to the environment. That is, as a set of both descriptive and normative assumptions about social and physical reality relating to harmonious environmental relations.

This notion of ecosophy also distinguishes this thesis from Naess and Stibbe who use the idea of an ecosophy to refer to the positionality of the researcher engaged in an ecological discourse analysis, not to the discourses or worldviews themselves. In the case of Stibbe, this is not surprising since he works in the context of Critical Discourse Studies (CDS), a field that historically developed from Critical Linguistics by including a variety of non-linguistic approaches to the same goal of exposing how discourses function to enforce existing power relations by misrepresenting or defamiliarizing oppressed social groups. CDS draws on the work of Foucault and Gramsci on ubiquitous power relations and how these are enforced through ideology and discourse. It is 'critical' in the sense that it aims to "support the struggle against inequality" (Flowerdew & Richardson, 2018a, p. 5) by pointing out how exactly discourse maintains this inequality. (Flowerdew & Richardson, 2018a, pp. 1–5) While this inequality is generally limited to inequalities in a human society, Stibbe (2018, p. 500) expands the range of relevant 'oppressed groups' to include environmental beings. Individual animals, plants, species, and whole ecosystems, but also currently living people who suffer the consequences of pollution, resource depletion or other related issues. Working under the assumption of ubiquitous power relations and with the goal of uncovering how environmental discourse sustains inequality, it is of course essential to be aware of the positionality of the researcher. Hence, the notion of an ecosophy. However, being aware

of your own (normative) ideas about harmonious environmental relations does not necessarily translate to research that is 'critical' in the sense described above. This awareness of one's own ecosophy also needs to have discernible consequences for the theoretical framework of one's research, for the way information or data is interpreted. It is perfectly possible that a researcher, as an individual, is 'critical' and has the intention to contribute to what they believe is a better world, while their research stays within the dominant paradigm that they believe to be problematic.

Dryzek's often cited work (2005) is an example of how quickly and unnoticed a theoretical framework can slip into a dominant perspective. According to Dryzek, all environmental discourse necessarily starts in the context of industrial society, including its discourses and legitimating principles. More specifically, all environmental discourse reacts or deals with the dominant structures of industrial society in some way. He calls this dominant context 'the discourse of industrialism', which is characterised by a commitment to an eternal growth of the production of goods, services, and of material wellbeing. There are of course many and often radically different perspectives on the how, where, and who of this growth, compare for example Marxist, neo-liberal, and Fascist perspectives. But according to Dryzek, these can all be counted as industrialism because they deal with environmental issues only in so far as they relate to the resources needed for (industrial) production. (Dryzek, 2005, pp. 14–15) By implication, what characterises an environmental discourse is a focus on environment as a topic in itself rather than as a means to industrial capacity. All environmental discourse thus needs to respond to the dominant structures of industrial society and somehow introduce the environment as a topic in itself.

Based on this assumption, Dryzek (2005, pp. 14–17) then classifies all environmental discourse in the context of this dominant discourse of industrialism in four categories along two dimensions. The first dimension deals with *how much* the environmental discourse aims to depart from industrialism. A discourse is reformist if it aims to only modify the structures of industrial society and it is radical if it aims to completely restructure them. The second dimension deals with *the way* in which environmental discourses depart from industrialism. They are prosaic when they take the political economy of the industrial society as a given, and they are imaginative if they try to break with the political economy of industrialism. In this way, Dryzek ends up with four kinds of environmental discourse. There is 'problem solving' discourse, which is reformist and prosaic, there is 'limits and survival' discourse which is radical and prosaic, there is 'sustainability' discourse which is reformist and imaginative, and then lastly there is 'green radicalism' discourse which is radical and imaginative. (Dryzek, 2005, pp. 14–17)

The problem is, however, that academic research is also always situated in the power relations and practices of the status quo political economy. Just like what Dryzek argues about environmental discourses, his own classification is also "bound up with political practices and power". Just like discourses "embody power in the way they condition the perceptions and values of those subject to them" (Dryzek, 2005, p. 10), so does Dryzek's classification. Since academic research also exists within these 'political practices and power', the perceptions and values of academic research too are conditioned by political practices and power. Classifying all environmental discourse on the assumption that it starts from a hegemonic industrialism, yet without explicitly positioning his classification along these same lines, means that Dryzek (accidentally) positions himself in the perspective of industrialism.

Of course, Dryzek does not work in the context of CDS and thus does not necessarily aim to support the "struggle against inequality" (Flowerdew & Richardson, 2018a, p. 5), but it remains important to note that by not *explicitly* taking a position in relation to industrialism, he *implicitly* positioned himself within the perspective of the discourse of industrialism.

Of course, this does not necessarily devalue Dryzek's work. Rather, it raises the issue of the kind of values inherent in scientific and academic research, and how these relate to environmental issues. The scientific ideal that underlies Dryzek's approach seems to be that of 'proper science' as taking distance from the object of study so as to not take any political position. However, this is an inherently 'modern' ideal (Latour, 2017, pp. 22, 47–49). It is deeply intertwined with the very same structures of industrial society that environmental discourses depart from and react against. The issue of climate change and related debates on how to deal with it notoriously challenge the role and status of science and technology.[6] And as I also argue in section 2.1, the kind of science needed to 'prove' climate change challenges the traditional separation of descriptive science and normative politics. Somewhat ironically, this means that when dealing with environmental and climate issues, ascribing to the ideal of a purely descriptive 'proper science' is also a implicit political position.

This thesis, then, is an exploration of what it means to academically study environmental (and/or climate) activism from a self-consciously normative theoretical framework. More specifically, this thesis self-consciously positions itself in what Dryzek calls 'green radicalism'. Dryzek explicitly mentions the Gaia Hypothesis as an example of a green radicalist discourse, which means that its "adherents reject the basic structure of industrial society and the way the environment is conceptualized therein in favor of a variety of quite different alternative interpretations of humans, their society, and their place in the world." (Dryzek, 2005, p. 16) Taking the idea of Gaia as the theoretical framework of this thesis means abandoning the 'neutrality' that Dryzek implicitly claims in his classification. Unlike Dryzek, although he does explicitly mention it, with this thesis I do not aim to take a step back and take the view from nowhere. In picking a 'green radicalism' perspective, this thesis in part picks up the critical aims of Critical Discourse Studies, but breaks with Stibbe's CDS approach to environmental discourse, which tends to be about analysing how discourses construct or maintain power relations that are destructive to harmonious environmental relations, see for example Halliday (2006) or Mitchell (2013). While an ecological version of CDS is explicitly normative in its goals, it does not seem to question the normativity or positionality of its own perspective. In this thesis, on the other hand, I explore the ecosophies underlying environmental activism that formed in response to an awareness that something is wrong with humanity's relation to the environment. That is, in response to the intrusion of Gaia, which I discuss in chapter 2, but which at the very least can be said to be a normative framework.

To run ahead a little, the intrusion of Gaia means that a worldview should be developed that takes into account the interconnectedness of beings without placing humans outside or on top of nature. For a core assumption, this is very lofty and abstract while it needs to be relatively robust and solid to function as a theoretical framework. Based on the work of Bruno Latour and Isabelle Stengers I attempt to make

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[6] See for example (Latour, 2017, pp. 24–33).

a working theoretical framework out of this, which I then use in chapter 3 to analyse activist ecosophies and make something meant to function somewhat like a map. While it is based on an 'external reality' and things that are really there, the choice of what materials to present and how to present them prioritises some kinds of navigating over others.[7] In this analysis then, based on the sources and materials created by climate activists, I aim to create a kind of 'map' of activist ecosophies as an experiment to see if and how an explicitly normative and 'radical' framework impacts a classification of environmental discourses, or in this case ecosophies.

In other words, studying environmental activism, their discourses, and closely related worldviews is a promising way to try and understand the general feeling of lack associated with efforts against climate change. However, approaches to this study tend to assume the ideal of science as taking a neutral distance, while forgetting that academic work is also a part of the complex social and political power structures surrounding environmental issues and is therefore not 'neutral'. Even research with explicitly normative aims, like Critical Discourse Studies, tend to forgo a thorough reflection on the positionality of their theoretical framework and how this impacts its results. In the next chapter, then, I take the 'radical' idea of Gaia and attempt to make a theoretical framework out of it.

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[7] For a concrete and historical example of how maps can be both scientific and political, see Laura Hostetler's *Qing Colonial Enterprise: Ethnography and Cartography in Early Modern China* (2001).

2. The Modernist Worldview and Gaia's Intrusion

Developing a theoretical framework based on Gaia, of course, also means developing an ecosophy to ground this framework. This, in turn, means a philosophical engagement with the relationship between humanity and nature, specifically with its dominant form as it exists now, how it came to be, and what is wrong with it. The main authors working on Gaia as a worldview are Bruno Latour and Isabelle Stengers, on whose work this chapter is based. Both of these present Gaia as a reaction to what they consider is the problematic worldview that led to climate change, or at least allowed climate change to become the problem it is now. Even more so, as I discuss in this chapter, they see this problematic worldview, which they characterise as a modernist worldview, as the philosophical reason why climate change is so difficult if not impossible to deal with.

In the first section of this second chapter, then, I historicise this modernist worldview and point out two of its fundamental assumptions: (1) that there are universal laws of nature that determine the mechanical movement of things, the earth as a rock floating through space, and (2) that in this universe determined by natural laws, humans take a special position because of the unique characteristic of having agency, in the sense of being the only creatures capable of free and rational thought. Next, I argue that this worldview is deeply embedded in current day language, knowledge production, and policymaking, to then argue that climate change poses a unique and fundamental challenge to this worldview. In this way, the first section of this chapter forms the 'diagnosis' needed to be able to form a 'prognosis' in the second section. The second section, then, forms the 'prognosis'. Based on an alternative way to understand agency in the context of climate change, it constructs the notion of 'Gaia' as a challenge to the modernist worldview. In doing so, a requirement appears for what is needed to deal with the unique challenge of climate change: nature needs to be animated.

