Ecologizing the Concept of Progress

Toward a Terrestrial Ethics and Ontology through Jonas and Latour

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> "Humans have changed the way the world works. Now they have to change the way they think about it, too."
> *(Economist, 26/05/2011)*

Abstract: *This paper reconsiders the modern concept of progress in light of ecological crisis by proposing its ecologization—an ethical and ontological reorientation grounded in terrestrial thinking. Traditionally associated with linear temporality, technological development, and anthropocentric mastery, the idea of progress is shown to be complicit in environmental degradation and systemic planetary imbalance. Drawing on Bruno Latour's political ecology and Hans Jonas's ethics of responsibility, the paper critiques this dominant paradigm and explores alternative frameworks for understanding progress in a more-than-human context. While Jonas emphasizes foresight and moral obligation rooted in human responsibility, Latour decouples agency from human exclusivity, advancing a relational ontology that includes nonhuman actors and the Earth (Gaia) itself as participants in political and ethical life. Despite their differences, both thinkers converge in their critique of techno-scientific hubris and their call for a reorientation of human agency. The paper argues that integrating Jonas's normative ethical vision with Latour's ontological pluralism enables a reframing of progress as situated, relational, and co-responsible. Such a reconfiguration, the paper concludes, is essential for developing a viable ecological ethic and navigating the demands of terrestrial life in the wake of the modernist project.*

1. Introduction

The modern concept of progress, long tethered to linear time, technological mastery, and human exceptionalism, is increasingly called into question in the face of ecological collapse and planetary destabilization. What once functioned as a secular promise of improvement now reveals its complicity in the degradation of the very conditions that make life possible. This paper argues for an ecologization of the concept of progress—an attempt to rethink its foundations through an ethical and ontological reorientation toward the terrestrial. Drawing on Bruno Latour's political ecology and Hans Jonas's ethics of responsibility, the essay explores how progress might be reconceived not as domination over nature, but as a situated, relational, and co-responsible engagement with a more-than-human world. Where Jonas articulates a moral imperative grounded in the foresight of human action, Latour offers a political and ontological framework in which nonhuman actors, entanglements, and Earth itself become part of the ethical field. Together, their thought helps outline a paradigm of progress that complicates anthropocentrism: while Jonas maintains a human-centered ethical imperative, Latour calls for a broader ecology of agency and co-responsibility. Their convergence opens space for reimagining progress in light of ecological realities.

The following chapters begin by tracing the historical development of the modern concept of progress, emphasizing its entanglement with anthropocentrism, technological optimism, and the modernist project. This is followed by a critical examination of Hans Jonas's and Bruno Latour's respective contributions to rethinking human agency and responsibility in ecological terms. Particular attention is given to the tensions and complementarities between Jonas's anthropocentric ethics of responsibility and Latour's relational ontology and political ecology. The final section synthesizes these perspectives to outline the contours of an ecologically informed concept of progress—one that resists the logic of domination and is responsive to the complex, entangled realities of life on a shared and vulnerable planet.

2. The Modern Paradigm of Progress: Origins and Critiques

The concept of progress, which emerged during the Enlightenment and solidified through modernity, has been foundational to Western thought and political practice. Rooted in the belief in linear advancement, human mastery over

nature, and the perfectibility of society through science and technology, this paradigm has shaped dominant narratives of development and improvement for centuries. Progress was traditionally understood as an unequivocally positive force—a forward-moving trajectory promising greater knowledge, prosperity, and control over the environment. However, this modern paradigm is increasingly subject to criticism due to its anthropocentrism, its assumptions of limitless growth, and its role in driving ecological crises. Critics from ecological, political, and philosophical perspectives question the coherence and desirability of this linear, human-centered model. This section traces the historical development of the progress paradigm in brief and examines key critiques, forming the basis for alternative conceptions that respond to ecological realities and ethical imperatives.

Since the Enlightenment, progress has been conceived as a linear, continuous process through which human society advances via scientific discovery, technological innovation, and socio-political reform. This teleological vision implies inherent improvement over time: the future is better than the past, and the present is a steppingstone toward ever-greater mastery over nature and social conditions (Kant, 1784/1997; Condorcet, 1795/1994). The roots of this concept lie in the Enlightenment's faith in reason and human perfectibility, along with the rise of scientific naturalism and industrial capitalism. Philosophers such as Kant and Condorcet envisioned history as a rational process of emancipation and progress culminating in an era of universal enlightenment and freedom. Progress thus became a metanarrative legitimizing the expansion of knowledge, technology, and economic growth. Already in the 19th and early 20th centuries, fundamental objections to the paradigm of progress were being formulated. Romanticism, for instance, countered the rationalization of the world with a mode of thinking grounded in organic interconnectedness and a deep affinity with nature. With the onset of the "Age of Extremes" (Hobsbawm, 1998), criticism intensified: the two world wars, the Holocaust, colonialism, and the destruction of ecological systems through industrial expansion led to a deep questioning of the idea of linear moral progress.

Critical Theory, especially in the works of Horkheimer and Adorno, analyzed the idea of progress as part of a dialectical movement in which Enlightenment transforms into new forms of domination. In their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, they argue that the same processes of rationalization that contributed to human liberation simultaneously fostered an instrumental reason that objectified both nature and the subject (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1969). Here, progress no longer appears as a guarantor of humanity, but as

an ambivalent moment in an ongoing process of alienation. Postcolonial and feminist approaches also critique the implicit universalization of Western development models, which often conceal cultural hegemony and epistemic violence under the guise of progress. Progress is thus not seen as a neutral process but deconstructed as an expression of particular power relations (Spivak, 1988). Particularly in the context of climate change, the modern narrative of progress is inadequate, as it fails to take into account humanity's new role as a geological force beyond historical categories (Chakrabarty, 2009). Finally, from an ecological perspective, the destructive flip side of classical progress becomes increasingly apparent. The expansive logic inherent to the idea of "ever more" conflicts with the finitude of natural resources. The concept of progress increasingly appears as an ideological engine of ecological exploitation as a metaphysical justification for a process of planetary destabilization. Most urgently, ecological critiques emphasize that Earth's planetary boundaries (climate, biodiversity, biogeochemical cycles) are being exceeded due to the dominant, growth-oriented paradigm of progress (Rockström et al., 2009). The assumed compatibility of infinite growth with a finite planet is thereby called into question, exposing the classical ideal of progress not only as inadequate but also as dangerous. Consequently, a critical rethinking of the concept of progress is imperative—one that incorporates ecological realities and challenges the anthropocentric, linear assumptions of modernity's dominant narrative.

