

Dr Bernadette Brady

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# Non Modern



A consideration of two non-modern,  
never been modern or pre modern  
thinkers.





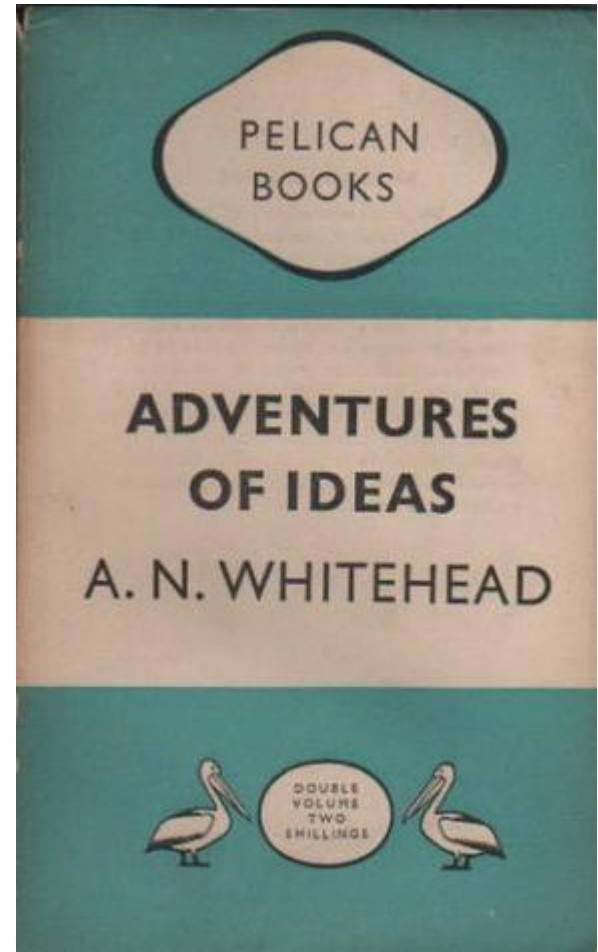
# Alfred Whitehead

(1861 – 1947)

British mathematician, logician and philosopher best known for his work in mathematical logic and the philosophy of science.

In *Process and Reality*, rather than assuming substance as the basic metaphysical category, Whitehead introduces a new metaphysically notion which he calls an ***actual occasion***.

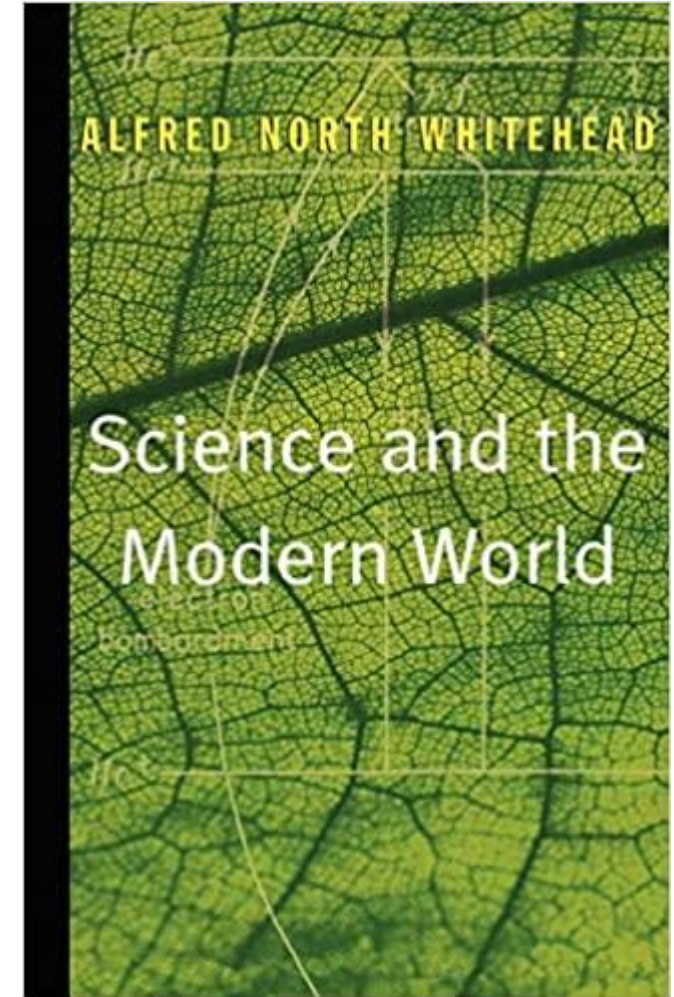
In Whitehead's opinion an actual ***occasion*** is not an enduring substance, but a process of becoming.<sup>1</sup>



Whitehead, A. N. (1933, 1942). *Adventures of ideas*. Harmondsworth, UK: Pelican Books.