2.1   Climate Change and the Modernist Separation

According to Latour, the seeming apathy towards ecological crisis mentioned in the introduction is the long-term result of a modernist worldview that arose in the West during the Enlightenment and its related scientific and technological developments. More specifically, he singles out Galileo (1564-1642) and his theory about the movement of bodies as a symbolic break line with the worldview of the past (2017, p. 60), of what would become known derogatory as the 'Dark Ages'. In the worldview of the 'Dark Ages', the diversity of all kinds of beings and forces fed a range of philosophical and scientific discussions[8], but Galileo broke with this worldview by stripping the Earth "from all forms of movement except one, abandoning all the prevailing notions of climate, animation, and metamorphoses." (Latour, 2017, p. 60) This marked the beginning of a mechanical view of the world, although this was not an immediately straightforward move. Take for example how Newton's (1643-1727) theory of gravity, now seen as exemplary for early modernist thinking, was contested by his contemporaries in the wake of Galileo. The progressives at the time had just gotten rid of the Medieval occultist explanations of nature that called

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[8] See for example the discussions about nominalism vs. realism (Conti, 2005).

on a variety of innate qualities of objects. Rather than that a stone falls, for example, because it is in the stone's 'nature' to fall, the progressive scientists shifted to a mechanistic view of the world where a stone falls because it is moved by an external influence. But Newton's idea of gravity called on a mysterious innate quality of objects that caused them to be attracted to each other without physical contact. Somewhat ironically, Newton's theory must have felt rather old-fashioned at first. It was only by the mid-18th century, about three quarters of a century after the publication of Newton's *Principia,* that it became generally accepted also among the progressives that gravity was one of the few irreducible inherent properties of matter. (Kuhn, 1996 [1964], pp. 103–106)

The progressive scientists' successful reduction of the number of irreducible forces and qualities of nature meant a huge boon for the development of 'modern science', but it also had far reaching philosophical consequences. For one, as Latour argues, Galileo's discovery that the earth was just one celestial body among others also meant the end of the exceptionality of the earth. Previously, the Earth had a special position in the universe because, as the Aristotelian sublunary world, it abided by a different set of forces and laws than the superlunar world of the celestial bodies. Now suddenly, the matter on earth was fundamentally no different than that above the moon. (Latour, 2017, pp. 76–77) In this mechanical worldview or perhaps rather cosmology, humanity also needed a new place. But now humanity needed to be exceptional in the context of a vast, indifferent, and material *universe* rather than being exceptional in the context of a sublunar *world*. The most influential modern account of human exceptionality in a mechanical universe comes from René Descartes' (1596-1650) *Méditations Métaphysiques* (2009, [1647]). In it, he develops a theory of 'substance dualism', according to which there is one other fundamental substance besides matter: mind. This allowed Descartes to have a fully mechanical view of the world, and by extension of animals, plants, and the body, while simultaneously positing that humans are exceptional in that they are moved by a mind that is not bound by the deterministic laws of nature. (Robinson, 2023)

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) notoriously takes it a step further by asserting that rationality is the basis for moral worth. According to Kant, the only beings that have any inherent moral value and that should therefore be treated as ends in themselves, are beings with the capacity for free, independent, and rational thought. Any being without a 'mind' and therefore without the capacity for reason, can, in other words, be exploited without any moral offence. This leads to famously controversial issues about people with a disability (Johnson & Cureton, 2022), but for the purpose of this thesis it is important to note that this is a free pass to exploit any non-human being at will. Animals, plants, or nature in general do not have rational capacities like humans do, therefore are not 'free' like humans are, and can therefore be exploited as mere resources. Over the centuries since Galileo's discovery, a worldview thus emerged that first fundamentally separates humans from the rest of nature, and then attributes freedom and moral value exclusively on the side of the human.

This modernist separation between free-willed humans on the one side and deterministic natural resources on the other still has deep implications to this day. It can even be found in seemingly innocent phrases like 'our relation to the world', which already implicitly assumes that 'we', as humanity, are somehow 'alien' to the rest of the world in that 'we' need to go out of our way to relate to it. (Latour,

2017, p. 14) According to Latour (2017, pp. 58, 68), this separation seems so self-evident that the normal functioning of (the English) language enforces this separation as a 'stylistic effect'. Agency is stripped from non-human beings and attributed exclusively to humans through the normal way of talking and thinking. But importantly, this is still only a *stylistic* effect, it is secondary and contingent rather than necessary or real. In reality, according to Latour, 'nature' and 'culture' are two parts of the same concept, their meanings are reciprocally constituted in a dialectical process. If you are to define 'nature', then at the very least you need to distinguish it from culture or the 'human realm' in general. The same goes for the reverse: defining culture means distinguishing it from the natural world. Without the one, there is also not the other. (Latour, 2017, pp. 14–20)

It is of course not only everyday language that assumes and even self-enforces this modernist separation, it is also present in the norms and standards of the scientific production of knowledge and even in the structures of industrialised society. Most notably in the ideal of 'proper science', which contains the ideal of being objective and descriptive. It means taking and maintaining distance from the object of study, and above all, it means not making normative or political claims (Latour, 2017, pp. 22, 47–49). This ideal of science as purely descriptive can be traced back to a notorious modernist thinker: David Hume (1711-1776), more specifically to his articulation of the famous 'is-ought gap' (1740).[9] A proper scientists that works on uncovering and describing the laws of nature, then, under no circumstances should draw normative conclusions from their work about how people should behave, let alone what kind of policy should be implemented. Of course, scientific knowledge production is essential to inform political decision-making, but under this ideal, it is the politician who decides what kind of policy should be implemented and it is the scientist that provides the tools and knowledge that enable this policy. (Stengers, 2015a, pp. 135–136) (See also Jasanoff (2004) on the separation of science and politics into two distinct spheres.)

Policy today too tends to be embedded in the modernist separation between humans and nature. The Club of Rome's report *Limits to Growth* is a case in point, but not in the sense that this report explicitly addresses the assumed modernist separation at the core of industrial society. Rather, by assessing the possibility of continuing exponential economic growth and warning that this trend is unsustainable, the report acknowledges that this kind of growth is assumed in the status quo. If things go on as usual, continuously striving for economic growth, the earth will reach its limits and industrial capacity will be cut of. (Randers et al., 1972, pp. 23–24) For it to be possible for the status quo to assume and aim for this kind of continuous exponential growth, it needs to assume the modernist separation. In other words, the modernist separation is a condition of possibility for this assumption. Without assuming that nature is a resource to be exploited for human gain, this kind of economic growth loses its meaning. This goes to show how deeply the modernist worldview is embedded in the structures of society.

However, this modernist worldview has taken some blows in the last half century. The report of the Club of Rome is of course one such example. Philosophically, it were the 'post-modern' thinkers that broke

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[9] In Book III, Section I, Part I of his *A Treatise of Human Nature: Being an Attempt to Introduce the Experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects*.

with modernism's 'grand narrative' [10]. But more recently it is climate change that poses a fundamental challenge. For one, the kind of science that supports the idea of climate change, according to Latour, requires vast networks of data and data gathering, where no individual 'datum' holds the strength or certainty to prove climate change. What gives climate science its strength is the multitude and robustness of these networks, even if each element in each of these networks holds a degree of uncertainty. (Latour, 2017, p. 31) This makes it possible to challenge each individual node and claim that climate change has not been 'proven', even if there is consensus in the scientific community. The scientists find themselves in a difficult position. The legitimacy of their voice as scientists in political decision-making, at least in an idealised modernist worldview, derives from the 'objectivity' and 'neutrality' of scientific data and facts. Claiming that political action needs to be taken even if data is uncertain, means crossing over from scientist to citizen and means losing the authority granted to them as scientists. (Stengers, 2015a, p. 136) The problem is thus that climate science and the normativity that it entails, clashes with the modernist normative view that science should be purely descriptive and politically 'neutral'.

Additionally, and perhaps more fundamentally, climate change poses a challenge to the modernist worldview because the modernist worldview allows no agency for non-human actors. Based on the modernist separation, the side of nature is supposed to be passive, blindly following the laws of nature until it is exploited by active humans. Climate change, however, as something that is induced by human action, escapes this imposition. In this sense, climate change can be understood as a re*action* to human activity, which implies that the side of Culture is subjected to Nature's regime of activity, just like Nature is subjected to Culture's regime of activity, to borrow some of Stengers' terminology (2015b, p. 45). However, that processes in nature have consequences for human activity of course does not necessarily contradict with the Galilean assumption of a universe of dead bodies moving according to the laws of nature. A contradiction only arises in combination with the second assumption, that humanity's exceptionalism comes from having agency by virtue of the capacity for rational thought. If climate change is understood as a kind of 'action', agency can no longer be exclusively attributed to humans. Either all beings 'act' and have agency, which means getting rid of the modernist separation, or no beings have agency at all, which means full-blown determinism. Neither is acceptable in a modernist worldview that requires human exceptionalism to justify the exploitation of nature for human gain.

Clearly then, something needs to change. Climate change causes a fracture in the worldview that roots much of industrial society, both in terms of its knowledge production and its policy making. A new, or at least heavily adapted worldview is needed that encompasses the challenge posed by climate change. However, as is clear from this section, it took the modernist worldview quite some time to mature. The philosophical consequences of scientific and technological inventions took some time to make themselves clear. The overarching notion of 'environmental issues', which increasingly also includes climate change, only emerged in the 1960's (Dryzek, 2005, pp. 3–5). We cannot expect a full-fledged

[10] See for example, and for more on the idea of 'grand narratives', Jean-François Lyotard's *La Condition Postmoderne: Rapport sur le Savoir* (1979).

alternative worldview to already exist. Rather, now is the time for the struggle to figure out what this alternative worldview can and should look like. In the next section, I discuss what this challenge to the modernist worldview requires in terms of the 'intrusion of Gaia'.

2.2 Gaia's Intrusion

The intrusion of Gaia is the name that Stengers gives to the challenge posed by climate change that I discussed above, although this of course is not exactly what Stengers has in mind. To Stengers, the intrusion of Gaia is a 'question' posed to humanity by the interconnectedness of beings, yet without this interconnectedness having any interest in the response. Rather, it refers to an awareness of this interconnectedness that can never again be ignored as it was before. (Stengers, 2015b, pp. 46–47) This question that is not really a question of course still requires an 'answer', but not so much because Gaia demands it, but because there's really no other choice. That is to say that climate change fundamentally interrupts the workings of the modernist worldview, and we need to adapt without ever being able to go back. In this second section of the first chapter, I start from a way to deal with the contradiction posed by climate change as discussed above and how it leads to the notion of 'Gaia' as the interconnectedness of beings. Next, I add an important nuance to this notion and set up a general requirement for the kind of response that Gaia's intrusion requires.

As discussed above, the modernist worldview locates human exceptionalism in a unique human capacity for cognition, specifically rational cognition that allows free and independent thought. In this way, the modernist worldview separates humans from nature, but also comes under pressure in the context of climate change. One way to address this tension, is by closing this separation and recognising the agency of non-human actors. This conjures anthropomorphic images that, of course, seem ridiculous at first glance. Who would seriously believe that for example a meandering river decides to change its path after rational and conscious consideration? However, thinking this through, it might not be so ridiculous after all. It is important to note here that the kind of agency attributed to the river in the example just mentioned is built on the modernist separation and assumes an essentially human cognitive capacity as the core of agency, while this is exactly the kind of assumption that is being challenged. In other words, under a different understanding of agency, it might not be ridiculous at all to recognise a meandering river as an agent.