This growing body of critique reveals the limitations of the traditional progress narrative, particularly its failure to account for ecological constraints and the interdependence of all life on Earth. The escalating environmental crises demand a fundamental reassessment of progress—one that transcends human-centered and growth-driven assumptions. Of particular relevance are the ecological challenges confronting the modern paradigm, which demonstrate how environmental realities require a reconceptualization of progress in line with planetary boundaries and sustainable coexistence. The Anthropocene, defined as the current geological epoch marked by significant human impact on Earth's systems, underscores the urgent need to rethink progress. This epoch highlights the profound entanglement of human and nonhuman forces and exposes the limits of traditional frameworks that separate society from nature. Ecological thinking introduces key concepts such as interdependence, limits, resilience, and vulnerability, thereby destabilizing the foundations of the classical narrative of progress. It reveals that what was once considered "nature" to be conquered is, in fact, a complex, dynamic, and sensi-

tive web of life within which humanity is inextricably embedded (Latour, 1993; 2017). The systemic risks and uncertainties characteristic of the Anthropocene render linear and growth-oriented visions of progress untenable. Furthermore, the ecological crisis introduces a temporal dimension often obscured by classical progress narratives. Environmental degradation and climate change produce long-term, often irreversible consequences, requiring a shift from short-term maximization to an ethic of future-oriented responsibility (Jonas, 1984). This challenges the dominant temporal paradigm of progress as endless forward motion, and instead suggests the necessity of precaution, care, and sustainability. Accordingly, the ecological challenge demands an "ecologization" of the concept of progress—a fundamental revision that reconfigures progress as a notion inherently entangled with planetary boundaries, ethical responsibility, and the relationality between human and nonhuman actors.

3. From Nature as Resource to Ecological Interconnectedness

A fundamental reconfiguration in the ecologization of progress involves a profound transformation in the conceptualization of nature itself. Historically, particularly within the dominant frameworks of modernity and historical materialism, nature has been conceived primarily as a resource—a vast, external stockpile of raw materials to be appropriated, exploited, and controlled for human advancement and economic growth. Karl Marx's analysis of capitalism famously emphasizes the extraction and transformation of natural resources as a driver of production and social development (Marx, 1867/1976). While foundational for industrial and technological progress, this instrumentalist view tacitly assumes nature's disposability, subordinating ecological concerns to economic imperatives. However, the environmental crises of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have exposed the limitations—and dangers—of this resource-based ontology. Contemporary ecological thought increasingly rejects the objectification and commodification of nature, emphasizing instead interdependence, relationality, and the agency of the more-than-human world. Bruno Latour (among other philosophers and new materialist thinkers) critiques the modernist dualisms that separate humans from nature, arguing that such binaries facilitate domination and ecological destruction. This ontological shift carries profound ethical and political consequences. Indigenous worldviews, for instance, often conceive of humans as embedded within relational networks that include animals, plants and land-

scapes—networks grounded not in control or exploitation, but in reciprocity and responsibility (Whyte, 2017). Donna Haraway similarly calls for rethinking human-nonhuman relations through the concept of sympoiesis—a mode of "making-with" that emphasizes mutual entanglement and collaborative survival in the ruins of modern progress (Haraway, 2016). Such perspectives foster an ethic of care and stewardship that stands in stark contrast to the exploitative paradigms of modernity. Moreover, this reconceptualization influences policy and action. The emergence of ecosystem services frameworks and rights of nature laws in some jurisdictions reflects attempts to institutionalize the idea that nature is not merely a resource but a rights-bearing entity with intrinsic value and agency (Stone, 2010; Cullinan, 2011). These shifts challenge legal and economic systems to move beyond anthropocentric valuation and incorporate ecological interdependence into decision-making. In relation to the concept of progress, this epistemic transformation entails a move from viewing progress as technological mastery over an external nature toward progress as the cultivation and maintenance of sustainable relationships between humans and the more-than-human world. Hans Jonas's ethics of responsibility explicitly ground moral obligation in the recognition of the natural world's vulnerability and intrinsic worth, compelling humanity to safeguard ecological conditions for future generations (Jonas, 1984). Similarly, Bruno Latour's relational ontology rejects nature/society dualisms, proposing instead that humans are enmeshed in networks of heterogeneous actors, and that progress must involve the composition of new, hybrid collectives where nonhuman agencies are accounted for (Latour, 1993). Together, these perspectives suggest that a crucial prerequisite for ecologically informed progress lies in transforming the way nature is seen and valued—from a passive resource base toward a dynamic, interconnected participant in shared futures. This paradigm shift not only challenges the epistemological foundations of classical progress narratives but also opens up possibilities for ethical engagement and political innovation compatible with ecological limits. The reconceptualization of nature as relational, interconnected, and agentic not only challenges the ontological foundations of modernity but also demands a rethinking of ethical and political responsibility. If progress is no longer defined by domination over nature but by the capacity to live within ecological limits and relational networks, then the question arises: how should human agency be redefined in this transformed landscape? This question lies at the heart of both Hans Jonas's ethics of responsibility and Bruno Latour's political ecology. Although they approach the issue from distinct philosophical tradi-

tions—Jonas from existential ethics and Latour from science and technology studies—both thinkers grapple with the urgency of ecological crisis and the need to reorient human action accordingly. The following section examines their respective contributions to an ecologically grounded notion of progress, highlighting points of convergence and productive tension between their frameworks.

4. Hans Jonas and the Ethics of Responsibility

> "Act so that the effects of your action are not destructive of the future possibility of (…) life."
> *(Jonas, 1984, 11)*

Hans Jonas's philosophical intervention is pivotal for rethinking the concept of progress in light of ecological crisis. Writing in response to the rapidly advancing technological power of the mid-20th century, Jonas identified a deep ethical void at the heart of modern moral philosophy: its failure to account for humanity's unprecedented capacity to alter the planet and endanger future generations in irreversible ways (Jonas, 1984). His work responds directly to the crisis of modernity's unrestrained technological expansion, which, under the banner of progress, threatened the very conditions of life on Earth. Central to Jonas's thought is the imperative of responsibility. Unlike classical ethical theories, which focus primarily on interpersonal duties among contemporaries, Jonas extends the ethical horizon toward the long-term future and the more-than-human world. His "Imperative of Responsibility" demands that human action be evaluated according to its impact on the "permanence of genuine human life on Earth" (Jonas, 1984, 11). This is not merely a pragmatic or instrumental concern; it constitutes a new foundation for ethics—one grounded in the vulnerability of life and the irreversible scope of technological intervention. Jonas's ethical thinking introduces a new temporal dimension to moral reflection, in which the future is recognized as a distinct domain of ethical concern. Responsibility is no longer limited to the immediate or the visible but extends to future generations, whose well-being depends on the foresight and restraint of those living today (Jonas, 1984, 13). For Jonas, the modern concept of progress—rooted in Enlightenment optimism, technological confidence, and anthropocentric rationalism—is ethically obsolete. Traditional no-