1. Sherburne, Donald W. (1995) "Whitehead, Alfred North," in Robert Audi (ed.), *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 852.

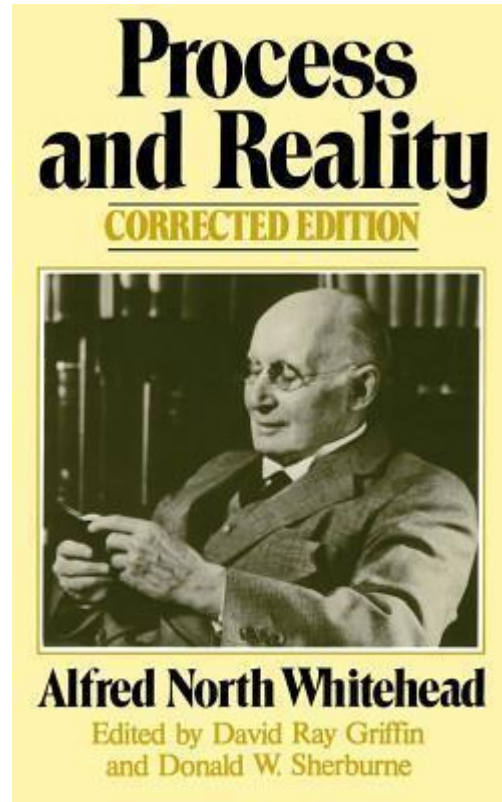
“There persists, [a] **fixed scientific cosmology** which presupposes the ultimate fact of an irreducible brute **matter, or material**, spread through space in a flux of configurations. In itself such a **material is senseless**, valueless, purposeless. It just does what it does do, following a fixed routine imposed by external relations which **do not spring from the nature of its being**. It is this assumption that I call '**scientific materialism**.' Also it is an assumption which I shall challenge as being entirely unsuited to the scientific situation at which we have now arrived.” <sup>2</sup>





There is an essence to the universe which forbids relationships beyond itself, as a violation of its rationality. Speculative philosophy seeks that essence.

The ultimate principle... lies in **the nature of things** that the many enter into complex unity.. The “creative advance” is the application of this ultimate principle of creativity to each novel situation which it originates.



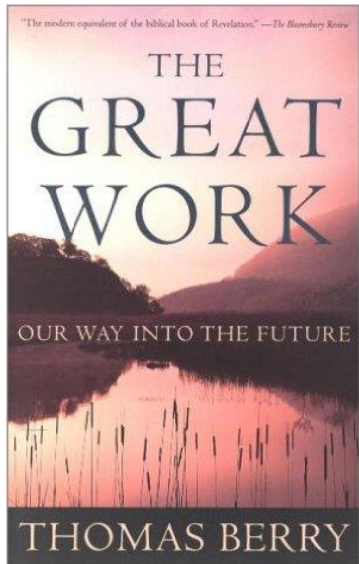
Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (1929); Corrected Edition, ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York: Free Press, 1978), p.4 and second quote p.21.

# Alfred Whitehead

Whitehead produced a **non-modern cosmology**

For him the world is **process** not **substance**, **becoming** not **being**, **narrative** not **fact**.

This produces what is today considered alternative views on cosmology.



Thomas Berry's important environmental cosmological work – *The Great Work* – posed that the cosmos was made of story, of substance becoming. It was not the substance that was the key but rather its process.

Recent developments in environmental ethics is also focused on becoming rather than being.