To inform such a different understanding of agency that is 'post' the modern, we might draw on pre-modern traditions. Latour, for one, suggests an almost literary understanding of agency in the sense of being a 'subject':

> "[…] just as happens in prescientific and nonmodern myths, we encounter an agent that takes its label, "subject," from the fact that it can be *subjected* to the whims, the bad moods, the emotions, the reactions, and even the revenge of another agent, which also takes its quality as "subject" *from the fact that it is equally subjected to the action of the other*." (Latour, 2017, p. 62, original emphasis)

The agency of the meandering river, in this sense, lies not in some conscious consideration about its path, but in the fact that the course of the river is subjected to others, like the lay of the land, rainfall upstream, or even the sediment it erodes and deposits itself. Even if this sounds like it could make sense for rivers, it sounds counterintuitive when applied to humans. While that may be the case, this is because our intuition here is a modern one. In ancient Greece for example, this does not seem to have been counterintuitive at all. Peter Sloterdijk, a philosopher that Latour also discusses quite extensively (Latour, 2017, pp. 122–130), argues that in the *Iliad*, Achilles functions as a medium for an almost god-like rage. This 'rage' is not seen as something part of Achilles' capacity for cognition. Rather, Achilles is the medium through which this rage expresses itself in the world. Achilles is still the 'subject' here, not in the sense that he rationally chooses to be enraged, but in the sense that he is 'subjected' to this guiding and almost godly rage. (Sloterdijk, 2010, p. 4)

The kind of pre-modern-inspired agency suggested here is not an individualist one like in the modernist worldview, it is an intersubjective one. The agency of entity A derives from being subject to entity B, and the agency of entity B similarly derives from being subject to entity A. Of course, in this sense, no entity is subject to just a single other subject, the same principle goes to create a vast network of dependencies. The point is, however, that in this understanding, agency does not derive from any individual entity's properties. It derives from the way that entity is embedded among other entities, it is a 'situationist' understanding of agency rather than an individualist one.

This has an important implication that allows a collapse of the modernist separation. One entity can only have agency if other entities do too. From this understanding of agency, it is nonsensical to limit agency only to humans because humans depend on each other and on other beings for their very survival. The fact that humans even exist in such a way to be considered 'agents', is only possible because a range of other entities and other humans are consequential for human activity. By being useful or meaningful in any kind of way[11], they structure the possibilities that are open and closed for human action. Human agency too, in this sense, is subject to non-human entities whose possibilities for action are similarly structured, among others, by humans.[12] (Latour, 2017, pp. 98–99) To again borrow terminology from Stengers (2015b, p. 45), each being's "regime of activity" depends on the regimes of activity of others. Without this kind of structuring, this opening or closing of possibilities, there would be no element of choice that even allows for the modernist notion of agency or intentionality.

This notion of agency as the structuring intersubjectivity of regimes of activity points to what Gaia 'consists of' as an entity. There is of course much that needs further explanation and nuance, but in its simplest form, as a being that can be referred to, Gaia is the assemblage of all 'couplings' that hold together the world. Stengers compares the kind of being that Gaia is, to the kind of being that a rat is: "it is not just endowed with a history but with its own regime of activity and sensitivity, resulting from the

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[11] In the very broadest sense that for example being "useless" also implies a specific course of action, which is in this case, to not "use" this specific entity.
[12] This has implications far beyond the issues of agency and climate change. For example, under this view, it also becomes nonsensical to talk about an animal or plant as having evolved in response to an environment. Rather, species and environment evolve together. (Latour, 2017, p. 101)

manner in which the processes that constitute it are coupled with one another in multiple and entangled manners, the variation of one having multiple repercussions that affect the others." (Stengers, 2015b, p. 45) Gaia thus refers to the interdependence that grounds this pre-modern-inspired 'post-modern' understanding of agency, but rather than that Gaia refers to an ostensible entity like the rat that is embedded in this interdependence, Gaia refers to the assemblage of all couplings that constitute this interdependence. Just as 'real', but not as tangible.

However, there is a danger is saying that Gaia is the assemblage of couplings that hold together the world. This phrasing implies that Gaia provides some kind of overarching stability or coherence. Both Stengers (2015b, p. 45) and Latour (2017, pp. 94–97) strongly deny that Gaia somehow provides a holistic unity or providence, but it remains challenging to articulate Gaia in a way that stresses the interconnectedness of all beings without making Gaia out to be the overarching 'Whole' made up of all these parts. What is at stake here is how humanity can 'handle' Gaia. If Gaia is understood as a being that somehow provides an overarching unity or coherence, it implies that every part of this whole somehow functions to create this unity. Latour strongly contests this 'technological metaphor' because it also implies that there is a great "Engineer" that created the system and that could fidget with this system. (2017, pp. 95–97) Frans C. Verhagen argues that the metaphor of 'nature as a machine' developed in the 17th century in the context of the rise of a 'mechano-morphical language', enabled by the discoveries of Galileo, Newton and other modernist thinkers. This allowed nature to be viewed in industrial and economic terms, created and maintained by God as the 'Great Engineer', whose operations could then be emulated by humanity. (Verhagen, 2008, pp. 5–7) It is for the same reason that Stengers rejects technological solutions to climate change like geoengineering (Stengers, 2015a, pp. 139–140). These kinds of solutions open up the possibility of the idea to manipulate the functions of nature to benefit human gain and they reduce nature again to a collection of merely passive natural resources or processes to be tinkered with.

Gaia should thus not be seen as a Whole consisting of its parts that unite to create this Whole. By extension, Gaia also does not provide any overarching providence or stability, it does not provide any service or function. This has an important consequence. As Stengers argues, Gaia is not *threatened* by climate change. Whether human activity destroys much of the foundation for life on Earth or not, this planet will continue to exist in some form or another. There will still be entities subjected to other entities' regimes of activity, and there will still be Gaia. However, Gaia is 'ticklish' in the sense that human activities might be met by a disproportionate response, but this response does not have any moral compass guiding it, it does not have any greater good in mind. (Stengers, 2015b, pp. 45–46)

This points to a difficult and precarious balance that needs to be made. The interconnectedness that constitutes Gaia can not be removed from our worldview, but how it should be integrated or taken into account remains to be seen. This provides a basic requirement for emerging worldviews: they should at the very least animate nature in some way. Philosophically, this animation should be a careful balance between under-animating and over-animating nature (Latour, 2017, p. 87; Sands, 2020; Stengers, 2015b, pp. 43–44). Under-animation results in the classic modernist worldview discussed above where 'nature' is reduced to a resource to be exploited. Over-animation, on the other hand, and perhaps

somewhat ironically, also leads to the modernist notion of nature as a resource to be exploited but in the sense of a 'Great Engineer' discussed above. As an overarching entity providing stability and coherence to life on earth, an over-animated Gaia is in control of the foundation for human and other life, whether as a frail being that needs to be protected against human destruction or as a vengeful goddess that should not be offended. In this case, Gaia is 'reduced', or rather 'enlarged', to a (mechanical) system whose processes can be tinkered with. This provides guidance on how nature should not be animated, but it does not give any content to how it should be animated.

Accepting the reality of Gaia, as Stengers implores her readers to do (2015a), is thus not just an invitation to accept a new, alternative worldview. Gaia does refer to an interdependence that holds together the earth and, in this sense, provides a way to 'view' the 'world', but this way of 'viewing' primarily poses a challenge to the modernist way of 'viewing'. 'Accepting the reality of Gaia' means accepting that climate change is more than a technological problem, it is a fundamental philosophical intrusion that forever alters the human-nature relation. But while it is certain that the consequences of human activity in the interdependence of things can never be discounted again, it is uncertain how exactly these consequences should be accounted for. Accepting the reality of Gaia means accepting the intrusion, but the question remains on how to deal with this intrusion and what it means for the practical struggle with climate change. In fact, Stengers suggests that academics and activists alike do not fret too much about theory because it tends to disregard valuable practices based on mere abstractions. Instead, Stengers suggests the cultivation of a collective cooperative intelligence that experiments with practices that give "voice to powers, human and non-human, that must be addressed if they are not to turn into destructive ones," (2015a, p. 142). More concretely, this means bottom-up Direct-Action Activism that is 'situated and precarious', it springs up around concrete issues and grabs whatever ways of thinking that empower these 'powers' to act.

The new worldview that is supposed to challenge the modernist one is thus still under development, so to speak, and at least in Stengers' account it is activism that provides the hotbed and the practices necessary to give meaning to such a new worldview. Analysing the ecosophies of environmental activist groups is thus not a search for an already existing worldview. It is rather a search for how concrete issues and corresponding practices relate to different ways to think the world and humanity's place in it. Looked at through the lens of Gaia as developed above, one way to do this is to search for how activist groups animate nature in response to Gaia's intrusion. It is, however, not necessary that these groups explicitly engage with the idea of Gaia to justify or work out their activism. Gaia provides an academic lens and the central question to ask of these activist groups ('How do you animate nature?'), but not the content of their response.[13] Furthermore, it is not even necessary for activist groups to explicitly animate nature. As long as they are dealing with environmental issues, they need to assume at least some kind of human-nature relationship. If it turns out that they leave the modernist separation unaltered, then that is a result in itself.

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[13] The 'question' and 'response' here is meant metaphorically, as discussed in the next chapter, the analysis does not actually make use of ethnographic methodologies.

But of course, using Gaia as a framework has some important consequences. For one, it means that environmental activism is not understood as a direct reaction to 'the discourse of industrialism' or societal structures and institutions that are deemed destructive. Rather, environmental activism becomes a reaction to the intrusion of Gaia on these societal structures. This might seem like nitpicking, but the extra step is important. It means that from the very start, the question already unapologetically assumes that there is an actual problem, there is no more room to ask whether or not the activists are right in thinking that currently existing societal strictures are destructive for the environment. It is what gives this thesis its normative character. Additionally, the way the notion of Gaia was developed here provides a central point of reference that allows comparison between different activist approaches. That nature needs to be animated allows to ask how an activist group animates nature and allows comparison between these ways of animating nature.

Briefly summarizing this chapter then, in the Gaia perspective, climate change provides a unique challenge to the modernist worldview because it points out the interdependency between human and non-human activity. However, this modernist worldview developed roughly since the Enlightenment and our current ways of thinking, speaking, and living are deeply entrenched in it. If a new worldview is to develop then, one that can integrate the interdependency between human and non-human actors, it most likely will not come from dominant structures or institutions. Instead, it is more likely to emerge, little by little, from an activist context. The idea here is not that Gaia should be at the core of this new perspective, Gaia rather provides the theoretical framework for this thesis, and it provides an entry point to start 'mapping' environmental activism from the Gaia perspective. That is, the worldviews that start to emerge in response to Gaia's intrusion should animate nature in some way, but it leaves room for different worldviews to emerge depending on how exactly they animate nature. An important side note, however, is that the analysis in the next chapter does not deal with a developmental pattern of these worldviews over time. It deals with a snapshot of activist groups and serves more as an attempt at a proof of concept.

3. Mapping Activist 'Ecosophies'

This third chapter centres around the question of how environmental activist groups do, in fact, animate nature and what their resulting ecosophies look like. To answer that question, this chapter analysis the online presence of groups engaged in environmental activism to search for underlying worldviews, and more specifically, underlying ecosophies, to then 'map' and compare these. Of course, this first of all requires a section on methodology, section 3.1, which is then followed by the actual analysis in section 3.2 and a reflection and discussion of the analysis in section 3.3.