tions of progress celebrate the idea of linear advancement, the continual mastery of nature, and the limitless expansion of human capabilities. Jonas critiques this as a dangerous illusion. In his view, such faith in progress neglects the destructive potential of modern technology and assumes that innovation will always be redemptive. In response, Jonas proposes a reversal of the burden of proof: in situations where technological action could result in ecological catastrophe, the onus lies not on the critics to demonstrate harm, but on the proponents to prove safety. This precautionary principle is central to his ecological ethics. It marks a clear departure from the dominant ethos of growth and acceleration, instead advocating for restraint, humility, and moral foresight (Jonas, 1984, 13). Although Jonas remains committed to the central role of the human as a moral subject, his philosophy nonetheless challenges anthropocentrism by emphasizing the intrinsic value of life itself. He argues that the unprecedented power humans now wield over the biosphere necessitates a new form of stewardship—one grounded not in domination but in care (Jonas, 1984, 8). Life, in its vulnerability and irreplaceability, becomes the ground of moral obligation (Jonas, 1984, 10). This ontological shift, though not yet a full break with the modern subject/object divide, pushes toward a broader view of ethical relevance. Jonas does not fully dissolve the divide between humans and nature, but he demands that human agency recognize its embeddedness in and responsibility toward a larger web of life (Jonas, 1984, 7). In this sense, his work anticipates more relational and decentered ontologies without fully embracing them. Jonas offers a powerful ethical critique of modern progress and a compelling normative vision for ecological responsibility. He situates human action within a widened moral and temporal field, emphasizing care, sustainability, and the preservation of life (Jonas, 1984, 12). His imperative of responsibility remains a crucial resource for grounding ecological thought in ethical terms. Yet Jonas's framework, while ethically expansive, still operates within a modern metaphysical architecture that privileges the human as the central moral actor. Agency remains largely human, and nature, while valued, is not politicized or ontologically equal. The categories of "nature" and "humanity" remain distinct, and the conditions under which responsibility is exercised are not redefined at the ontological level. To move beyond this limitation, and to fully ecologize the concept of progress, it becomes necessary to question the very constitution of the modern subject and its separation from the nonhuman world. This is the project undertaken by Bruno Latour, whose political ecology seeks not only to expand ethical responsibility but to redistribute agency, dissolve dualisms, and recompose the world in terms of entangled, more-than-

human collectives. Where Jonas offers an ethical compass, Latour provides the ontological and political tools necessary to rethink progress as situated, relational, and co-constructed by human and nonhuman actors alike. While Hans Jonas's ethics of responsibility powerfully expands the moral horizon by emphasizing human foresight, care, and restraint in the face of ecological vulnerability, it remains rooted in a fundamentally anthropocentric framework. His normative vision centers on human agency as the bearer of ethical obligation and conceptualizes nature primarily as an object of human stewardship. However, as ecological challenges intensify and the limitations of human-centered ethics become increasingly evident, a further rethinking is required—one that not only broadens ethical responsibility but also reconfigures the very ontological categories of agency, subjectivity, and the nature-society divide. Bruno Latour's political ecology offers this next step by decentering the human subject and advocating for a relational, more-than-human conception of progress. Latour challenges the modern dualisms that Jonas retains and proposes a framework in which humans and nonhumans co-constitute political and ethical collectives. In doing so, Latour provides a complementary but ontologically radical approach to ecologizing progress—one that reconceives agency, responsibility, and the composition of shared worlds beyond traditional boundaries.

The following section will thus explore Latour's thought as a critical extension and transformation of the ethical groundwork laid by Jonas, focusing on the implications of Latour's relational ontology for redefining progress in the Anthropocene.

5. Bruno Latour's political ecology

Building on Hans Jonas's foundational ethics of responsibility, Bruno Latour's political ecology offers a vital ontological and political reconfiguration necessary to fully ecologize the concept of progress. While Jonas expands the ethical horizon by emphasizing human foresight and moral obligation toward future life and ecological vulnerability, Latour pushes further by challenging the very categories through which modernity has understood agency, nature, and society. He argues that rethinking progress requires not only a normative recalibration but also a profound revision of the conceptual and political frameworks that sustain the dominant human-centered worldview.

Latour's relational ontology dissolves the rigid nature-society divide, presenting humans and nonhumans as interconnected actors within dynamic

networks. Central to his thought is the concept of "composition," which denotes the ongoing collective assembling of heterogeneous beings and forces into new political and ecological configurations. This framework opens the way for a politics of the terrestrial—anchored in the figure of Gaia as a political-ecological actor—where progress is no longer about human mastery but about coexisting and composing sustainable worlds. Moreover, Latour critiques the limitations of traditional critique and envisions the emergence of an ecological class—new political subjects whose identities and interests are inseparable from the terrestrial. This perspective highlights how ecological challenges necessitate political innovation and collective responsibility that transcends old dichotomies and power structures. In what follows, this chapter will explore these dimensions of Latour's thought, showing how his political ecology not only complements but crucially extends the ethical insights of Jonas. Together, they provide a robust conceptual and normative foundation for an ecological reconceptualization of progress suited to the complexities of the Anthropocene.

The ecological crisis presents not only urgent practical challenges but also deep conceptual questions for the categories underpinning political and ethical modernity. The concept of progress, rooted in Enlightenment and industrial modernity, proves inadequate when confronted with planetary limits. It remains bound to a profound anthropocentrism that reduces nature to a mere resource for human ends, and to a linear temporality demanding constant innovation and forward momentum—often at the cost of present ecological destruction (Latour, 2018; Jonas, 1984). Consequently, a thorough revision of progress is imperative—an ecologization that redefines it not as the mere extension of technological mastery but as a relational, responsibility-infused coexistence with nonhuman entities. The philosophical approaches Bruno Latour's political ecology and Hans Jonas's ethics of responsibility prove especially fruitful in this regard. Latour critiques the modern concept of progress as embedded within a dualistic framework that artificially separates nature and society—a foundational gesture of modernity. In *We Have Never Been Modern* (1993), he argues that the modern constitution rests on two simultaneous but contradictory operations: the purification of conceptual domains (i.e., drawing clear distinctions between nature and culture, facts and values), and the proliferation of hybrids, meaning the ongoing creation of entities that mix natural and social elements—such as climate models, genetically modified organisms, or technological infrastructures (Latour, 1993, 10–12). These hybrids are ubiquitous in modern life, yet modern discourse system-

atically represses their entangled nature by maintaining the illusion of pure categories. This paradox reveals what Latour calls the "modern constitution": a hidden rule that organizes knowledge and power by separating what is considered objective (nature) from what is considered subjective or constructed (culture or society), while in practice continuously entangling them (Latour, 1993, 13–15). According to Latour, this dichotomy is not an empirical reality but an ideological framework that legitimizes a certain regime of politics, science, and progress. It allows nature to be rendered as a passive, external realm governed by immutable laws, while society is imagined as the active domain of values, decisions, and history. Latour argues that this artificial division has contributed directly to ecological degradation. By excluding nature from the political sphere—treating it as a background to human action rather than a participant in it—modernity has obscured the fact that "natural" systems are deeply enmeshed in social, economic, and technological networks. The ecological crisis, in this light, is not merely the unintended consequence of technological development, but a crisis of representation and ontology: we lack the categories and institutions to adequately represent the more-than-human world in political terms (Latour, 1993, 25–30; 96–99). By exposing this contradiction, Latour fundamentally challenges anthropocentrism. If there is no ontological divide between nature and society, then agency and significance cannot be reserved for humans alone. What modernity treated as "natural" and inert is, in fact, already imbued with political and epistemic agency. The very idea of human exceptionalism collapses, revealing a world composed of actor-networks-assemblages of human and nonhuman agents that co-construct reality (Latour, 1993, 105–117). From this vantage point, the ecological crisis is not simply a failure of environmental management, but a failure of the modern epistemological order. Progress, as traditionally conceived, relies on the very dualisms (nature/culture, subject/object, human/nonhuman) that now appear untenable. Latour's call is not to abandon the concept of progress altogether, but to recompose it on a different ontological foundation: one that recognizes the hybrid, relational, and co-constitutive nature of the world we inhabit.

