Francis Bacon famously suggested that if the task of power is to impose new natures on a given body, then the task of knowledge is to find, for a given nature, the source of its coming-to-be.

With this suggestion in mind, let me characterize five irreducibly interrelated entities. An ‘index’ is any quality that is relatively perceivable to some agent. (Equally useful terms include ‘evidence,’ ‘trace,’ ‘inscription,’ ‘sign,’ ‘token,’ ‘characteristic,’ ‘symptom,’ ‘text,’ and so forth.) A ‘kind’ is any projected propensity to exhibit particular indices. (Equally useful terms include ‘types,’ ‘habits,’ ‘statuses,’ ‘competences,’ ‘states,’ ‘genres,’ ‘essences’ and ‘substances.’) An ‘individual’ is any entity that can evince indices to an agent and thereby be a site to project kindedness by that agent. (Individuals include organisms, eras, collections, groups, environments, instances, processes, interactions, and so on.) An ‘agent’ is any entity that can perceive such an index and project such a kind. (Agents are themselves usually index-evincing and complexly kinded individuals.) And an ‘ontology’ is an agent’s assumptions as to the indices, kinds, and individuals that constitute a particular world. (Worlds range from fleeting contexts emergent in interactions to collective imaginaries entertained by audiences, from the universe as understood by astrophysicists to an era as reconstructed by archaeologists. And ontologies
are as likely to be enworlded as they are enminded, as embodied as they are encoded, as collective as they are individual, as distributed as they are local, as fleeting as they are durable, as portable as they are context-bound.

Such entities undergo transformations in a variety of interrelated ways, on various timescales, with various degrees of inertia. For example, indices may change an individual's kind irrespective of an agent's ontological assumptions. (Indeed, any world is replete with kinded individuals (galaxies, species, groups, personalities), and many disciplines (astronomy, biology, sociology, psychology, etc.) are devoted to understanding their conditions of coming to be, as well as the constraints on their imposition.) Indices may change an agent's ontological assumptions regarding the kinds that constitute a particular individual (often deductively). Indices may change an agent's ontological assumptions regarding the indices that constitute a particular kind (often inductively). Indices may change an agent's ontological assumptions regarding the indices, individuals, kinds, and agents that constitute a particular world (often abductively). And changes in an agent's ontological assumptions about a world (in any of the foregoing ways) may change the world about which the agent makes assumptions. (Each and every agent is, to some degree, not just knowledgable and powerful, but also able to be underknown and overpowered.)

Nth-nature refers to the ensemble of worlded ontologies and ontologized worlds that—at any moment and across moments—exist, interact, emerge, etc.

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