3.1   Methodology

As discussed in chapter 1, the methodological context for the following analysis is based mainly on two strands of scholarship: Critical Discourse Studies (Flowerdew & Richardson, 2018a) expanded to include ecological issues by Arran Stibbe (2018), and studies of environmental discourses by John S. Dryzek (2005). However, as is hopefully clear by now, the following analysis does not simply adopt the methods or intentions of these two strands of scholarship. Through the Gaia perspective (chapter 2), for one, environmental activism is understood to be reacting to the intrusion of Gaia rather than to Dryzek's discourse of industrialism. Furthermore, in doing so, activist groups are understood as developing an 'ecosophy' (Naess, 1995), but in the sense that they develop a philosophy with both a descriptive and normative aspect about status quo harmonious environmental relations (see chapter 1). Of course, activists do not come together to reflect and discuss the current state of harmony in environmental relations or how this relates to the Gaia hypothesis. The idea is rather that by trying to articulate concrete issues relating to the environment, what is to be done by them, and by trying to act on these issues, activist automatically and perhaps even unconsciously develop both a diagnosis and prognosis about the human-nature relationship. In other words, an important working assumption in the following analysis is that theory and praxis codevelop, that theory informs practices and that reversely praxis informs theory. For the purposes of this thesis, that means that theory is present as long as there is praxis, even if this theory is not made explicit.

More concretely, the intrusion of Gaia discussed in chapter 2 sets the stage for the diagnosis parts of new developing ecosophies. It sets the stage, but it does not put on the play. In the same vein as Dryzek argues that there are many radically different ways to pick up the discourse of Industrialism (Dryzek, 2005, pp. 14–15), there are many radically different ways to pick up an ecosophy in response to the intrusion of Gaia. The concrete who, where, what, and when of this intrusion depend on the concrete worldview that Gaia intrudes on. In other words, an understanding of what exactly it is that goes wrong depends on an understanding of the specifics of what is even going on in the first place. While all activist worldviews minimally agree that *something* is going wrong, what this is specifically can vary from person to person or group to group and makes for a single stage that allows a comparison of different kinds of plays. Differences in the 'diagnosis' of Gaia's intrusion then naturally lead to differences in the related 'prognosis', in what it means for environmental relations to be 'harmonic'. 'Harmonic' here understood as an imagined ideal state to be pursued.

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In this context, the following analysis examines *some* of the ways that climate or environmental activism makes a diagnosis and related prognosis of human-nature relations in the face of Gaia's intrusion. The analysis is by no means exhaustive and as it is a qualitative analysis, it is to significant degree speculative. This is partly because of limits of space and time, but also due to methodological decisions. For one, this is purely desk-based research, the analysis does not involve any interviews or other ethnographic methodologies. This means that the scope of this analysis is limited to what is accessible through the internet, which in turn means that some groups or movements without the means or desire to be present online are automatically omitted. This could potentially include radical anti-technology groups for example, or groups calling for violence whose content is removed under (supra-)national or platform regulations.[14] Practically, for example, this means that the most 'radical' call for action calls for non-violent civil disobedience. Additionally, using the internet to gather primary data favours groups with a large online presence and large popular support. However, popular support does not equate to relevance for the aims of this thesis. Rather, the largest and most broadly known groups or organisations can be expected to be closest to the 'status quo' worldview, they are the least threatening to the worldview often taken for granted.[15] Methodologically, this means that the attention spent on each ecosophy under consideration does not necessarily match the size or the number of groups ascribing to the respective ecosophy.

These considerations seem to suggest that ethnographic methodologies rather than desk-based methodologies are the way to go here, they would not only allow me to cover both online and offline groups, but they would also provide a depth to the analysis of each ecosophy that is lacking in desk-based research. However, this kind of ethnographic research would require an amount of time, space, and resources that are simply not available for this thesis. Taking into account the limits and aims of this thesis, I prioritise a broad even if limited scope over individual depth. The main reason for this is that I found no precedent to this study. As mentioned at the end of chapter 2, this analysis is meant as a proof of concept, it is an exploration of the fruitfulness of Gaia as a normative theoretical framework. And besides, as it potentially takes centuries for a full worldview to develop which even then can only be fully grasped with hindsight, as Hegel's famous appendage reminds us[16], it is for now more important to take a general stock of differences arising. Further research, more in depth but also more broadly, about how new ecosophies develop in response to Gaia's intrusion in different historical, social, environmental, political, economic, cultural etc. circumstances is left as a suggestion.

Practically, then, how did I go about this analysis? First, of course, was finding primary sources, that is, websites of environmental and/or climate activist groups. As mentioned in the introduction, 'activism' is here understood very broadly and roughly as any person or organisation 'actively' working for change or for a cause. I identified relevant groups mainly in two ways. The first is by simply asking people

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[14] See for example Germany's Last Generation (Letzte Generation) movement, which had their website removed as part of legal action against them for organising a 'criminal enterprise'. ('German Police Swoop on Last Generation Climate Activists', 2023)

[15] To run ahead a little, one such example addressed in the next section is WWF.

[16] "The owl of Minerva begins its flight only with the onset of dusk." (Hegel, 1991 [1820], p. 23)

involved in Ghent University's Green Hub who are also involved in climate activism what main groups they know of. The second is through Google searches for key words such as 'climate activism', 'climate action', 'klimaatactivisime' etc., which often yielded newspaper articles about activist actions and activist groups. Otherwise, but to a lesser extent, I also found groups through for example the Belgian government's list of federally recognised NGO's or by accidentally stumbling upon groups in my daily life. Of course, as I started looking at some of the first sources I found and as I started to get an idea of what I was looking for, I went back to look for other groups. In other words, it was a reciprocal search. All in all, this yielded a total of 25 groups. For all of these I scoured their websites, 'about us' pages, blogs, yearly reports, goals for the future, working documents etc. although I of course not studied all 25 equally thoroughly. As it started to become clear what ecosophies I could identify, I focused on some over others. Eventually, 14 of these 25 groups feature in the following analysis. The full list of all 25 groups including the link to their website and some preliminary notes etc. can be found in appendix 1.

In terms of space and time, most of these groups are and have been active in Flanders in the last couple of years. Some are active in Belgium as a whole, such as Climaxi and Act for Climate Justice, some in the Netherlands, like Red het Sterrebos, some in Germany, such as Lützerath Lebt. Additionally, there are also some overarching organisations working either on a global scale, like Extinction Rebellion's global site, or on a European Union scale like the Climate Action Network. There is furthermore one notable case that was active as far back as 2002: the occupation of the Lappersfort forest in Bruges. They had quite an extensive and useful website, but as it is no longer active now, I accessed a 2010 version through the Wayback Machine. Geographical and temporal scope are thus not clearly defined in the search for primary materials, but for the purposes of this thesis this is also not necessary. As was mentioned before, this is a qualitative analysis. A temporal scope of roughly 10 years is still extremely small compared to the time needed for a worldview to develop. In terms of geography as well, the following analysis is not meant to be exhaustive of any one region. The focus on Flanders is mainly practical (I wrote this thesis in Ghent), so there is also no reason to exclusively look at Flemish groups. The selection of the occasional group outside of Flanders is again also for practical reasons, limited by barriers of language, but also because a closer look suggested that they could be relevant for the aims of this thesis.

Once I had a list of all groups and some preliminary notes on what they stand for, what they try to do, and how they try to achieve their goals, I dived deeper and started searching for each of their underlying ecosophies. I did not look this thoroughly at all 25, but at a subset of groups that showed promise. This subset was still larger than the 14 mentioned in the following analysis. Practically that means that I scoured their website etc. again and asked how they diagnose current environmental relations and what their prognosis was. As part of this process, I made notes for each group I looked at and started to group these groups according to identified similarities and differences. This too was a reciprocal process of going back and forth between activist groups and their similarities and differences. Eventually this yielded the three ecosophies discussed in the next section.

3.2   Three Activist Ecosophies

The discussion of the three ecosophies I identified based on the methodology discussed above follows a similar pattern in all three cases, which I deal with one by one. The discussion starts out with a general explanation of why I named each ecosophy the way I did and with a short description of what the ecosophy is about. Next, I elaborate on the diagnosis part of the ecosophy to then deal with the prognosis part before ending with a brief summary. This is the general pattern, but occasionally I diverge from this pattern if it seems suitable to do so.

The first ecosophy I discuss, I call 'Eco-sensitive Modernism' (EsM). It is characterised by a diagnosis that does not fundamentally challenge the structures of industrial society and a prognosis that aims to collaborate with dominant institutions. In doing so, its assumed human-nature relationship does not animate nature nor does it grant any agency to nature. The other two ecosophies under discussion, however, Direct Social Action (DSA) and Direct Environmental Action (DEA), are characterised by a similar diagnosis and even prognosis, but differ in their point of entry and the way in which they do animate nature. They both challenge dominant structures and institutions for their tendency to prioritise profit over people and planet and both take to direct action. But while the DSA ecosophy starts from social issues to abstractly include environmental issues under the same umbrella, the DEA ecosophy starts from local nature and wildlife to include social issues under the same umbrella. This leads to different ways to animate nature, and thus to distinct ecosophies.

3.2.1   Eco-sensitive Modernism (EsM)

This first and seemingly most widespread activist ecosophy amounts to what I call an 'eco-sensitive modernism'. As the name suggests, it shares a foundation with the modernist worldview as addressed in chapter 2, but with the addition that it also addresses environmental issues. It is a modernist ecosophy in the sense that it takes the separation between human and nature as its core, and often even a human superiority, that does not principally reject a one-sided extraction of natural resources as long as this extraction fulfils some ad hoc conditions which these organisations aim to tighten and/or get implemented. It is, however, sensitive to ecological issues in the sense that it recognises the importance of ecological 'services' and the need for these services to be able to continue human activity in the same way. But as the phrasing in terms of 'services' already indicates, the eco-sensitive modernist ecosophy does not seem to animate nature. It calls for new sets of regulations to protect and conserve the life-sustaining environment, but without reforming the institutions or workings of these regulations themselves. Perhaps unsurprising then, do the organisations in this ecosophy work close to and with the established order. Exemplary of this ecosophy are organisations such as the World Wildlife Foundation (WWF), ClientEarth, BOS+, Bond Beter Leefmilieu, and Natuurpunt, but also specifically climate change-oriented organisations such as Climate Action Network or the Belgian Alliance for Climate Action.