In *Down to Earth* (2018), Latour lays out what can be read as a terrestrial manifesto—a constructive political ecology that builds directly on his earlier critique of modernity. He argues that the modern project of progress, conceived as liberation from material constraints through science, economics, and globalization, has reached its limits. Faced with ecological breakdown, it is no longer viable to imagine the future as a space of boundless expan-

sion or technological transcendence. Instead, Latour insists that we must "land"—to come back down to Earth and recognize our material and ecological dependencies (Latour, 2018, 11). What modernity framed as a triumphant ascent—toward reason, mastery, and universalism—has become a dangerous detachment from the very conditions that sustain life. Latour provocatively argues that the ideal of a shared, global horizon—the so-called "Global"—is dissolving before our eyes, giving rise to new forms of denialism, nationalism, and ecological isolationism (Latour, 2018, 11–18). In response, he introduces the figure of the Terrestrial, a mode of existence defined not by abstract universals or national identities, but by attachment to specific material conditions, territories, and networks of interdependence. Progress, from this perspective, must be redefined as a project of re-orientation: no longer a forward flight, but a turning back—*not backward*, but *downward*—toward the Earth as the shared condition of survival. Crucially, Latour does not treat the Earth as a passive background or inert resource. Drawing on James Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis (Lovelock, 1979), he reinterprets Gaia not as a harmonious superorganism but as a reactive, dynamic, and unstable system of feedback loops—an Earth that responds, resists, and acts (Latour, 2017, 95–101). Gaia, in Latour's reading, is not a metaphysical being but a political actor: a force that disrupts human plans, withdraws stability, and demands recognition. The ecological crisis thus becomes not merely an environmental issue, but a crisis of representation—of who or what counts as a participant in the political field (Latour, 2017, 102–108). Through this lens, the idea of progress must be radically transformed. Rather than measuring advancement by technological innovation or economic growth, Latour urges us to evaluate it in terms of our ability to compose livable worlds with others—human and nonhuman alike (Latour, 2018, 81–89). Progress becomes a question of inhabitation: of learning to stick to the soil, and to reframe politics not around sovereignty or abstraction, but around shared vulnerability and entangled agency. Latour's critique of the modern constitution and his call for a terrestrial reorientation reveal the depth of the conceptual revision required in response to the ecological crisis. By dismantling the nature-culture divide and challenging the narrative of unbounded progress, he exposes the ontological and political blind spots of modernity. Yet his project is not merely deconstructive. Latour's political ecology aims to reassemble the world on new terms—through concepts like Gaia, composition, and the proliferation of nonhuman agency. These ideas signal a profound shift: progress must no longer be conceived as transcendence or mastery, but as situated, collective and ecologically embedded world-

making. The following sections develop this shift in more detail, unpacking the ontological, ethical, and political dimensions of Latour's terrestrial thought.

5.1 Latour's Relational Ontology: Rethinking Agency Beyond the Human

Bruno Latour's work offers a radical ontological reconfiguration that undercuts the modernist dualisms shaping Western thought—especially the foundational separations between nature and society, subject and object, fact and value. In *We Have Never Been Modern* (1993), Latour identifies these binaries as the pillars of what he terms the "modern constitution": an epistemic-political order that claims to purify domains (separating Nature from Culture) while simultaneously generating hybrids—complex entanglements of human and nonhuman forces (Latour, 1993, 10–13). The central paradox of modernity, according to Latour, is that it denies the existence of these hybrids even as it depends on them. Latour's relational ontology begins by rejecting the idea that agency belongs exclusively to human subjects. Instead, drawing from Actor-Network Theory (ANT), he proposes that agency is distributed among heterogeneous assemblages of actors—including people, machines, institutions, microbes, and landscapes—each contributing to the stabilization or transformation of reality (Latour, 2005, 71–72). Agency, in this view, is not a property but an effect: it emerges from the capacity of an entity to make a difference within a network. This challenges the anthropocentric bias of classical political and ethical frameworks, opening the way for a more-than-human politics. This rethinking of agency is tied to Latour's "critique of critique." In his influential essay *Why Has Critique Run out of Steam?* (2004), Latour criticizes traditional critical theory for its tendency to debunk and deconstruct, often without offering constructive alternatives. He observes that critique has become too detached, too skeptical, and increasingly ineffective in mobilizing political action—especially in the context of ecological crises and climate denial (Latour, 2004, 227–229). Instead, he calls for a shift from critical subtraction to "composition," an epistemic and political practice concerned with assembling and maintaining fragile, contested collectives of humans and nonhumans. This proposal is developed in his later writings as compositionism, an approach that aims not to purify or unmask, but to carefully compose worlds—through science, politics, ethics, and art—without denying their multiplicity and entanglement (Latour, 2010). Compositionism, as Latour puts it, takes up the task of building, maintaining, and caring for collectives of humans and nonhumans, rather than seeking to destroy, de-

mystify, or disqualify them (Latour, 2010, 474). Progress, in this framework, is no longer understood as linear advancement or control over nature, but as the iterative, negotiated process of composing livable worlds in response to ecological and political attachments. This ontological shift is inseparable from a political one. Latour famously imagines a "Parliament of Things"—a provocative metaphor for the inclusion of nonhuman actors in deliberative and representative processes (Latour, 1993, 142–145). While nonhumans cannot speak for themselves, they speak through instruments, measurements, symptoms and proxies. What is required, then, is not simply extending rights to nature but reorganizing the institutions of political life to account for the agency and effects of nonhumans. The "parliament" metaphor signals the need for a new ecology of representation—one capable of articulating the entangled interests of all Earthbound actors. This compositionist vision of collectivity directly challenges the classical notion of progress. Rather than valorizing control, speed, or innovation, Latour's relational ontology redefines progress as the cultivation of situated attachments and responsive alliances—fragile, ongoing, and materially embedded. In this sense, Latour resonates with Hans Jonas's ethics of responsibility, particularly in his insistence on care, precaution, and future-orientation. Yet Latour moves beyond Jonas by refusing to center the human as the exclusive bearer of ethical weight. His project instead seeks to decenter human agency, placing it within wider assemblages of ecological actors and planetary interdependencies. Progress, then, becomes a matter of collective world-making: not a transcendence of limits, but a negotiation with them; not an assertion of mastery, but an act of composition. This shift not only critiques modernity's ontological assumptions—it provides tools for constructing alternatives grounded in relationality, vulnerability, and the shared task of inhabiting a threatened planet. Latour's relational ontology lays the groundwork for a redefinition of progress—one that no longer centers on human mastery or technological acceleration, but on the fragile, situated work of composing livable collectives across the human—nonhuman divide. By displacing the nature/society binary and redistributing agency, Latour invites us to reimagine politics as a more inclusive and responsive enterprise. Yet this ontological shift does not remain abstract. It culminates in a powerful cosmopolitical vision grounded in the figure of Gaia—a non-metaphysical, politically charged conception of the Earth as an active and reactive presence. In the following section, we turn to this concept to examine how Latour expands the ethical and political implications of ecological entanglement, and how Gaia compels a profound reorientation of the idea of progress itself.

