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CHAPTER 3

PANPSYCHISM

Issues for Inter-Faith Dialogue in the Twenty-First Century

There are certain key issues which any conversation amongst religious/spiritual traditions taking place in the early twenty-first century presumably needs to address. These would include the following four:

(1) Religious or spiritual traditions generally rest upon a metaphysical presupposition that reality includes spiritual aspects or contents in addition to purely physical ones. But different religious or spiritual traditions differ in respect of the details of this presupposition, and their different metaphysical elaborations cannot all be reconciled: a monotheism such as Christianity or Judaism, for instance, is not consistent, in respect of its metaphysical commitments, with a polytheistic tradition such as Shinto. Such differences are by no means trivial. Since religious beliefs are often foundational to the social and cultural identity and existential orientation of the believer, members of religious communities may feel threatened when their beliefs are challenged by contrary beliefs of different communities. Such differences are likely to lead at best to argument, at worst to confrontation, if they cannot be resolved in a way that satisfies the various parties. But how can these disagreements be resolved if the differences are contradictory? Relativist strategies, that defuse differences by allowing that all cultures are entitled to their own spiritual ‘truths’, are disingenuous, inasmuch as they betray the realist intent of most religions. Christians and Jews, for instance, typically do believe that God is real and that other gods do not exist; in this sense their beliefs are genuinely in conflict with those of a polytheistic religion like Shintoism. How to achieve inter-religious cordiality and cooperation in the face of contradictory religious beliefs, without resorting to relativising strategies that effectively invalidate the realist self-understanding of most religions, remains a formidable question.

(2) Any contemporary conversation amongst religious and spiritual traditions presumably also needs to address the question of the relation between religion and science. This is, as we all know, a very hot topic in debates between and within civilizations across the world today, and the heat is, again, not unwarranted. There really is tension between religion and science in their respective approaches to reality. To spell out the reasons for this tension, let’s start with science. Science is a *rational* form of inquiry, but its method is strictly *empiricist*: only that which can be observed under strictly experimental or repeatable, preferably measurable, conditions can be included in its purview. But clearly any *spiritual* dimension of reality would not, could not, be observable in this fashion. Spiritual phenomena are constituted or constellated through meaning rather than through the kind of efficient causality that constitutes phenomena amenable to scientific investigation. Phenomena constituted through meaning are sensitive to context and inherently open to interpretation; in this sense, specific

instances of spiritual phenomena cannot be reliably repeated, as contexts and interpretive possibilities change through time and across cultural and even personal contexts. So phenomena that express spiritual aspects of reality are ruled out as possible objects of science by science's own definition of itself. Science, then, though rational, cannot include spiritual phenomena in its account of reality, not because those phenomena do not exist but because they *cannot* show up under the methods of science.

Turning to religion, we see that while it of course has no trouble including spiritual phenomena in its purview, its treatment of those phenomena relies not on reason but on faith, revelation or scriptural authority. This seems unsatisfactory. It is through reason that we make our beliefs accountable to others. Without such a requirement of accountability, people would be free to hold any beliefs they chose, however self-serving or delusional. Such leniency would ultimately undermine the legitimate claims of science itself. Perhaps more importantly, compromising reason in this way would jeopardize the whole emancipatory and moral project of modernity, particularly as it is represented in the institution of democracy. For it is ultimately reason which confers moral autonomy on individuals: it gives them the cognitive tools to judge truth claims responsibly and competently for themselves, thereby earning the moral authority to legislate for themselves and, through democratic representation, for society. Without reason, individuals have no claims against the arbitrary authority of rulers and whatever of prejudice or superstition those rulers care to instil in them via social conditioning. Enlightenment institutions, and the democratic values of freedom and equality together with the human rights those values embody, rest on a foundation of reason.

If we value the emancipatory project of modernity, then we won't want to give up our hard-won reason in our approach to reality. But nor will we want reason to be wholly co-opted by science, a science which, while an immensely progressive tool as far as it goes, becomes unduly restrictive when it presumes to cover the entire field of investigation. A third kind of discourse seems to be required, one which is rigorously rational, on the one hand, but open to aspects of reality not accessible to scientific observation, on the other. Such a discourse will presumably be essentially philosophical.

(3) An inter-religious conversation conducted in the context of the present-day academy arguably also needs to be sensitive to the anti-essentialist tastes of cultural theorists in the postmodern and deconstructive schools. Though religions are generally realist and not merely constructivist in their metaphysical intent, they presumably need to offer performative rather than merely dogmatic ways of approaching their accounts of the nature of reality. By this I mean that they will need to eschew canonical formulations of their existence claims, so that believers may constitute those claims in ways that express their own experience of spiritual phenomena. To conform to the anti-essentialist sensibilities of the contemporary academy, then, religious and spiritual traditions will presumably need to be in a sense tentative and testable: their existence claims will need to include an experimental, try-it-and-see dimension. The inclusion of such an experimental or experiential dimension need not contradict either the realist requirement or the requirement that religious or spiritual traditions be answerable to reason, but it will mean that any existence claims such traditions make will not be reducible to exclusive rational or theoretical formulations: such existence claims will not, in other words, be entirely containable within essentialist categories.