In the diagnosis of the eco-sensitive modernist ecosophy, the environmental issues it aims to deal with are not seen as *fundamentally* caused by status quo environmental relations. Climate change or other environmental problems like biodiversity loss, deforestation, pollution etc. are considered more as a 'too

much', an excess that needs to be reigned in. The issue, like the Bond Beter Leefmilieu articulates it, is to "[…] realise the day in which everybody in Flanders lives well and healthy, without weighing on nature, the environment, and the climate."[17] (Bond Beter Leefmilieu, n.d.) WWF is great example. WWF is an organization that centres around wildlife conservation and the protection of wildlife habitats. As they write in a short self-description: "WWF engages itself to stop the deterioration of nature on our planet and to build a future where mankind lives in harmony with nature."[18] (WWF België, n.d.-c). This of course implies a problem in status quo environmental relation, namely a destruction of nature. But the problem, as becomes clear when considering their strategic plans up until 2026, is not a *fundamental* issue with the way humans relate to nature as discussed in chapter 2. It is rather one of excess, a problem of too much influence of human activity on nature. Tellingly, of their four strategic goals, three of them are about reducing the impact of human activity on nature, while the fourth is about expanding their network of donors and partners. (WWF België, n.d.-b) Part of their first goal, for example, of "reducing loss of nature to 0", is "[…] to stop deep sea mining in international waters *until* the highest environmental standards have been reached."[19] (WWF België, n.d.-b, emphasis added) The issue does not seem to be *that* deep sea mining would happen, it is that the impact of deep sea mining on nature would be too high. Of course, this may be the result of practical considerations: that it is simply unrealistic to be able to stop deep sea mining at all, so it is better to at least try to influence the way it is going to happen. But either way, they advocate for higher environmental standards rather than new environmental relations. Note furthermore that the stress of WWF on protecting and conserving nature does not grant agency to this nature. Nature is highly valued, but its faith lies in the hands of humanity to either protect it or destroy it. This is clear in the way WWF writes about the area's they aim to protect: they talk about it in terms of 'natural heritage'. "Protecting those natural treasures [places rich in biodiversity] is very important for the health of our vulnerable ecosystems and for the wellbeing of local communities that depend on them." (WWF België, n.d.-a)

Also, with regards to the role of science and technology in environmental problems, this ecosophy takes a modernist stand. Organisations ascribing to this ecosophy generally engage with the role of science and technology by referring to an often-unspecified science or scientific consensus that climate change is real. However, because this science is unspecified, it is presented as somehow independent from what goes in society or politics. Science, and specifically climate science, is understood as inherently 'neutral', which as discussed in chapter 2 is problematised by the Gaia perspective. Here again WWF is exemplary. They link trust in "facts and science"[20] to integrity as one of their core values and they "base [themselves] on the most reliable and recent scientific information to evaluate each problem and

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find a solution."[21] (WWF België, n.d.-d) This implies that science provides neutral facts and data that political actors like WWF and politicians then use to determine what course to take. ClientEarth does a very similar thing. They legitimise their mission with: "The science could not be clearer: we are facing a climate crisis that threatens the future of life on our planet. But we have the power to fix it. Here is how we use the law." (ClientEarth, n.d.-a) This fits neatly in what was discussed in chapter 2 as the proper role of science in the modernist worldview. Environmental issues are designated as a problem and science is expected to back this up with the appropriate facts and technologies to solve the problem and be done with it. This also distinguishes an eco-sensitive modernism from ecomodernism in the sense that ecomodernism expects scientific and technological development to 'solve' climate change and environmental problems (Asafu-Adjaye et al., 2015), while eco-sensitive modernism legitimises its mission by reference to an often undefined science.[22] The Belgian Alliance for Climate Action even specifically talks about 'Science Based Targets' for companies without explaining what science or how these targets are based on science. (Belgian Alliance for Climate Action, n.d.)

Regarding the prognosis then, each organisation of course supports different actions and campaigns, but they share a similar approach. I already mentioned the conservation approach of WWF, which assumes an agency-less environment in need of high environmental standards and human protection. While other organisations do not necessarily focus on conservation, they share the assumption that nature needs to be protected from humans by humans and human institutions. ClientEarth is exemplary in this regard. Also stressing the need for a "future in which people and planet thrive together" (ClientEarth, n.d.-b), they approach the declining state of the planet through the law, which is uniquely suited for "governments […] to be held to account" (ClientEarth, n.d.-a). The strategy here is to lobby governments and/or supra-national institutions to create laws protecting the environment, and in the case of ClientEarth to then sue companies and governments when they do not follow these laws. In other words, it is the very structures and institutions of industrial society that are expected to provide the solution to environmental problems. It is not surprising then that eco-sensitive modernist organisations work close to governments and businesses. WWF, ClientEarth, and BOS+ for example, are part of 82 federally recognized NGO's (FOD Buitenlandse Zaken - Buitenlandse Handel en Ontwikkelingssamenwerking, 2022), and the Climate Action Network gets funding from the European Commission (CAN Europe, n.d.). In other words, eco-sensitive modernist organisations even have vested interest in the existing structures and institutions, they derive their existence from them.

The eco-sensitive modernist ecosophy is thus characterised by an understanding of environmental problems as caused by an excess of human influence that accordingly needs to be (drastically) reduced for the sake of the planet and all of humanity that depends on the planet. The ideal state is thus one in which humanity has reduced its influence on nature to zero. However, what is at stake here is not the human-environment relation itself. These are considered fundamentally separate. It is the responsibility

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[21] From the Dutch: "[WWF:] baseert zich op de meest betrouwbare en recente wetenschappelijke informatie om elk probleem te beoordelen en oplossingen te vinden." (WWF België, n.d.-d)
[22] Or in the case of Natuurpunt, by itself providing part of the science or data to inform policy makers (Natuurpunt, n.d.).

of humanity to free nature from its influence, but humanity is consequently not itself considered part of nature. This is the foundation that the eco-sensitive modernist ecosophy shares with the modernist worldview and seems related to their close cooperation with dominant institutions on which many of these organisations also depend for their existence. The idea thus seems to be to act as humanity's environmental 'consciousness' on these institutions.

3.2.2 Direct Social Action (DSA)

A second ecosophy amounts to what I call 'Direct Social Action'. The 'Direct Action' part refers to what was discussed by the end of chapter 2 as Stengers' (2015a, p. 142) call for Direct Action Activism, while the 'Social' refers to what I identify as the entry point of these organisations to environmental activism. What I mean is that the organisations falling under this ecosophy seem to start from a problem that is primarily social, but then move to include environmental issues under the same analysis. In the diagnosis of the Direct Social Action ecosophy, the same structural problems that cause social issues like inequality and oppression, are also held responsible for environmental issues like climate change, pollution, biodiversity loss etc. However, since the entry point is social, their prognosis also seems to be aimed at social institutions and settings, such as parliaments and universities. This means that groups under this ecosophy do animate nature, but in an abstract way. Nature and non-human beings are included among the group of those subjected to oppressive social structures, but these non-human beings are not part of their actions or campaigns. Exemplary Direct Social Action groups are Act for Climate Justice, End Fossil Occupy!, Extinction Rebellion, and to a lesser degree Climaxi.

The problems that this ecosophy aims to address are identified as fundamental problems in the social structures and institutions of industrial society and the values embedded in it. Although it is of course not mentioned explicitly, it does seem like the modernist separation is identified as part of the problem. One exemplary case is an interview with an Act For Climate Justice activist in the context of a direct-action campaign to replace commercial posters in urban areas with self-made posters. These self-made posters called for an economic recovery after the COVID pandemic that prioritises social and environmental issues over profit. An action by the way, that can be understood as aimed at sites where the profit-motive intersects with the public domain:

> "We want to warn that in this crisis the profit of a few cannot take priority again over the wellbeing of us all. Sadly, we see some signs that point out that during this crisis the priorities are once again crooked. [Large companies get government funding to reopen despite the safety risks.] We see the same thing happening for the climate crisis. Blind profit-chasing causes solidary and sustainable solutions to be neglected."[23] (Act For Climate Justice, n.d.-a)

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[23] From the Dutch: "["] Wij willen ervoor waarschuwen dat bij deze crisis niet opnieuw de winst van enkelen mag primeren over het welzijn van ons allemaal. Helaas zien wij een aantal signalen die erop wijzen dat de prioriteiten tijdens deze crisis opnieuw scheef zitten. Zo gaan werkplaatsen bijvoorbeeld open zonder voldoende veiligheidsvoorwaarden of krijgen grote bedrijven overheidssteun zonder voldoende voorwaarden. Dat zijn zaken die er op wijzen dat de beleidsmakers hun beslissingen laten leiden door het grote geld.", zo leggen de actievoerders uit. "We zien het bij de klimaatcrisis ook

This quote already hints at multiple characteristics of the DSA ecosophy. For one, it shows that social issues are the entry point. The COVID pandemic, while not exactly a 'social' issue in the classic sense, is still a human crisis and not so much an environmental one. At the same time however, and secondly, the interviewee explicitly links what is going wrong in the COVID recovery to the climate crisis. The problem for both is the same: profit over people and planet, but importantly, not only on the side of the private companies, but also on the side of the government. The underlying issue in this ecosophy thus seems to be that government and market collaborate to prioritise profit over people and planet. And even more so: not only nature is problematically considered a resource, people are too. According to the same interviewee: "[The changes that arise from the COVID crisis] according to us should not reinforce the system that exploits humanity and nature."[24] (Act For Climate Justice, n.d.-a) One system of exploitation is thus held responsible for both social and environmental issues.

While the fundamental cause for both social and environmental issues is the same, the entry point and the prognosis are both social. Solving this fundamental problem means changing social structures and making sure human wellbeing is safeguarded, which automatically also means safeguarding environmental wellbeing. This prognosis is exemplary and even explicitly present in Climaxi: "To Climaxi, the climate issue is fundamentally a social issue that requires fundamental, structural social changes." [25] (Climaxi, 2022) More concretely: "[The ideal society] is a society in which the level of democratic participation in political, cultural, and economic affairs is substantially higher than today, and in which there is more social and political equality. That is one of the most important keys to deal with the climate question in an effective and socially just way."[26] (Climaxi, 2022) Notable here, besides the literal claim that the answer to the climate crisis is social, is that democratisation is considered to be the solution.

There is, however, no mention of non-human beings, which are either way unsuited for democratic participation by virtue of the simple fact that they do not talk. But that is why I mentioned earlier that Climaxi does not completely fit in the DSA ecosophy. Consider on the other hand an action by Act for Climate Justice. In 2018, they occupied the Belgian Parliament and read a 'Declaration of Social and Climate Resistance' in which they decry "a toxic system […] set up by a minority that systematically passes the bill to the most vulnerable while the ones really responsible continue unpunished with the destruction of the planet."[27] (Act For Climate Justice, 2018) The point here, however, is the symbolic

gebeuren. Het blinde winstbejag zorgt ervoor dat er niet voor solidaire en duurzame oplossingen wordt gekozen. Daarvoor willen we bij deze crisis opnieuw waarschuwen. ["]" (Act For Climate Justice, n.d.-a)

[24] From the Dutch: "We willen de uitdagingen die komen kijken bij deze crisis en de lockdown zeker niet minimaliseren. Toch moeten we ook beseffen dat er veranderingen zullen voortkomen uit deze situatie, en wat ons betreft mogen die niet opnieuw het systeem bestendigen dat roofbouw pleegt op mens en natuur." (Act For Climate Justice, n.d.-a)

[25] From the Dutch: "Voor Climaxi is de klimaatkwestie fundamenteel een sociale kwestie en vergt ze fundamentele, structurele sociale veranderingen." (Climaxi, 2022)

[26] From the Dutch: "Dit is een maatschappij waarin het niveau van democratische participatie in politieke, culturele en economische aangelegenheden substantieel hoger is dan vandaag, en waarin er grotere sociale en politieke gelijkheid is. Dat is één van de belangrijkste sleutels om het klimaatvraagstuk op een effectieve en sociaal rechtvaardige wijze aan te pakken." (Climaxi, 2022)

[27] From the Dutch: "We zijn hier omdat we ons verzetten tegen een allesverslindend en giftig systeem, gebaseerd op groei, ongelijkheid en winst. Een systeem dat is opgezet door een minderheid maar de

value of the Belgian Parliament as a site of the public's representation to the state. Occupying the parliament to address climate change and environmental destruction thus symbolises a very specific accusation of a shortcoming of the political system: the environment and the climate do not have any institutionalised political representation. This, then, shows how nature is animated in an abstract way. Because the status quo of industrial society threatens both human *and non-human* life, the struggle for social justice in this sense includes non-human beings. 'Social' justice is quite literally also 'environmental' justice. Nature is thus placed on the same level as humanity, even if nature is not directly called upon to come protest in the streets or voice its interests in a parliament.