5.2 Latour's Gaia: A Political-Ecological Actor Beyond Metaphysics

A central development in Latour's ecological thought is his reinterpretation of "Gaia, a (finally secular) figure for nature" (Latour, 2017, 75). Drawing inspiration from the Gaia hypothesis but decisively distancing himself from metaphysical or spiritualized readings, Latour frames Gaia as an emergent political-ecological actor—a complex collective of human and nonhuman agencies that constitute the Earth system (Latour, 2017). While the original Gaia hypothesis suggested Earth as a self-regulating organism, Latour rejects viewing Gaia as a mystical or supernatural entity. Instead, he emphasizes that Gaia should be understood as a complex network of real, material interactions—geological, atmospheric, biological, and technological—that together shape the conditions for life on the planet. Gaia is not a spirit, a god, or an essence, but a contingent, fragile, and active collective whose existence depends on the political recognition and care by human and nonhuman actors. This political-ecological framing grounds Gaia firmly in empirical realities and political stakes rather than abstract metaphysical speculation. This reconceptualization of Gaia has significant consequences for the idea of progress. It demands acknowledging that human societies are fundamentally enmeshed in these entangled networks and that the notion of progress as linear technological or economic advancement is no longer viable. Instead, progress must be rethought as a process of coexistence, negotiation, and mutual adjustment within the Earth system. Gaia functions as a political actor insofar as it compels humans to engage collectively and responsibly with nonhuman agencies, challenging anthropocentric assumptions of control (Latour, 2015). This emphasis on collective responsibility and political composition resonates with Hans Jonas's ethical demand for responsibility toward future generations, though Latour extends this to include the more-than-human world as an active participant. By positioning Gaia as a political-ecological entity rather than a metaphysical force, Latour avoids spiritual metaphysics or animism while providing a powerful conceptual tool for ecological politics. Integrating Latour's Gaia into the ecologization of progress enriches the discourse by foregrounding the systemic, relational conditions that enable and constrain human action. It calls for new political formations and ethical sensibilities that recognize Earth's agency, thereby expanding the horizon for an ecological concept of progress that is both pragmatic and normatively compelling.

This chapter's exploration of Latour's reinterpretation of Gaia underscores a pivotal shift in ecological thought—from viewing Earth as a passive backdrop

or mystical entity to recognizing it as a politically active, relational collective. By reframing Gaia as an emergent actor within a network of human and nonhuman agencies, Latour challenges anthropocentric and metaphysical assumptions that have historically underpinned modern notions of progress. This shift opens up new pathways for political engagement and ethical responsibility that are grounded in ecological realities and the interconnectedness of life. Building on this reconfigured political ecology, the next section will delve deeper into Latour's broader critique of critique itself and his concept of composition. This will further illuminate how progress can be reimagined as a collective process of assembling heterogeneous entities, transcending the limitations of traditional modernist dichotomies and opening up innovative possibilities for ecological coexistence.

5.3 Latour's Critique of Critique and the Concept of Composition

Bruno Latour's ecological thought fundamentally interrogates not only the ontological assumptions of modernity but also the intellectual tools traditionally employed to challenge them. In his influential essay "*Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam?*" (2004), Latour argues that the longstanding tradition of critique—rooted in exposing illusions, deceptions, and ideological constructions—has reached a limit, particularly within ecological debates. This critique, while historically essential for revealing the blind spots and power relations of modernity, increasingly falters when confronting the complexity and urgency of the Anthropocene. Latour observes that critique often relies on a skeptical posture: its primary mode is to debunk and deconstruct existing knowledge claims and institutional arrangements, especially those related to science and politics (Latour, 2004, 230). Yet, this mode tends to reproduce the very dichotomies it seeks to dismantle—most notably the nature/culture and human/nonhuman divides. By relentlessly pointing out that hybrids or entanglements are "false" or "constructed," critique paradoxically reinforces the modernist idea that pure, uncontaminated categories should exist. In *We Have Never Been Modern*, Latour diagnoses modernity as a "constitutional" order based on strict bifurcations that separate society from nature, and humans from nonhumans, while in reality these hybrids have always existed, yet remain repressed (Latour, 1993, 7–9). This dilemma is acutely felt in ecological discourse, where the stakes are existential. The negative logic of critique breeds skepticism and distrust but rarely offers a constructive path forward. Latour suggests that it risks immobilizing political and ecological action by

fostering cynicism and paralysis rather than transformation. This is especially evident in the persistence of climate change denial and science skepticism, phenomena that undermine collective efforts to address ecological crises by casting doubt on scientific consensus and delegitimizing environmental concerns. In response, Latour calls for a new approach he terms *compositionism*—a mode of thinking that moves beyond tearing down to actively assembling new configurations of humans, nonhumans, technologies, and environments (Latour, 2010). Compositionism acknowledges the irreducible hybridity of the world and embraces the task of creating new collective forms that respect and incorporate ecological entanglements. Instead of focusing on exposing illusions, compositionism aims at building workable political ecologies and durable alliances capable of addressing complex environmental challenges. In *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence*, Latour elaborates on this epistemological and political shift, emphasizing the necessity to compose "common worlds" through the active negotiation and assemblage of heterogeneous actors (Latour, 2013). This approach aligns closely with the demands of the ecological crises, where progress depends not on dominating nature but on negotiating ongoing relationships and dependencies among diverse actors. Moreover, Latour's idea of a *parliament of things* exemplifies compositionist politics by advocating for the inclusion of nonhuman entities as political subjects. Such political reconfiguration expands responsibility and agency beyond the human sphere, resonating with but also extending Hans Jonas's ethics of responsibility to a pluralistic and distributed model of ecological governance. By advocating for composition over critique, Latour provides a vital conceptual and political tool to overcome the impasse of ecological skepticism and nihilism. This transition from a deconstructive to a constructive logic reinvigorates the concept of progress, situating it within an active and relational politics of care, negotiation, and cohabitation on a fragile planet. Latour's diagnosis of critique's exhaustion does not call for its abandonment, but for its transformation. In the face of ecological urgency, critique as debunking is no longer sufficient—what is needed is a mode of thought capable of assembling and sustaining the fragile attachments that constitute our shared world. Compositionism, as Latour proposes, offers a more generative framework: it resists the impulse to stand above or outside of entanglements, and instead urges us to take part in their careful reweaving. This shift is not merely methodological; it bears directly on how we understand progress itself. If critique once aimed to liberate us from illusions, composition insists we take responsibility for what we build together. Progress, in this light, is no longer a linear trajectory

of technological mastery or ideological purification, but the pragmatic, plural, and situated work of composing a livable world.

