Prince of Networks: Bruno LaTour and Metaphysics

Graham Harman

Prince of Networks: Bruno LaTour and Metaphysics

Graham Harman

Prince of Networks: Bruno LaTour and Metaphysics Graham Harman
Prince of Networks is the first treatment of Bruno Latour specifically as a philosopher. It has been eagerly awaited by readers of both Latour and Harman since their public discussion at the London School of Economics in February 2008. Part One covers four key works that display Latour s underrated contributions to metaphysics: Irreductions, Science in Action, We Have Never Been Modern, and Pandora s Hope. Harman contends that Latour is one of the central figures of contemporary philosophy, with a highly original ontology centered in four key concepts: actants, irreduction, translation, and alliance. In Part Two, Harman summarizes Latour s most important philosophical insights, including his status as the first secular occasionalist. The problem of translation between entities is no longer solved by the fiat of God (Malebranche) or habit (Hume), but by local mediators. Working from his own object-oriented perspective, Harman also criticizes the Latourian focus on the relational character of actors at the expense of their cryptic autonomous reality. This book forms a remarkable interface between Latour s Actor-Network Theory and the Speculative Realism of Harman and his confederates. It will be of interest to anyone concerned with the emergence of new trends in the humanities following the long postmodernist interval. 'Graham Harman does for Bruno Latour what Deleuze did for Foucault. Rather than a recounting of Latour s impressive sociological analyses, Harman approaches Latour as a philosopher, offering a new realist object-oriented metaphysic capable of sustaining contemporary thought well into the next century. What ensues is a lively and productive debate between rival, yet sympathetic, orientations of object-oriented philosophy between two of our most highly original, daring, and creative philosophers, giving us a text destined to have a major impact on contemporary philosophical thought and providing exciting avenues beyond reigning deadlocks that haunt philosophy today.' Professor Levi R. Bryant (Collin College), author of Difference and Givenness: Deleuze's Transcendental Empiricism and the Ontology of Immanence. 'Graham Harman s book Prince of Networks is a wonderfully eloquent exposition of the metaphysical foundations of Latour s work. This is not an introduction to Latour. It is rather a skilful and penetrating interpretation of his work, as well as a insightful Heideggerian critique. At last somebody has taken Latour to heart and to task. I cannot imagine a more forceful, incisive and lucid analysis of the foundations of Latour s work than this one.' Professor Lucas D. Introna (Lancaster University)

Prince of Networks: Bruno LaTour and Metaphysics Details

Date   : Published June 25th 2009 by Re.Press
ISBN   : 9780980544060
Author : Graham Harman
Format : Paperback 247 pages
Genre   : Philosophy, Theory, Nonfiction, Sociology

Download and Read Free Online Prince of Networks: Bruno LaTour and Metaphysics Graham Harman

From Reader Review Prince of Networks: Bruno LaTour and Metaphysics for online ebook

Eric Phetteplace says

The first half of the book reviews Latour's major works, quoting too much and sticking quite close to the text, while the second half focuses more on Harman's own philosophical commitments and where they coincide/conflict with Latour's. That's not what I was expecting; the straightforward, chronological summaries and then digression into object-oriented philosophy were a bit disappointing. Still, the book works well for a couple reasons. First, I'm just getting started reading Latour and rather than read his immense back catalog the quick, focused readings of his major works here is a huge boon. I'd recommend this book to anyone in a similar situation; read the first half at least rather than all of Latour's works, or perhaps use that half as a guide to which of Latour's books you should check out (for instance, I took away that *Irreductions* in The Pasteurization of France is the place to start for me).
Secondly, Harman is a rare gem in philosophy. He borrows Latour's penchant for long lists of heterogenous objects and his preference for cogent rhetoric over precise argumentation. His take-down of analytic philosophy around pp. 167-176 is great; it's not that the analytics aren't great at constructing arguments, it's that the precision of arguments isn't the only or most valuable aspect of a philosophy (he leans heavily on the opening of Whitehead's Process and Reality here). I still disagree with Harman's particular philosophy but he is a refreshing voice with some neat tricks up his sleeve (e.g. his reading Latour through hyperbole rather than critique).