This social entry point and abstract animation of nature also seem to be present by virtue of two interesting consequences they have on the workings of DSA groups. The first is that climate change and loss of biodiversity too are understood in rather abstract terms. That is, in terms of global averages of CO2 emissions and "The Anthropocene Extinction" (Extinction Rebellion Global, n.d.) rather than for example in the loss of local nature as is the case for the next ecosophy. Act For Climate Justice too articulates the problem in abstract averages: "To stop [global] warming, we are urged to take small individual actions, even though the necessary structural action does not happen. These small actions disappear in nothingness next to the real polluters who are responsible for climate destruction. Only 100 companies are responsible for 71% of produced greenhouse gasses since 1988."[28] (Act For Climate Justice, n.d.-b)

A second consequence is that most actions take place in urban areas. The occupation of the parliament and the poster action mentioned above are a case in point, but also for example most actions by Extinction Rebellion focus on built up areas. Take the protest on the Grand Place in Brussels on December 20th 2019, or the attempted occupations of bank lobbies on April 1st 2021 (Extinction Rebellion Belgium, 2022). This is presumably a consequence of the abstract way in which nature is animated and shows that this animation of nature is largely limited to the diagnosis but plays no direct role in the prognosis besides as mentioned above in the symbolism of occupying the parliament. Nature and natural beings are put on the same level as human beings when it comes to climate justice being equated to social justice, but the prognosis deals with traditionally non-natural sites of action commonly considered exclusive to human society, such as parliaments or bank offices. The significance of this observation lies in the contrast with the ecosophy discussed next, the Direct Environmental Action ecosophy.

The Direct Social Action ecosophy thus abstractly animates nature in the sense that environmental issues are seen as a consequence of the same structural problems that cause social issues. While the entry point is social, the struggle for social justice inevitably also includes a struggle for environmental

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rekening systematisch doorschuift naar de meest kwetsbaren, terwijl de echte verantwoordelijken ongestraft verder gaan met het vernielen van de planeet." (Act For Climate Justice, 2018)

[28] From the Dutch: "Om de opwarming tegen te gaan, worden we aangespoord om kleine individuele daden te stellen, ook al blijft de nodige structurele actie uit. Deze kleine acties verdwijnen in het niets naast de echte vervuilers die verantwoordelijk zijn voor de klimaatvernietiging. Slechts 100 bedrijven zijn verantwoordelijk voor 71% van de geproduceerde broeikasgassen sinds 1988." (Act For Climate Justice, n.d.-b)

justice. Structural problems, like government and economy prioritising profit over wellbeing, are addressed in urban sites on behalf of the environment, but do not actively involve any non-human environmental beings. The strategy is rather one of disruption, disrupting the business as usual of the 'modernist' institutions and structures.

3.2.3 Direct Environmental Action (DEA)

The third and final ecosophy under discussion in this thesis amounts to what I call Direct Environmental Action. Just like in the previous section, the 'Direct Action' part of the name is in reference to Stengers' Direct Action Activism, but if the entry point in the previous ecosophy is social, then here it is environmental. That is, the entry point here is the (imminent) destruction of local nature. The concern for the environment is then extended to also encompass social issues in a similar diagnosis as in the DSA ecosophy. The difference, however, is that in the DEA ecosophy, nature is animated locally and concretely. Threats to local and concrete nature, mainly forests and the wildlife inhabiting it, provides both the trigger to the diagnosis and the site of action for the prognosis while the causes of these threats are identified in social and economic structures. Exemplary organisations of the Direct Environmental Action ecosophy are Groene Gordel Front, which was behind the occupation of the Lappersfort forest in Bruges in 2002, Lützerath Lebt which was active near a coal mine in Germany in early 2023, and Red het Sterrebos, which occupied a forest in the Netherlands in early 2022.

For the DEA activist groups, the trigger for Action is usually the expansion of industry or its infrastructure into a forest or other piece of nature that needs to be cleared for the expansion. The occupation of the Lappersfort forest in Bruges, Belgium in 2002 by the Groene Gordel Front, for example, was triggered by plans to expand a small towpath into a road connecting to the city centre. This expansion would cut of a piece of the forest, which was already under threat because a part of it was zoned as industrial area (Groene Gordel Front, 2002b). Similarly for Lützerath Lebt, their activities started when the German energy company RWe demolished a road connecting the town of Lützerath to Keyenberg, but only really took of "[w]hen in October 2020 RWe started cutting down trees in and around Lützerath" (Lützerath Lebt, n.d.) in order to dig up the coal underneath (Lützerath Lebt, 2021a). Local protest against local expansions of industry, however, do not necessarily stay local in scope. They are often connected to global issues and struggles such as climate change in general, but also issues like inequality:

> "Lützerath Lebt sees itself above all as a symbol for the struggle for global climate justice and therefore attaches importance to allying itself with the struggles of MAPA activists (most affected people and areas), mostly from the global south, where people are already suffering massive losses and damage at the current global warming of 1.2 degrees, although they have contributed least to the climate crisis." (Lützerath Lebt, n.d.)

Here the inclusion of social issues in the struggle against climate change already makes itself felt. The danger in the expansion of RWe's coal industry is understood in the context of Global North and South inequalities. The very same structures held responsible for the coal mine expansion and the destruction of the forest are also held responsible for Global North and South inequalities, inequalities often quite a

distance away. In a blog post, for example, they link the expansion to broader coal exploitation issues and ask "[…] what about the health effects of coal "processing", what about those of RWe's black coal imports – for example for the power plant Datteln iV in NRW – on the life and environment of indigenous groups in Russia?" (Lützerath Lebt, 2021b) Also in the case of the occupation of the Sterrebos it is clear that the environmental action is also about social issues: "Our fight is feminist, antifascist, antiracist, anti-ableist, queer, anti-capitalist, anti-speciesist, against antisemitism and all forms of oppression. We want to become more aware of daily and structural oppression and actively resist it. We give each other the support and the strength to speak out against toxic masculinity."[29] (*Sterrebos Bezetting! – Red het Sterrebos*, n.d.)

The core diagnosis is thus remarkably similar to the one of the Direct Social Action ecosophy: a system that prioritises profit over planet and wellbeing. The focus, however, lies on the planet part and only secondarily on the people part, while this order is reversed in the DSA ecosophy. The primacy of the planetary wellbeing in the DEA ecosophy is clear also in the Dutch occupation of the Sterrebos in protest against the expansion of car maker VDL Nedcar into 200 years old forest. The activist group, after describing how municipality and large capital are intertwined, writes: "The problem that becomes visible here, is that nature conservation is not considered a relevant factor when it comes to (the guise of) economic development."[30] (Sterrebos, 2022b) Yet at the same time, the social aspect is certainly there: "As long as multinationals make up [the decisive social group], in the long run, there are only losers."[31] (Sterrebos, 2022b) The case is similar for Lützerath Lebt, after describing some of the consequences of RWE's expansion, they write: "All this shows clearly, that RWE puts profits ahead of the common good." (Lützerath Lebt, 2021b) as well as justifying their occupation as: "Right here we stand up for climate justice, we rebel against a neocolonial, destructive system that destroys the foundations of life worldwide." (Lützerath Lebt, 2023) A neocolonial system, which is a socio-economic system, is thus considered the structural origin of the destruction of 'the foundations of life worldwide', combining environmental concerns with social concerns.

That this ecosophy animates nature in a local and concrete way is already hinted at by the common trigger of its activist groups, the destruction of local forests and nature, but only really becomes clear when looking at the prognosis. That is, the activist groups of the DEA ecosophy tend to do Direct Action in the form of occupying the respective forest or piece of nature until it becomes clear that the occupied forest will remain. Symbolically, it implies that cutting down these trees means cutting down us humans, and thus implies an inclusion of these concrete trees and forests on the moral level of being as humans. In this sense, loss of nature is not understood in the DSA sense of an abstract Extinction event, but as

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[29] From the Dutch: "Onze strijd is feministisch, antifascistisch, antiracistisch, antivalidistisch, queer, antikapitalistisch, anti-speciecistisch, tegen antisemitisme en iedere andere vorm van onderdrukking. We willen ons bewuster worden van dagelijkse en structurele discriminatie en ons er actief tegen verzetten. We geven elkaar de steun en de kracht om ons uit te spreken tegen toxic masculinity." (*Sterrebos Bezetting! – Red het Sterrebos*, n.d.)
[30] From the Dutch: "Het probleem dat hier zichtbaar wordt, is dat natuurbehoud niet als factor van belang wordt gezien als het gaat om (de schijn van) economische ontwikkeling." (Sterrebos, 2022b)
[31] From the Dutch: "Zolang multinationals de dienst uitmaken zijn er op lange termijn alleen maar verliezers te betreuren." (Sterrebos, 2022b)

the loss of the forest next to my village and to the humans whose lives depend on nature in general. Although this symbolism is not mentioned explicitly, it is testified to by the ubiquitous practice of building treehouses (See Groene Gordel Front, 2002; Lützerath Lebt, 2022; *Sterrebos Bezetting! – Red het Sterrebos*, n.d.). In all groups under consideration, occupying a forest does just not mean being present in the *area* that is to be transformed into industry, it means living in the trees that are to be cut down. There is of course a practical concern here as well, namely that treehouses are more difficult to clear than tents (*Actiekamp Lappersfront*, 2002). But either way, occupying a forest in general and building treehouses as a form of direct action signals an underlying assumption of a fundamental equivalence between humans and nature.

This already shows an animation of nature on a quite personal level, but that the DEA ecosophy animates nature locally and concretely is also clear in other ways. For one, DEA activist groups tend to be notably specific in listing the ecological value of what needs to be protected. The Lappersfronters for example, list the seven biomes of the forest quite extensively, mentioning the ecological value of each of these biomes. One of these biomes, for example, is grassland that is "an ideal breeding ground for nightingales and several species of butterflies,"[32] while another is park forest which "has not been maintained for multiple decades and has roughened into an 'old-growth forest' with undergrowth and botanically interesting open space on poor sandy soil (which seriously increases its natural value)." (Groene Gordel Front, 2002c) Similarly, Red het Sterrebos cites a couple of forest owls nesting in the forest, which is a protected species and means that cutting the forest is in contradiction with environmental protection laws. (Sterrebos, 2022a) They also cite the ecological value of the forest more generally: "The Sterrebos is a unique, calm, and wild forest. Because it is not maintained and there are no paths crossing it, it is a safe space for roe deer, badgers, bats and breeding birds and even more (protected) animal species. Many of the trees, mainly oaks, are already 200 years old."[33] (*Veelgestelde vragen – Red het Sterrebos*, n.d.) In other words, especially compared to the DSA ecosophy, nature here takes the shape of the concrete trees and species present in the local biome that is under threat.