Having examined the ontological and political implications of Latour's compositionism, we now turn to his vision of *terrestrial politics*—a vision in which the idea of progress is fundamentally reoriented. In *Down to Earth*, Latour calls not for acceleration or escape, but for a return: to Earth, to locality, to the shared material conditions that bind all earthly beings together. The next section explores how this "landing" challenges modernist notions of futurity, mobility, and emancipation, and offers an alternative model of ecological progress grounded in situated responsibility and planetary entanglement.

5.4 Progress as a Return to Earth: Latour's Terrestrial Politics

In *Down to Earth* (2018), Bruno Latour presents one of his most pointed political interventions, urging a redefinition of progress not as expansion or transcendence but as "landing"—a return to the Earth. This return is not nostalgic or regressive; rather, it is a deliberate reorientation of political imagination and ethical responsibility toward the material and relational conditions of earthly life. Against the backdrop of climate change, ecological destabilization, and political fragmentation, Latour argues that the modern trajectory of "progress" has come to mean escape: escape from nature, from limits, from locality, and ultimately from responsibility. This imagined upward trajectory—toward globalization, technological transcendence, or even space colonization—is, for Latour, a dangerous illusion. It reflects what he calls the "Out-of-This-World" orientation, the dream of detachment from terrestrial entanglements and planetary constraints (Latour, 2018, 33). In contrast, Latour proposes the *Terrestrial* as a new attractor—a mode of being politically and ecologically situated (Latour, 2018, 39). The Terrestrial demands attachment, belonging, soil, and localized responsibility; it cannot be abstracted or globalized without dissolving the very conditions of life. Progress, then, is redefined as a process of *relocalizing* our political and ethical commitments. Rather than aiming for mastery, growth, or escape velocity, progress involves reattaching ourselves to the networks—ecological, social, and technological—that support life. This includes a recognition that no single actor, whether state, corporation, or individual, can act alone. The political challenge of the Terrestrial is the composition of a new collective that includes human and nonhuman agents alike. Latour connects this planetary reorientation to the urgency of climate politics. The refusal to confront ecological reality—seen in climate denial, reactionary nationalism,

and techno-utopianism—is, in his view, a symptom of modernity's crisis. The promise of endless growth without territorial or ecological responsibility failed and let some elites chose to cut themselves off from the rest of the world, protecting their own survival while denying planetary limits (Latour, 2018, 20). The result is not only ecological devastation but political disintegration: a retreat from shared futures and democratic institutions. The return to Earth, by contrast, demands a politics of inhabitation. It requires that progress be conceived not as forward motion into an abstract future, but as the careful work of making a shared world livable, considering the material and relational conditions of life. In this sense, progress becomes inseparable from care, maintenance, and situated responsibility. It is no longer about moving forward on a universal track, but about the imperative to protect the habitability of the Earth (Latour & Schultz, 2022). Latour's terrestrial politics thus resonate deeply with the ecological reframing of progress explored throughout this paper. Like Jonas, he foregrounds responsibility; but where Jonas grounds this in human foresight and moral imperative, Latour embeds it in a networked ontology and a pluralist political vision. His call to "return to Earth" is not a rejection of progress, but its radical transformation—a move from vertical conquest to horizontal composition, from abstraction to situated entanglement. Latour's vision of progress as a return to Earth or the Terrestrial radically shifts the trajectory of modern politics. Rather than pursuing emancipation through detachment or abstraction, it demands new forms of attachment—grounded, situated, and ecologically responsive. This terrestrial reorientation reframes the political landscape: no longer structured by traditional left-right or global-local dichotomies, it calls for entirely new axes of alignment. But who, then, can speak for the Earth? Who composes the collective capable of inhabiting the Terrestrial? These questions bring us to a pivotal point in Latour's political ecology: the emergence of an *ecological class*. As the climate crisis redraws the boundaries of political conflict, Latour suggests that a new form of political subjectivity is forming—one no longer defined primarily by economic interest, but by the shared struggle to defend the conditions of life on a vulnerable planet. The next section explores this proposal and its implications for ecological progress in the Anthropocene.

6. On the Emergence of an Ecological Class: Political Reorientation in the Anthropocene

> "Being a materialist today means not only reproducing the material conditions that are favorable to humans, but also taking into account the conditions necessary for the Earth to be habitable. These conditions force us to consider not only what the political economy of traditional parties has sought to simplify under the name of 'resources,' but also a new material reality of the planet."[1]
> *(Latour & Schultz, 2022, 21)*

The preceding chapters have shown that the classical idea of progress—understood as linear development, technological mastery, and emancipation from natural constraints—is fundamentally inadequate in the face of the ecological crises of the Anthropocene. In response, this chapter outlines the key dimensions of an alternative understanding: an ecologized concept of progress. Drawing together insights from Hans Jonas's ethics of responsibility and Bruno Latour's Earthbound relational ontology, this reconfigured concept emphasizes interdependence, restraint, and cohabitation. First, ecological progress must be viewed as situated, not universal. Classical modern progress narratives often assume a singular trajectory, applicable to all societies and measured by abstract metrics such as GDP or technological capacity. In contrast, ecological progress is context-sensitive and plural, rooted in specific ecological, cultural, and material conditions. It rejects the notion of a single human destiny and instead affirms the diversity of ways of living well within ecological limits. Second, progress must be redefined in terms of responsibility and foresight. Here, Hans Jonas's ethics offers a crucial orientation. The imperative to act in ways that safeguard the future of life remains essential, particularly in light of human technological power. Jonas reminds us that without a strong normative orientation, ecological thought risks lapsing into relativism or passivity. His anthropocentric ethics, though limited in scope, provides an indispensable moral compass (Jonas, 1984). Third, ecological progress requires a non-anthropocentric ontology, as articulated by Bruno Latour. Progress is no longer defined as human separation from or control over nature, but as participation in a dense web of human–nonhuman relations.

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1 Translation by author from: Latour, Bruno; Schultz, Nikolaj (2022): Zur Entstehung einer ökologischen Klasse. Ein Memorandum. Berlin: Suhrkamp.

Latour's "parliament of things" and his emphasis on relationality and agency expand the ethical and political community to include nonhuman actors. This ontological shift demands new forms of representation, governance, and care.