John Hartmann says

This is really two books. The first half of the book is a (lightly critical) summary of Latour's thought, focusing on four of Latour's central concepts: actors/actants, irreducibility, translation, and alliance. Harman notably places Latour's early short work "Irreductions" at the center of Latour's thought.

The second half of the book consists in a working out of an object-oriented philosophy, one which takes Latour (and Whitehead) to be pioneers of OOP, and which hybridizes Latour with Heidegger to produce a full-blown account of objects. This is a continuation of Harman's earlier texts, but here we find a fairly persuasive argument for objects as both relational and possessing reality beyond or beneath relations. Causation becomes vicarious, in that objects only affect or encounter one another via mediation. Harman also engages Melliassoux on correlationalism along the way.

Stylistically, this book is a breath of fresh air. Harman is not engaged in hagiography, like so many in the SPEP crowd seem to be. He's doing speculative metaphysics, and he writes with panache. (There's a whole sidebar about Karl Rove trying to destroy Immanuel Kant that is bizarre and wonderful.) People who work in process philosophy, philosophy of technology, or Continental philosophy would do well to read this book.

Sam says

A monster.

Terence Blake says

This book gives a useful account of the early Latour, and then goes on to expound a philosophy that is the exact opposite. Where Latour does a good job of uniting realism and historicity in his description of the knowledge process Harman elaborates a synchronic dualist ontology.

Attentive says

This book, divided into two parts, could've been great if it had simply deepened then summarised its main points instead of tailing off into another exposition of Harman's "quadruple object" elaboration of Heidegger's tool-analysis.

But the discussion of the philosophical elements of Bruno Latour's contribution to science and the scientific method is clear and fascinating, and Harman's affection for Latour's vigour and irrepressible realist tendencies makes it additionally engaging.

As someone who has only read surveys or fragments of Latour previously, this seemed to be a good introduction to him.

Brent Wilson says

This book's first half provides a concise overview of Bruno Latour's object-oriented metaphysics. Latour is a French social thinker and co-developer of actor-network theory. I understood that part of the book, but then got lost in the second half where Graham Harman critiques and fine-tunes that metaphysic. Still, that first half was worth the price. I see Latour as an alternative to our traditional person-centered metaphysic, inherited first from the Greeks and then from the Enlightenment, the humanistic Kantian tradition that puts people at the center of things.

This is part of my ongoing inquiry into continental thinking, based largely on Heidegger and those following or responding to him. My field of educational technology neglects the body and how we engage the material world - we're too caught up in dualistic cognitive thinking and other dualistisms (splits like mind/body, fact/value, theory/practice).

So imagine a philosophy that doesn't privilege humans and out intentions and agency. We are entities among many - physical objects natural and artificial, ideas and constructions of various kinds. We each engage the world through pushes and pulls. There is no essence, no essential defining qualities, and hence no real continuity over time - except through allegiances or investments in networks. Those networked investments constitute the order of things, the continuity that grounds and orients us. What a radical idea, violating our privileged sense that we're special as humans!

I love this radical object-oriented scheme as a pluralistic flattening or leveling of things, as a basis for starting over in our thinking and building a fresh ontology that can withstand various challenges to God- or human-centered philosophies. The scheme has some fresh insights for technology (my professional interest),

agency, time and change, networks and identity. No need to fully trash a more people-centered view (e.g., activity theory, practice theory, hermeneutics, pragmatism). All of these schemes have value and explain things at a different scale or focus.

I would love to introduce my field of ed tech to these ideas, but not sure how and where to gain entry!