Additionally, the concrete and personal way of animating nature under the DEA ecosophy shows itself in the issue of eating meat and animal products. As mentioned earlier, the Sterrebos occupation movement is explicitly anti-speciesist (*Sterrebos Bezetting! – Red het Sterrebos*, n.d.), which of course already quite literally shows an understanding of animals as on the same ontological level as human. Among the Lützerath Lebt activists as well, anti-speciesist issues and discussions on the value of veganism are common.[34] This is notable especially in contrast to the DSA ecosophy where this topic is as far as I know absent. Contrast this with the example of a DSA ecosophy group like Extinction

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[32] From the Dutch: "[…] een ideale broedplaats voor de nachtegaal en verschillende vlindersoorten." (Groene Gordel Front, 2002c)

[33] From the Dutch: "Het Sterrebos is een uniek, rustig, verwilderd bos. Omdat het niet wordt onderhouden en er geen paden doorheen lopen is het een veilige plek voor reeën, dassen, vleermuizen en broedvogels en nog meer (beschermde) diersoorten. Veel van de bomen, vooral eiken, zijn al 200 jaar oud." (*Veelgestelde vragen – Red het Sterrebos*, n.d.)

[34] Personal correspondence with Anton Vandevoorde, a Ghent University doctoral researcher working on ontologies of radical climate movements who did participant observation at Lützerath Lebt.

Rebellion, which straightforwardly writes: "[…] thinking that a future post-fossil fuels society can go without the integration, and therefore consumption, of animals and their 'by-products', is an illusion." (XR Myth Debunkers, 2020) In other words, the DSA animates nature abstractly in that the focus is on animals in general, more as a category, while in the DEA ecosophy the focus is on individual animals and species. Eating meat is thus roughly on the same ontological level as eating a human.

The core issue in the Direct Environmental Action ecosophy then, like in the Direct Social Action ecosophy, is a socio-economic system that prioritises profits of the few over the wellbeing of planet and people. But unlike in the DSA ecosophy, the DEA ecosophy starts from the local plots of nature under threat by this system and expands to include social issues understood as stemming from the same problematic socio-economic system. These plots of nature are animated in a concrete and local way. The problematic system threatens to destroy the ecological value of the forests and their biomes, which prompts protest in the form of an occupation, often including building treehouses, until it is clear that the forest will not be cut, at least in the ideal scenario. Especially the treehouses symbolise a close relation and identification with the nature that they attempt to protect. Additionally, the groups under the DEA ecosophy tend to actively discuss issues like speciesism, which signals that every individual animal is considered to be ontologically and morally on the same level as humans.

3.3   Discussion and Reflection

What now to make of the above analysis and its three ecosophies? In this section, I reflect on and discuss the above analysis and its implications for the research questions of this thesis. This section on reflection and discussion is split into two parts: one dealing with the more theoretical and academic issue of positionality in environmental discourse studies, and another part dealing with the more practical implications of this analysis for understanding climate activism and its worldviews.

3.3.1   Positionality and the Study of Environmental Discourses

Now that we have a rough 'map' of the worldviews of climate activism through the Gaia perspective, the question rises of the impact that this Gaia-lens has on this map. As I discussed in chapter 1, the study of environmental discourse, even when it has explicit normative aims, tends to (accidentally) take the perspective or rather positionality of the dominant 'industrialist discourse' to categorise climate activism/discourse along the lines of reformist vs. radical and/or imaginative vs. prosaic. Under this view, three out of four categories for environmental discourses take some kind of dominant structure for granted, either its political economy (prosaic), its institutional structure (reformist), or both of these in for example Dryzek's 'problem solving' discourse (prosaic and imaginative). However, out of the four categories, only the 'green radicalism' discourse appears as completely breaking with the dominant industrialist discourse, or through the lens of Gaia: with the modernist worldview. The question then becomes: when assuming a 'radical' and normative perspective like Gaia, what implications does this have for the categorisation of environmental discourses?

A first and general observation is that the Gaia perspective at the very least does seem to lead to a different categorisation. This is clear from the simple constatation that the above analysis yields three

ecosophies rather than the usual four categories. But what happened here? Taking a closer look suggests two movements. First of all, it seems that the three categories that take at least one aspect of the dominant structures as stable merge into one: the eco-sensitive modernist ecosophy. The key characteristic of this ecosophy is, as discussed in section 3.2.1, that it sees no *fundamental* problem in dominant environmental relations but sees *ad hoc* issues that can be fixed through reform solutions. The distinction between fundamental and ad hoc is crucial here. From the Gaia perspective (chapter 2), the problematic separation between human and nature lies at the core of the whole of the dominant worldview, both its political economy and institutions ultimately derive from it. Whether a category of discourses then takes the dominant political economy or its institutional structures as given makes no real difference. It contains the problematic modernist separation of human and nature either way. All three of the non-radical and non-imaginative categories thus merge into a single one, that is, into an ecosophy that does not fundamentally address the problem. Meanwhile, however, it does keep the reformist vs. radical distinction albeit in a lighter form. The Eco-sensitive Modernist ecosophy is marks the 'reformist' side, while the DSA and DEA ecosophies mark the 'radical' side. This is clear from the observation that, as mentioned in section 3.2.1, the Eco-sensitive Modernist ecosophy groups tend to derive their mode of existence from existing structures and institutions while the DSA and DEA groups criticise 'the government' for cooperating with the market to cause the problematic profit over wellbeing issue (see sections 3.2.2 and 3.2.3).

In the second movement on the other hand, what is usually a single category of radical environmental discourse, the 'green radicalism' in Dryzek's approach, splits into two distinct ecosophies under the Gaia perspective: the Direct Social Action and Direct Environmental Action ecosophies. Both of these are 'imaginative' in that they (try to) break with the political economy of modernist society, and they are both 'radical' in that they do not see its current institutional structures as providing a solution. And yet, in the Gaia perspective these are two distinct ecosophies. Although they share a similar diagnosis, namely that profit takes priority over the wellbeing of the planet of its people, they have distinct approaches to environmental relations and how these relations need to change. And more importantly, they have distinct ways to animate nature, one in an abstract way and the other in a local and concrete way. The loss of analytic complexity by the first movement is thus compensated, to some degree at least, by the second movement.

But now how to explain these movements? I see two possible routes to go about answering this question. On the one hand, the shift in analytical complexity seems to be the result of the shift in positionality of the theoretical framework. For a framework that is (accidentally) positioned within the dominant discourse or worldview, it is not surprising that it has a closer look at non-radical discourses while the 'radical' groups seem like a single discourse. Under a 'radical' perspective then, it is to be expected that similarly, the non-radical discourses merge into a single category while the radical discourses split in a gain of analytical complexity. This can even be directly related to the theoretical framework. The main distinguishing point between the DSA and DEA ecosophies is the way in which these ecosophies animate nature, which is an issue that derives its meaning and significance from the Gaia perspective. The point here then, is not that all research on environmental discourse should take

a radical normative perspective, it is rather that positionality, whether explicit or implicit, has consequences for the outcome of one's research either way.

On the other hand, this shift in analytical complexity might be explained as the result of the shift in focus from discourses to worldviews or ecosophies. In this case, the three non-radical discourses in Dryzek's approach merge into a single one because, on a more fundamental level, they share the same worldview. They share a worldview that embeds these distinct discourses in the same dominant structures, and as mentioned in section 3.2.1, even makes them dependent for their existence on these status quo structures. The one radical discourse in Dryzek's approach, then, splits into two Direct Action ecosophies under the Gaia perspective because on a more fundamental level they have distinct worldviews, even if they share a discourse. They share a discourse in the sense of having roughly the same diagnosis, as mentioned in sections 3.2.2 and 3.2.3, that status quo structures and institutions prioritise profit over the wellbeing of people and planet. On a more fundamental level they then differ in their entry point and, more importantly, in the way they animate nature.

These two explanations, however, might not be unrelated. The set up of the Gaia perspective in chapter 2 deals with worldviews from the very start. A shift in theoretical framework to the Gaia perspective then of course also means a shift in the objects of analysis from discourses to worldviews. This makes sense on a deeper level as well in the observation that to be able to articulate and analyse a worldview, an external point of reference is often needed to point out what is assumed or taken for granted in the first place. In this sense, taking the Gaia perspective allows a different categorisation of discourses, and accordingly a different analytical complexity, precisely because it is 'radical' enough to go as far as rejecting the dominant discourse on a worldview-level. Shifting the object of analysis from discourses to worldviews thus seems to be an essential part of taking Gaia as a theoretical framework.

Besides that, one other important reflection has to do with the relation between the social and the environmental. The study of environmental discourses, as the name suggests, does not seem to deal with discourses about social issues[35], at least not primarily, while the above analysis suggests that social issues are intimately connected to environmental issues, at least in environmental activism. In fact, the assumed relation between social and environmental issues even seems to be an essential difference between the DSA and DEA ecosophies. What to make of this? On a cursory glance it might seem like a flaw in this thesis. Adding social issues to the mix under the Gaia perspective while they are absent in the study of environmental discourses could be an explanation for the split between the DSA and DEA ecosophies that has little or even nothing to do with the shift in perspective. A closer look, on the other hand, implies that understanding social issues as a key element in the differences between 'radical' ecosophies can also be an important insight that results from the Gaia perspective.

The key here lies in the way both perspectives are set up. Dryzek, for example, understands environmental discourses and/or activism as a reaction to the dominant discourse or structures of

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[35] Although to be fair the relation between social and environmental is not exactly absent either. Stibbe (2018) for example, explicitly suggests research on ecological discourses in CDS as an extension of the aims of CDS to support the struggle against (social) inequalities.

industrialism itself, which is identified as causing environmental issues one way or the other (Dryzek, 2005, pp. 14–15). Under the Gaia perspective, however, environmental discourses and activism are understood as a reaction to the *intrusion* of Gaia on the dominant modernist worldview, an intrusion in the form of climate change (see section 2.2). In other words, the Gaia perspective understands environmental activism and discourse as a reaction to a specifically environmental threat to a general society, rather than as a reaction to the specific elements in society that destroy the environment. As also discussed in section 2.2, in this way the Gaia perspective adds an extra step. This leaves more room for environmental discourses to make an analysis of society that goes beyond its consequences on the environment. In this sense, it seems that the Gaia perspective leaves more room for the importance of the relation between social and environmental issues, and even more so: it leaves room for different ideas of what the relation between social and environmental issues is.

This makes sense, of course, because the whole point of the Gaia perspective is to not make a fundamental separation between nature and human. Society is part of nature and nature is part of society. The extra step provided by the intrusion of Gaia is how this idea becomes functional in the theoretical framework. The split between the DSA and DEA ecosophies can be understood along these lines. While they share a similar diagnosis, the difference in their entry points into this diagnosis leads to different prognosis and different ways to animate nature. The first starts from social issues and includes environmental issues, leading to an abstract way to animate nature, while the latter starts from environmental issues and includes social issues, leading to a local and concrete way to animate nature. This might make the Gaia perspective and the way it intertwines social and environmental issues interesting for other related topics, like for example the issue of the relation between sustainability and politics (Block & Paredis, 2019).