Latour introduced this rethinking already in *Politics of Nature* (2004), where he interprets the ecological crisis as an uprising of things—that is, of all nonhuman entities. These entities, Latour suggests, demand to be taken as matters of concern (Latour, 2004, 66). He proposes to replace the modern division between nature and society with a political ecology that acknowledges and foregrounds hybrids—entities that are neither purely natural nor purely social. The term "hybrid" serves to avoid the dualism of subject and object, since for Latour, both co-constitute each other through networks of influence. As he elaborates in *Pandora's Hope* (1999), the relation between humans and artifacts is not one of unilateral agency. Rather, both are propositions that shape and transform one another. Translated to the relationship between nature and society, this means that nature can no longer be conceived as a passive realm acted upon by autonomous human subjects. Instead, nature and society are deeply entangled and continuously co-producing one another. Within this framework, Latour grants actantial agency to all entities, human and nonhuman alike. Crucially, Latour's network theory does not deny that humans are a decisive force in ecological destabilization. On the contrary, his calls for a materialist politics rely on repositioning existing conceptual categories. While he builds on the Marxist insight that societies must be understood in relation to their material conditions, he insists that "it is no longer the same materiality"[2] (Latour & Schultz, 2022, 19). The vision of an "ecological class" is therefore not a continuation of socialist traditions, but a conceptual shift grounded in the new planetary condition—the New Climatic Regime. The ecological question, Latour insists, can no longer be treated as secondary to social or economic ones. On the contrary, the livability of the Earth must be placed at the center of political analysis. Thus, Jonas and Latour, despite their differences, can be read as complementary. Jonas provides the ethical foundation for responsibility toward future life; Latour redefines the ontological terrain in which such responsibility must be enacted. An ecologized concept of progress entails both normative commitment and ontological humility: it requires human responsibility, but within an expanded field of actors and relations. Finally, ecological progress must be po-

2 Translation by author from: Latour, Bruno; Schultz, Nikolaj (2022): Zur Entstehung einer ökologischen Klasse. Ein Memorandum. Berlin: Suhrkamp.

litically organized. In *On the Emergence of an Ecological Class*[3] (Latour & Schultz, 2022), the authors argue that ecological transformation will not occur solely through individual ethical insight or philosophical realignment. It demands the formation of new social alliances—an "ecological class" capable of challenging dominant modes of production, consumption, and governance. Importantly, Latour and Schultz deliberately reframe the notion of "class" beyond its traditional Marxist roots. Unlike classical classes defined primarily by economic relations to capital and production, the ecological class is a political formation united by a shared interest in preserving the habitability of the Earth. For Latour, this redefinition is necessary because social questions, such as the distribution of production and wealth, depend entirely on the prior question of planetary habitability. Therefore, the ecological must be addressed before and as the condition of possibility for any meaningful social politics. The demand for environmental protection is no longer a marginal concern but the core of a new political order. While questions of production and economic justice remain crucial, they must now be embedded within ecological realities. This repositioning of the class concept also implies a decoupling of progress from prosperity. The societal orientation can no longer be guided by narratives of emancipation or autonomy that ignore interdependence. Instead, the full entanglement of humans and nonhumans must be acknowledged and addressed with regard to sustaining a livable planet. On this basis, Latour proposes the formation of an ecological class—a collective subject that articulates political demands from the standpoint of Earth's habitability and evaluates political programs accordingly. This perspective reframes progress as a collective political project: not the utopian unfolding of reason, but the contingent and contested composition of livable futures on a damaged planet. From that perspective, an ecological concept of progress does not reject the aspiration to move forward. Rather, it redefines what "forward" means: not acceleration, expansion, or abstraction, but deceleration, reattachment, and repair. It is a form of progress that begins with the Earth and orients itself toward preserving its habitability—materially, ethically, and politically.

3 Translation by author; the German edition was used here: Latour, Bruno; Schultz, Nikolaj (2022): Zur Entstehung einer ökologischen Klasse. Ein Memorandum. Berlin: Suhrkamp.

7. Between Foresight and Entanglement: Jonas and Latour in Dialogue

Hans Jonas and Bruno Latour approach the ecological crisis from distinct philosophical traditions—Jonas through existential ethics, Latour through posthumanist ontology—but their works converge in important ways when rethinking the idea of progress under planetary conditions. Examining their positions side-by-side reveals both tensions and complementarities that enrich an ecological reconceptualization of progress. Jonas's ethics centers on the uniquely human capacity for foresight and the imperative of responsibility that arises from it (Jonas, 1984). His moral framework emerges from the unprecedented scale and impact of modern technological power, obliging humanity to act on behalf of future generations and the broader web of life. This responsibility is rooted in an asymmetry: humans possess the power to alter the conditions of life irreversibly, while future beings are vulnerable and voiceless. Although Jonas's approach remains anthropocentric—grounded in human moral agency—it is deeply ecological in its emphasis on fragility, temporality, and care. Latour, in contrast, challenges the ontological dualism underpinning such anthropocentrism. In e.g. *We Have Never Been Modern* (1993) and *Facing Gaia* (2017), he argues that the strict nature-culture divide is a historical artifact that obscures the hybridity and entanglement of humans, nonhumans, and technologies. Responsibility, for Latour, is distributed across a network of heterogeneous actors rather than vested in a singular, sovereign human subject. This shift from a human-centered ethics to an ecology of collective agencies reframes progress as the careful composition of shared worlds, emphasizing relationality and political inclusion of the more-than-human (Latour, 1993; 2017). Despite these differing ontological starting points, Jonas and Latour share a profound critique of modern techno-scientific hubris and the myth of progress as human liberation from nature. Both insist on limits: Jonas on moral responsibility toward future life, Latour on the political recognition of Earth's agency and the dissolution of the nature–culture binary. Progress, in their combined view, must be reimagined as embeddedness, restraint, and cohabitation rather than mastery, acceleration, or domination. Importantly, these frameworks are not mutually exclusive but complementary. Jonas's ethics of foresight offers a crucial normative anchor for the more expansive, non-anthropocentric ontology Latour proposes. Conversely, Latour's distributed politics and ontological humility enrich Jonas's anthropocentric stance by expanding the moral field to include nonhuman

agencies. Together, their insights invite a radical shift from progress as conquest toward progress as composition—a collective care for a fragile Earth, oriented not toward transcendence but attentiveness. This dialogical tension between foresight and entanglement thus lays the conceptual foundation for ecologizing progress. By bridging ethics and ontology, normative responsibility and political composition, Jonas and Latour provide a robust philosophical basis for rethinking progress as a relational and responsible practice attuned to planetary limits. Drawing on the complementary frameworks of Hans Jonas's ethics of responsibility and Bruno Latour's relational ontology, the paper now moves from critical reflection to constructive reconfiguration. The next chapter will develop an ecologized concept of progress—one that is inherently situated, attentive to the plurality of life forms and anchored in a profound sense of responsibility toward both present and future earthly communities. This reconceptualization addresses the urgent need to rethink progress beyond linear, anthropocentric paradigms, as Jonas and Latour have laid the groundwork for such a transformation (Jonas, 1984; Latour, 1993). By grounding progress in ecological relationality and ethical foresight, the ensuing discussion aims to translate philosophical insights into practical orientations for sustaining life on a finite planet.