Lukáš says

One can't say that the two personalities meeting here (Harman & Latour) would be anything, but interesting. As with the book itself, Harman does a solid job of reading through Bruno Latour's major works, teasing out the arguments and niches and seeking to order them - and succeeds. In particular, when confronting the Prince's ideas with other thinkers, one can't but enjoy the insightful ways how this is done. In particular, it seems hard to chuckle over the Socratic dialogue "Latour" in order to highlight the challenge of "properties beyond relationality".
As with the second part of the book, Harman departs from Latour on certain occasions, just to flow back and forth with regard to thinkers such as Husserl or Meillasoux. His proposal includes opening Latour's pathway in some ways (including, for example, a suggestion of a fourtold reading of objects' properties).
While I appreciate the take on Latour's metaphysics, I can't but escape that while Harman's fascination / drive toward establishing some kind of complex or speculative realism has its charms, the lack of direct engagement with Latour's ideas in the second part (and instead meditating on derivations coming from there) confuses me on one major aspect of Latour's work, which comes from Latour's political ideas. I feel that against the radical aim of liberating subjectivities through Latour's project of "cosmopolitics" which involve more political space for nonhumans, Harman seems perhaps a bit ignorant toward the questions of im/possibility of reaching alternate understandings of objects in philosophy. This is somewhat puzzling toward Harman's method of hyperbolizing thinkers - not aiming to sound Straussian, one ought, however ask - what happens when some of these ideas become cemented in everyday micropolitical life? What potential problems and caveats might this lead to in practice, given that Harman's proposals become accepted? What may be the backlash stemming from the will to know?
Although I can imagine some fruitful discussions with regard to these questions, it doesn't play down the fact that this book is in many ways a fine read.

Karl Steel says

No time to write an elaborate review. But YES this strikes me as a very good introduction to Latour, a great take down of Heidegger's ultra-humanism, and likely the best available introduction to object-oriented philosophy. I do think Harman's 'weird realism' is correct in reserving something to objects, and in making objects, as it were, strangers to themselves, in order to allow something to happen. Without that, how can any network form or shift?

My only annoyance with the book is its repetitiveness. Several points appear 5 times or so. I see the pedagogic utility, but in an e-book format, Harman could have just provided links back to previous paragraphs, which would have sped up my reading.

Fernando says

Latour's works analyzed by Graham Harman.

Miros?aw Aleksander says

The book starts with a run down of Latour's pre-2000 ideas, primarily focusing on actor-network theory. The second part, despite the promising beginning, is increasingly problematic. Although this is supposed to add to Latour's ideas and elevate them to the position of metaphysics, Harman seems to slowly lose focus on the French sociologist. But this is not the only problem. Although this part reads well, it becomes repetitive. While the first two instances of using Heidegger's Geviert are interesting and add to the book, but by the third time it seems its just padding to make the book longer. The chapter about object-oriented-ontology is fairly loosely connected with the first two parts. Stylistically, his flourishes at times seem inane; he also suffers from that typically academic disease of "I have to coin a new name/concept for something that was already named and discussed to show how innovative I am!" Finally, the discussion of Kant at the end seems apologetic.

Now, that I've gotten that out of my system, the first two parts are worthwhile. Thee first is a nice and accurate introduction to Latour, the second a much-needed discussion of the most significant flaws in this aspect of his work.

Kars says

If it wasn't for the final chapter - which I found significantly less readable than the rest of this book - I would have given this five stars. Harman offers a great introduction to Bruno Latour's key works, reading them from a philosophical perspective. The key point of this book is that philosophy should not reduce reality to human experience of the world. In stead, it should adopt an "object-oriented" stance, in which all of reality is composed of actors that relate, but only indirectly. It is a refreshing perspective because it encourages an almost naive curiosity in the world and its mysterious workings. Finally, it very much appealed to me as a designer interested in creating things that relate to society in various ways. In fact, that I have not often felt compelled to pick up a book of philosophy, but was very much drawn to this one, should be endorsement enough. Because as opposed to many of his colleagues, Harman is both a clear and entertaining writer.