3.3.2 Worldview-building and Violence

Leaving aside now the question about positionality and theoretical frameworks, this very last section reflects on what the analysis in section 3.2 can tell us about environmental activism itself. Specifically, it deals with two issues: the issue of how to bring about change and the issue of violence. I reflect on these issues in the context of Gaia and based on the above analysis, but I also introduce some elements that I noticed while making the analysis and did not elaborate on above.

Of course, the main preoccupation of environmental activism is to bring about change, whether by making use of dominant structures like the groups in the eco-sensitive modernist ecosophy or by trying to resist and change dominant structures like the groups in the DSA and DEA ecosophies. But even if, like discussed above, we can 'ecosophically' understand these ecosophies as dealing with an environmental *intrusion* on a dominant worldview, in practice they eventually need to deal with the dominant institutions themselves some way or the other. This is obvious for the eco-sensitive modernist ecosophy, which seems to do so quite self-consciously (see section 3.2.1), but it is also the case for the 'radical' ones, which seems to cause some tensions.

Take the DEA groups for example. Occupying a forest in an attempt to prevent it from being cut is of course not exactly a long-term solution, it cannot continue to be occupied forever. At some point then,

if the occupation is to be successful, a deal needs to be reached with the authorities.[36] This 'reality', however, stands in contrast to the ecosophical rejection of the very societal structures embodied by these authorities. In the case of the Lappersfortbos, for example, this tension shows itself quite clearly in the diary of one of the occupiers, Joke, who writes that on the 16th of August 2002 they met with the local mayor to discuss the future of the forest. However, she writes, "It did not end up being a fruitful conversation. We don't speak the same language. They speak the language of politics in terms of money, structural plans, regional plans, special planning scheme's, … While we speak the language of the heart. We are the voice of nature."[37] (Joke van de "lappersforters", 2002b) This highlights that a fruitful conversation requires a common language, even for attempts to change existing institutions and structures from the outside. The activist groups understand this very well. Lützerath Lebt, for example, justify their action by referring to research by the German Institute for Economic Research and the Paris Agreement's 1,5°C target (Lützerath Lebt, n.d., 2021a). In other words, they try to stake their claim by holding existing institutions and structures accountable for their own promises.

Philosophically, this is related to a point mentioned in section 2.2, that developing a new worldview is an incremental process that takes centuries and that Gaia in that sense is not a full-fledged alternative worldview. Similarly, the change that environmental activism seems to potentially be able to enact is not 'radical' in the sense of a sudden overhaul of existing structures. Rather, it seems to also be an incremental process, tentatively trying to articulate issues in a common language and connecting them to new ways of acting and living[38]. While this can be read as a promise of change in the long term even if concrete actions fail to meet their goals, it also relates to the philosophical critique of Sands (2020, pp. 110–111) that Gaia, as a worldview, is too easily recuperable by the very modernist worldview it tries to be an alternative to. However, here again it is important to consider that developing a worldview to maturity takes centuries. Perhaps reversely this very 'recuperating' can then be understood as the way in which radical activism manages to bring about change in the long run, both in terms of worldview and in terms of attaching ways of living to this worldview. The inevitable negotiating and looking for a common language can then perhaps be considered a site of contestation that opens up the possibility of change in the first place.

The second issue, that of violence, is closely related to the first one. At the very least, violence is a recurring theme among the DEA and DSA groups, usually in the context of protesters being violently removed or arrested at protests or occupations. Joke from the 'lappersforters', for example, mentions people being beaten by police and needing an ambulance (Joke van de "lappersforters", 2002a). See also hanneke (2022) and End Fossil - Occupy! (2023) for similar cases. And yet none of the groups

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[36] The Groene Gordel Front for example, who occupied the Lappersfortbos, developed a management plan suggesting that the area be designated as an 'urban educational nature reserve' ("stedelijk educatief natuurreservaat") (Groene Gordel Front, 2002a).

[37] From the Dutch: "Het werd geen vruchtbaar gesprek. We spreken niet dezelfde taal. Zij spreken de taal van de politiek in termen van geld, structuurplannen, gewestplannen, BPA's, … Terwijl wij de taal van het hart spreken. Wij vormen de stem van de natuur."

[38] Lützerath Lebt, for example, quite self consciously organised a camp: "With a rich cultural and workshop programme, the camp opens up a space for sustainable solutions and ways of life." (Lützerath Lebt, n.d.)

under consideration actively call for violence. They all emphasise non-violence as the only way to go. As I mentioned in section 3.1 as well, this is probably at least partly a methodological constraint: if (online) calls to violence are prohibited, then of course I find no sources calling for violence online. But regardless, based on the analysis above, it seems like at least some kinds of violence, like the destruction of property, seem an almost unavoidable implication. If nature is put on the same ontological level as human beings and is systematically being destroyed, especially if protestors as well are not unregularly met with violence from the police, then it seems not unreasonable to call for the destruction of the tools used to destroy nature. It seems however, that there is an awareness of this implication even if it is not made explicit. Most exemplary in this regard is Extinction Rebellion. Just like most organisations, they have a section dedicated to non-violent civil disobedience (*What Is XR*, n.d.), but in the case of Extinction Rebellion this section is strangely convoluted. At first glance it contains the straightforward "We are a nonviolent network," but they also write:

> At the same time we also recognise that many people and movements in the world face death, displacement and abuse in defending what is theirs. We will not condemn those who justly defend their families and communities through the use of force […] We stand in solidarity with those whom have no such privilege to protect them and therefore must protect themselves through violent means; this does not mean we condone all violence, just that we understand in some cases it may be justified. Also we do not condemn other social and environmental movements that choose to damage property in order to protect themselves and nature, for example disabling a fracking rig or putting a detention centre out of action." (*What Is XR*, n.d.)

In other words, it seems like the dedication to non-violence is not the result of an inherently pacifist stance, but the result of practical considerations. In the context of the reflection made above, perhaps the claim to non-violence can be understood as negotiation tactic. Playing along with the rules of the game set up by the dominant structures in order not to lose legitimacy in the eyes of the public and the state. Again, this highlights the importance, and perhaps even necessity, of articulating even a 'radical' movement in a status quo framework. Research with an ethnographic methodology that is not bound by the limits of what can be posted online could shed further light on this issue.

Concluding the reflection then, it seems that the shift from the (accidentally) dominant to the Gaia perspective comes along with two movements that also shift the focal point of the analytical complexity. Three distinct 'reformist' discourses merge into a single (underlying) ecosophy embedded in the dominant modernist worldview, while a single 'radical' discourse splits into two distinct (underlying) ecosophies. This signals the importance of a self-conscious engagement with the positionality of theoretical frameworks and highlights the fruitfulness of 'radical' perspectives to make the fundamental assumptions of dominant worldviews apparent. Additionally, the extra step added in the Gaia perspective by understanding activism as a reaction to the *intrusion* of Gaia on dominant structures rather than as a reaction to existing structures directly, seems to provide some extra space to highlight the intimate relation between social and environmental issues. On a more practical level, it seems that regardless of how radical activism is, it needs to share a common language with dominant structures if

it is to bring about change, whether in policy or in worldview. The reluctance among activist groups to recognise the justification of (material) violence implied by their ecosophy can be understood in this context.

Conclusion

So, what now to make of this exploration of environmental activist groups' worldviews through the Gaia perspective? In the context of a general feeling of lack about the way governments attempt to deal with climate change, this exploration of a self-consciously radical perspective brings to attention the possibility that the issue of climate change requires a deeper analysis than simply one on the level of discourse. An approach like Dryzek's (2005) to the study of environmental discourses[39] that makes a classification from a seemingly 'neutral' perspective accidentally ends up taking the perspective of hegemonic structures and discourses. This is reflected in Dryzek's classification in the sense that it has a significantly larger analytical complexity regarding reformist discourses than for radical discourses.

Taking a radical perspective like Gaia, however, besides shifting the locus of analytical complexity from the reformist to the radical side, also shifts the focus from discourses themselves to the assumptions about the human-nature relationship underlying these discourses. This latter shift can be attributed to the diagnosis made from the Gaia perspective, namely that climate change poses a challenge fundamentally on the level of worldviews. From this perspective, a modernist worldview developed along with scientific and technological developments since the Enlightenment and fundamentally separated human from non-human beings. Through thinkers like Descartes and Kant, this separation is attached to moral worth and comes along with an individualist notion of agency as an innate capacity for independent and rational thought. This separation, in turn, becomes a justification for the uninhibited exploitation of non-human beings, i.e. Nature, and as part of the worldview of currently dominant structures and institutions, it stands in the way of a thorough approach to climate change. Climate change, then, is understood as a challenge to the dominant modernist worldview in the sense that it invariably points to the fundamental interdependence of all beings, both human and non-human. Referred to under the name of 'Gaia', this structuring intersubjectivity of regimes of activity intrudes on the modernist worldview and requires a 'response'. A response in the form of a new understanding of the human-nature relationship that is attentive to the interdependence of all beings and in that sense animates nature in some as of yet unspecified way.

Environmental activism then, understood as a reaction to the intrusion of Gaia on the modernist worldview, makes for an ideal site to explore the effects of a radical perspective like that of Gaia. The response required by Gaia's intrusion provides the entry point for this thesis' exploratory desk-based analysis and classification of the ecosophies underlying recent environmental activism in and around the region of Flanders. This analysis yields three distinct ecosophies, an Eco-Sensitive Modernist one, a Direct Social Action one, and a Direct Environmental Action one. The first is characterised by a human-nature relation that does not fundamentally differ from the modernist worldview, although it is aware of and sensitive to the destructive effects of an unbridled exploitation of natural resources. The second and third ecosophies on the other hand, do break with the modernist worldview's human-nature relation. The DSA ecosophy animates nature in an abstract way. It places non-human beings on the same ontological

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[39] Environmental discourses encompass climate change discourses.

level as human beings in the sense that both are threatened by the same societal structures, but it does not address any individual non-human beings. The DEA ecosophy on the other hand, animates nature in a local and concrete way. It starts from a concern for local nature under threat from expanding industry and equates this threat to local nature with a threat to life in general.

Questioning environmental activist groups for their assumed human-nature relationship, a question which derives its meaning from the radical Gaia perspective, thus leads to some interesting results. What are three distinct reformist discourses in Dryzek's approach, merge into a single underlying ecosophy. Reversely, what is a single radical discourse in Dryzek's approach, splits into two distinct underlying ecosophies. These two movements can presumably be attributed to the combined effects of the shift from a 'neutral' to a 'radical' perspective on the one hand, and the shift from discourse to ecosophy on the other, although both of these seem to be an integral part of the Gaia perspective. On a very basic level, this signals that the positionality of a theoretical framework does work through in the resulting analysis and classification. Especially in the context of a wicked problem like climate change, this means that it is important for academics to self-consciously engage with the positionality of their research. On a more philosophical level, this highlights the importance of an external point of reference to bring implicit assumptions to the surface. But besides the value of a 'radical' perspective in general, the Gaia perspective itself also shows some interesting consequences. For one, the additional step in understanding environmental activism as a reaction to the intrusion of Gaia on a modernist worldview seems to leave room for the inclusion of other areas of concern besides the environmental. Specifically, both the DSA and DEA ecosophies understand social issues like inequality and oppression as intricately linked to environmental issues like climate change and a loss in biodiversity.

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