# Alfred Whitehead

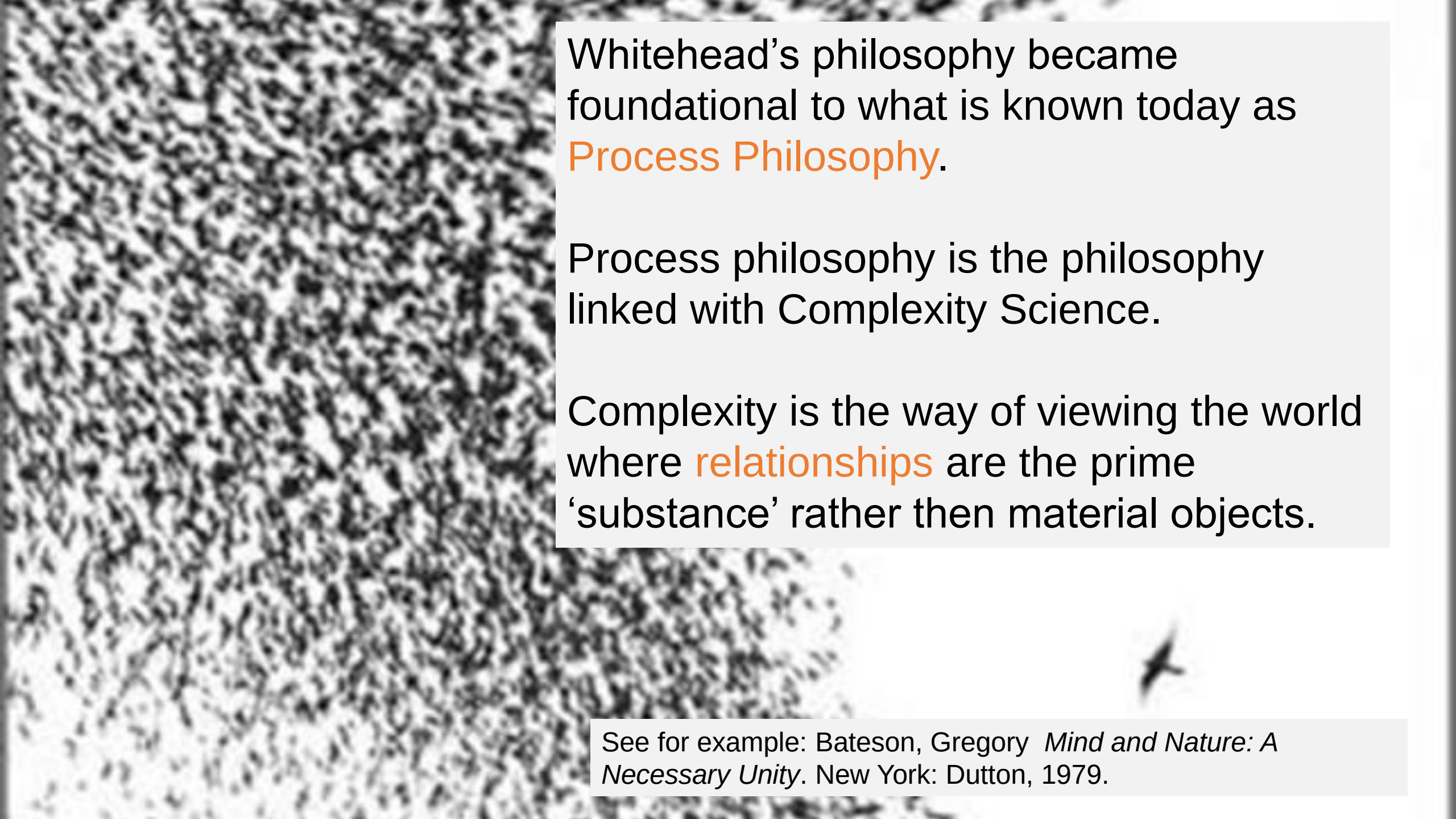
Whitehead's cosmology consisted of a metaphysical unification of **space, time, matter, events and teleology**.



Thus according to Whitehead, recognition that the world was **organic** (emergent) rather than **materialistic**, was therefore essential.

Process rather than static objects – **becoming** rather than **being**.

Whitehead's cosmology was in fact that of a sympathetic, as was central to the Stoic view of the world.



Whitehead's philosophy became foundational to what is known today as **Process Philosophy**.

Process philosophy is the philosophy linked with Complexity Science.

Complexity is the way of viewing the world where **relationships** are the prime 'substance' rather than material objects.