8. Ecologizing Progress: Toward a Situated, Responsible and Relational Concept

The preceding chapters have demonstrated that classical notions of progress—rooted in linear development, technological mastery, and human exceptionalism—are fundamentally inadequate in the context of the Anthropocene and its attendant ecological crises. Both Hans Jonas's ethics of responsibility and Bruno Latour's political ecology call for a profound rethinking of progress, one that moves beyond the illusions of modernity's dualisms and the myth of unbounded growth. Building on these foundations, this section outlines a reconfigured concept of progress defined by three interrelated dimensions: situatedness, responsibility, and relationality, each essential for an ecologically viable and politically relevant understanding of progress.

Situated Progress. As Latour argues in *Down to Earth* (2018), humans are "Terrestrials" whose futures are inseparable from the specific earthly conditions they inhabit. The Earth is no longer the inert backdrop to human history; it is an active, troubled participant in the collective we must now compose (La-

tour, 2018, 40). This insight challenges universalistic progress narratives that assume a singular path of development applicable across diverse contexts. Instead, ecological progress must be rooted in the multiplicity of local ecosystems, cultures, and material histories. Progress thus becomes a pluralistic and context-sensitive endeavor—attuned to the diversity of life-worlds and ecological limits. Such situatedness rejects abstract, one-size-fits-all visions of progress and affirms the necessity of place-based knowledge and practices.

Responsible Progress. Hans Jonas's *Imperative of Responsibility* (1984) remains pivotal in articulating the ethical core of ecological progress. Jonas emphasizes the necessity of foresight and moral accountability for the long-term consequences of human technological power—a capacity that demands restraint rather than unreflective expansion. He cautions: "Act so that the effects of your action are compatible with the permanence of genuine human life" (Jonas, 1984, 11). This ethical orientation insists that progress is not merely an expansion of power or capability, but an exercise in preserving the conditions necessary for life's continuation. Jonas's focus on responsibility toward future generations grounds progress in a temporal horizon that disrupts modernity's emphasis on immediate gain and short-term planning (Jonas, 1984).

Relational Progress. Latour's critique of the nature-culture dichotomy and his relational ontology provide a further critical reorientation. In *We Have Never Been Modern* (1993), Latour reveals how the modernist separation of humans and nature creates ecological blind spots, rendering nonhuman actors invisible within political and ethical considerations. He shows that the modern constitution consists in assembling a coherent fiction: nature is one, society is another; their hybrids are disavowed. Latour's concept of compositionism, developed further in *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence* (2013) and *Facing Gaia* (2017), reimagines progress as the ongoing assembling of heterogeneous entities, human and nonhuman, into collective worlds. His *parliament of things* metaphor envisions political communities that include nonhuman agencies and challenge anthropocentric governance. It aims at us to learn to compose with new actors who are neither human nor society but agents in the making of our common world. This relational dimension expands the moral and political community, demanding new forms of representation and coexistence that are attuned to ecological entanglements.

8.1 Synthesis and Political Implications

Together, these dimensions crystallize into an ecologized concept of progress that both critiques and transcends the legacy of modernity's hubris. This concept demands a pluralistic politics attentive to ecological diversity and the emergence of new social alliances, as articulated by Latour and Schultz's notion of an "ecological class" (2022). An ecologized concept of progress thus needs a redefinition what it means to move ´forward': Not a linear acceleration or abstract expansion, but a project of repair, care, and composition rooted in the finitude and fragility of the Earth system. In sum, ecologizing progress entails a paradigmatic shift—from domination and infinite growth toward humility, attentiveness and a deep commitment to the flourishing of both human and nonhuman futures. This redefinition opens the way for an ethical and political practice capable of navigating the complexities of the Anthropocene, grounded firmly in the situatedness, responsibility and relationality that Jonas and Latour have articulated. This ecologized concept of progress does not abandon the notion of advancement but radically redefines its direction and meaning. Rather than aspiring toward transcendence, control, and abstraction, it invites a turn toward groundedness, care, and composition. By drawing together Jonas's call for responsibility with Latour's ontological pluralism, we gain a conceptual framework that is ethically robust, politically resonant, and responsive to the ecological urgencies of our time.

9. Conclusion: Toward an Ecological Concept of Progress

This paper has traced the need for a fundamental rethinking of the concept of progress in light of the ecological disruptions that define the Anthropocene. The modern ideal of progress—anchored in notions of linear development, technological domination over nature, and the promise of perpetual improvement—has proven increasingly untenable in the face of planetary limits, climate instability, and ecological degradation. Rather than offering solutions, this inherited paradigm often blinds us to the entangled vulnerabilities of human and nonhuman life. By engaging the philosophical frameworks of Hans Jonas and Bruno Latour, we have reconstructed an alternative conceptual foundation for understanding progress—one that is both ethically grounded and ontologically expanded. Jonas calls for a radical extension of moral responsibility in response to the unprecedented scale and permanence of human

technological power. His imperative to act in ways that preserve the conditions for future life provides a normative anchor in a time of existential ecological risk. At the same time, Latour dismantles the modernist dualism of nature and culture, inviting us to recognize the Earth as an active political actor and to compose new collectives that include nonhuman agencies. His concept of *compositionism* shifts progress from a logic of extraction and transcendence to one of attachment, repair, and coexistence. Throughout this paper, we have shown that an ecological concept of progress must incorporate three core dimensions:

1) Situatedness: Progress is no longer universal or abstract but rooted in diverse ecological, cultural, and material conditions. It is place-based, relational, and attuned to the specificities of life-worlds and ecosystems.
2) Responsibility: Ethical foresight becomes central. Drawing on Jonas, ecological progress demands moral accountability toward future generations and the biosphere, prioritizing precaution over unchecked expansion.
3) Relationality: Inspired by Latour, progress is understood not as control over nature but as entanglement with a more-than-human world. It calls for a redefinition of agency, community, and care beyond the boundaries of the human.

Together, these dimensions form the contours of a revised, ecologized concept of progress—not as acceleration, growth, or conquest, but as the ongoing composition of livable worlds within planetary limits. Such a concept refuses the hubris of modernity and instead embraces humility, interdependence, and collective responsibility. It challenges us to envision futures that are not built on domination, but on the care for fragile entanglements that sustain life. A reorientation of the course of progress in ecological terms is required, with a shift from the concepts of escape to return, abstraction to situatedness, and sovereignty to responsibility. This concept suggests a halt to questioning how to quicken our progress or expand our reach. Instead, it highlights the imperative to cultivate coexistence with other entities and all forms of life on our shared, finite planet. Consequently, the extent of progress would be measured by the degree to which we succeed in acting responsible in a terrestrial sense to preserve the Earth's habitability.

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