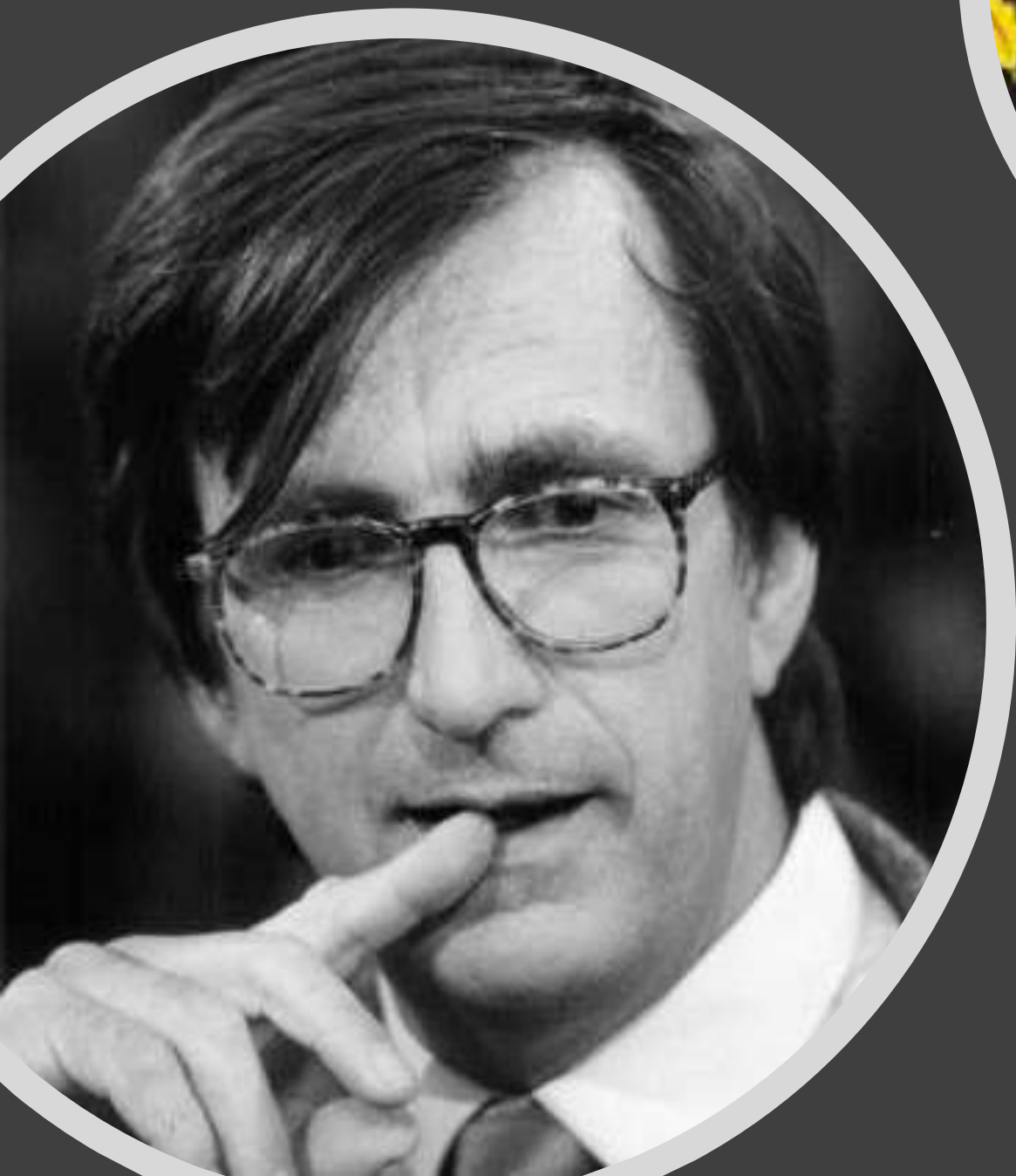
See for example: Bateson, Gregory *Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity*. New York: Dutton, 1979.



## Whitehead's philosophy of *becoming* rather than *being* has classical roots.

Its earlier roots can be seen in the Egyptian view of *neheh*, time as circular, which in turn lead to the Greek idea of *Kairos* time, time impregnated with cycles. It is also combined with the Stoic notions of sympathy – the interconnectedness of all things.

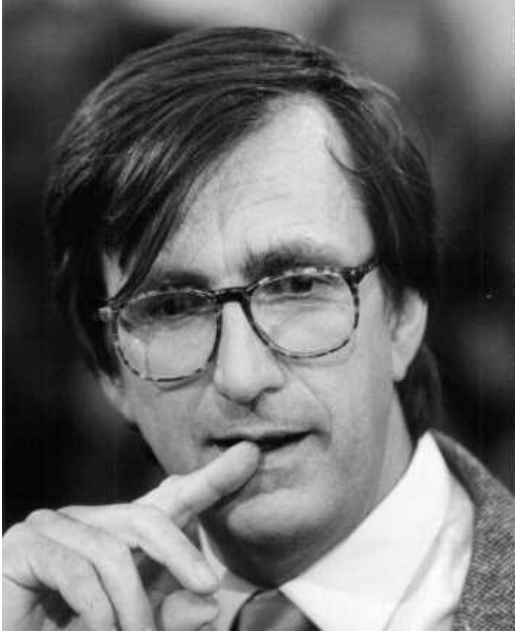
Qualitative research indicates that this is the philosophy that to underpin the praxis of astrology. In this regard the astrological voiced doctrine may be dualistic and modern but its praxis, a life lived in cycles in *Kairos* time, is Whiteheadian or non-modern.



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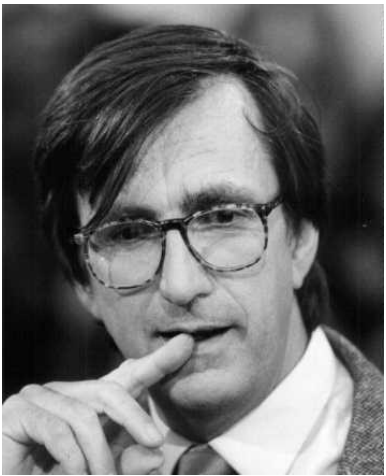


# Bruno Latour

Latour, in his work *We have never been modern*, defines what he calls the **Constitution of the Moderns** as an agreement and method of creating and maintaining a split between Culture and Nature.

Latour argues that the Moderns deny *any* connection between **Nature and Culture**.

Latour, Bruno. *We Have Never Been Modern*. Translated by Catherine Porter. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1991.

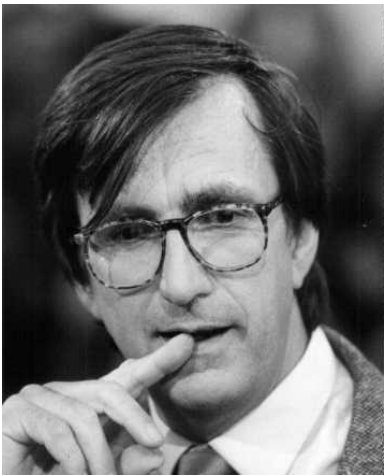


Latour then states that when Nature engages with Culture hybrids are naturally formed - objects that are part nature and part culture, quasi- objects.

Pre-moderns treat these objects with care.

However if, as in the case of modernity, when Culture is split from Nature then an irruption of hybrids, quasi-objects occurs into the human collective.

Moderns do not treat them with care.



Latour argued however that the modern separation of Nature and Culture, is actually fiction. As the blends - the quasi-objects and hybrids - are still formed. He places all technology into this category.

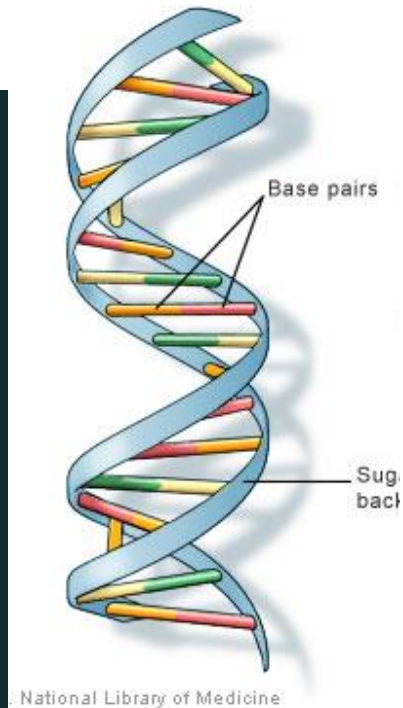
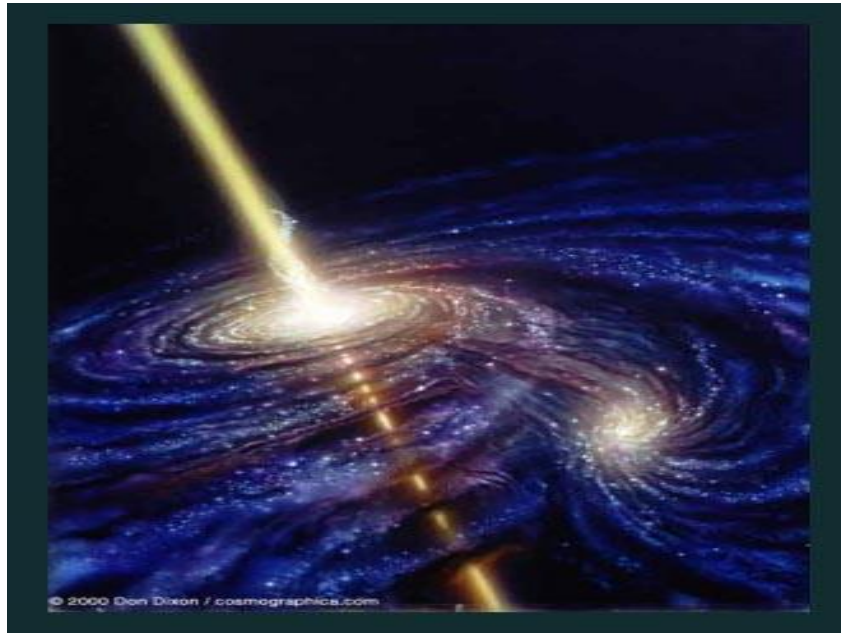
Latour points out that no collective has ever been constructed that did not contain non-human elements - sky/earth/myths and so fourth.<sup>6</sup>

The nature of the hybrid is a reflection of the size of the collective held together.

6. Latour, Bruno. (1991).pg 107 – 8.

‘the fact that one of the collectives needs ancestors and fixed stars while another one, more eccentric, needs genes and quasars, is explained by the dimensions of the collective to be held together.’

Latour, Bruno. (1991).pg 107 – 8



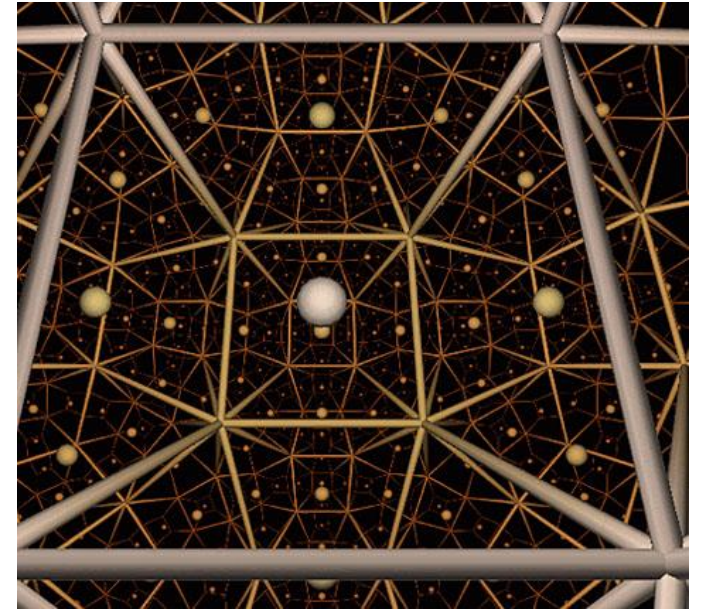
Moderns hybrids



Pre-moderns hybrids

'The role of science and technology is to populate our collective with new beings which enables us to grow our collective by forming intimate relationships with these new beings. Science pursues this task with great zeal.'

(Latour pg 109).



Latour suggests therefore that we are not living in a disenchanted world - as everyday our laboratories populate our collective with **hundreds of hybrids** far stranger than those of days before. (Latour p. 115).



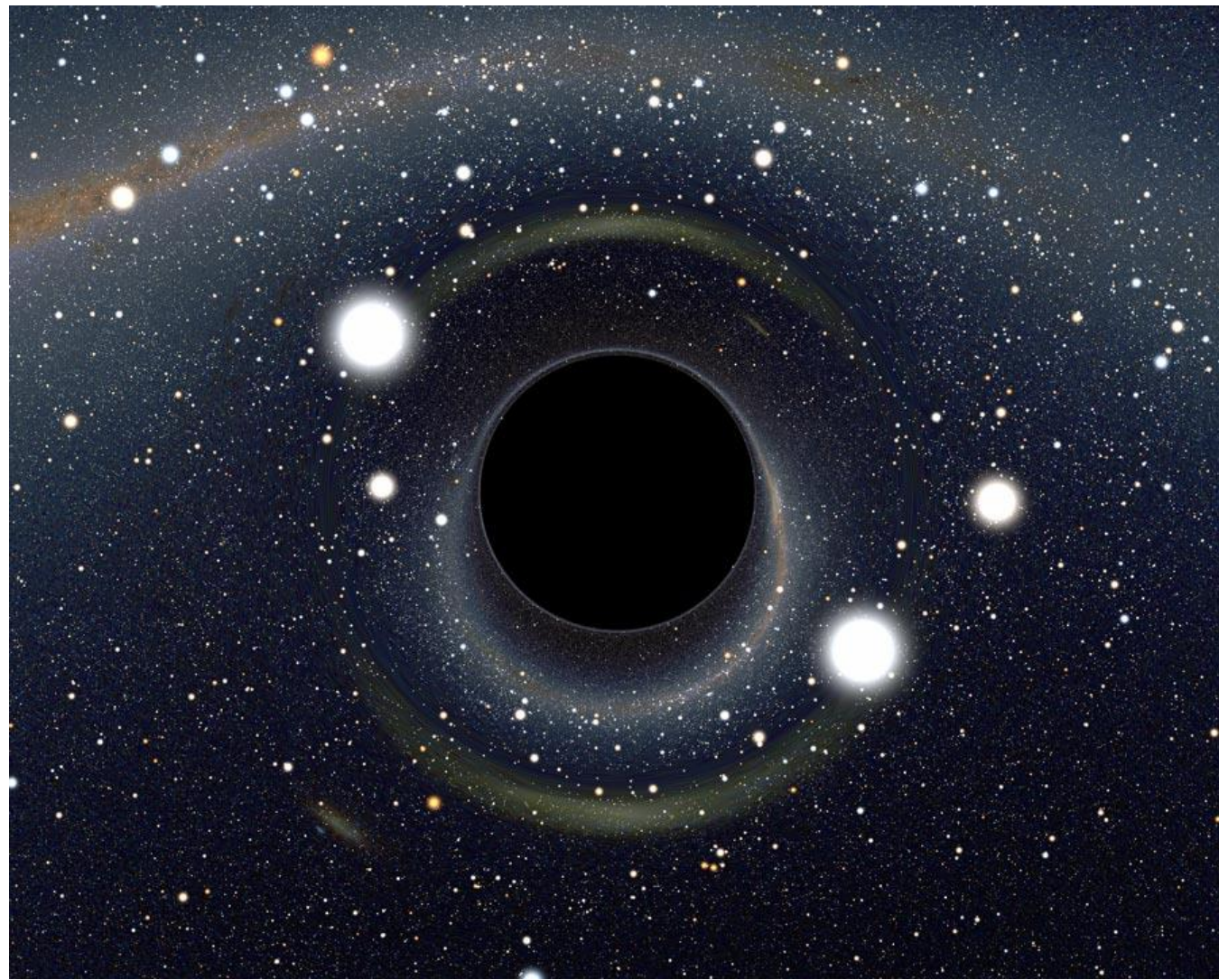
Technology enchants us.

**Moderns** allow for the proliferation of hybrids and thus their networks grow.

**Pre-moderns** do not engage in purifications (the separation between Nature and Culture) but also do not allow the proliferation of hybrids thus their network do not grow .



**Pre-moderns** respect the 'space' between culture and nature and hence they do not proliferate, and thus their culture does not grow.



**Moderns** ignore the split between culture and nature and thus hybrid object proliferate and so their world become larger, as it needs to contain these new hybrids

## References

Latour, Bruno, *We Have Never Been Modern*. trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1991).

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