(4) The fourth—and, to my mind, most important—issue to which any inter-religious conversation needs to be responsive today is that of ecology. The new era of climate change, mass extinctions and ecological collapse into which we have entered in the twenty-first

century is redrawing the parameters of relevance for the human project. Religion as we know it today is the cultural product of a 10,000-year period of geophysical and biospherical stability, dating from a millennium or two after the last glacial period. During this period the basic biophysical conditions and context for our existence and for the flourishing of our agrarian-based civilizations have been taken for granted. In the new era of geophysical instability and ecological decline, we can no longer count upon these conditions or this context. An entirely new register of salencies is emerging, and in light of this new register, many of the old questions of religion, and certainly many of the old certainties, will be up for review. Indeed, as new, pressing, existential questions emerge, it may be that religion itself as a formation loses relevance. How much will we care about hidden or heavenly matters when the plain old earth beneath our feet, which we have for so long relied upon as the unquestionable ground and context for our existence, becomes uncertain? Will we yearn for the elusive realm of the unknown beyond the appearances when the appearances themselves prove unknowable, no longer 'given'? How important will our much-vaunted spiritual life, as humans, seem when the whole physical structure of life around us is unravelling? Isn't the value we place on the unseen in fact conceived against a taken-for-granted background of the seen? How will we feel when it turns out that it was not 'providence' but an unusually favourable climate that assured that life would go on, against all obstacles, throughout human history? At the very least, religious and spiritual traditions today need to be responsive to the ecological crisis, not only under its utilitarian aspect, as a crisis for human infrastructure systems, nor only under its ethical aspect, as a crisis of survival for the more-than-human world, but under its aspect as a crisis of *meaning*. This is a crisis that threatens to strip away the entire context of continuity and renewability—seasonality, fertility and the inevitability of regeneration—together with the infinite inventiveness, resilience, irrepressibility, reliability, resourcefulness and variability of life processes, where this context and the character of these processes have provided both the taken-for-granted templates for our normative systems and necessary metaphors for the making of meaning itself (Mathews 2011a, 2011d).

One approach to reality—perhaps better described as post-religious than religious, though it is by no means secular—that meets the challenge of each of these issues is a view I shall here term *panpsychism*, though it comes in many guises and has gone under many names in the history of both philosophy and religion. As I shall explain in this paper, panpsychism, at least according to certain readings, can navigate difference inasmuch as it can serve as a base for different religions without unduly compromising their realist intentions. Its metaphysics is moreover perfectly consistent with, though it exceeds, the province of physics and other sciences; indeed, it brings its own explanatory thrust to some of the fundamental questions of physics. And though panpsychism is eminently amenable to theorization—as the history of philosophy attests—it is theorizable in a way that allows for no canonical or exclusive version of the view. Furthermore, under its spiritual aspect, panpsychism can be construed as practice, practice premised on experiential sources rather than on philosophical theory. The practice of panpsychism, which, according to the version I shall outline below, is *invocational*, sets up conditions conducive to the kind of direct experience that in turn corroborates panpsychism as metaphysics. Such experience, moreover, inspires a deep investment in ecology and motivates a profound reorientation and responsiveness to the wider community of life—panpsychism is indeed a tradition *par excellence* that underwrites the call of ecology. In all these ways, then, panpsychism seems well adapted to the cultural needs and conditions of the twenty-first century—where this no doubt accounts for its current rise, not only as a philosophical theory but as a spiritual orientation and undercurrent of the *zeitgeist* in popular Western culture.

Introducing Panpsychism

According to the view that I am calling panpsychism, mind is a fundamental aspect of matter. That is to say, although mind cannot exist independently of matter, matter also cannot exist independently of mind. Mind is a part of what matter most fundamentally is. There is in this sense no ‘brute matter’; the purely externalized ‘stuff’ proposed by physics has no correlate in reality. Whether the ‘inner’ properties ascribed to matter are characterized in terms of intentionality, agency, teleology, conativity or more overtly mentalistic characteristics, such as consciousness, apperception, sentience, subjectivity or spirit, they cannot be captured in purely extensional terms. Such a view of the nature of reality may be theorized in a variety of very different ways, from Leibniz’s monads and Whitehead’s ‘prehending’ particles and Williams James’ ‘mind dust’ to the self-active universes of Spinoza, Shelling and David Bohm, to the intelligent life-systems of Gregory Bateson, or the scenario of nature-as-agent or nature-as-intentional-system adopted by ecophilosophers such as Val Plumwood or Holmes Rolston (for a review of panpsychist streams in the history of ideas, see Skrbina 2005). All these philosophers argue that mind, in some sense, is a fundamental aspect of materiality, and that the world around us has a depth dimension as well as an empirical structure: it is a psychically textured terrain of embodied subjects or souls or intelligences rather than a flat manifold of purely externalized entities. As a terrain of subjects rather than a manifold of mere objects, our world has a for-itself dimension, a dimension of self-meaning and self-mattering, that entitles it to ethical consideration rather than mere instrumental treatment at our hands. To view the world in broadly panpsychist terms, then, is to undergo an ethical reorientation that is, from a Western perspective, revolutionary, as it requires that we change our definitive way of being in the world, from the mode of heedless indifference and instrumentalism appropriate to brute matter to a very different one of sensitive attunement.

However, while panpsychism in its broadest-spectrum sense entrains such a profound *ethical* reorientation, it does not inevitably afford a distinctive *spiritual* standpoint. I would suggest that only if the world is imputed not merely with a psychic dimension but with a capacity for engagement can it be counted of spiritual as well as ethical significance. That is to say, to see the world as a terrain of subjects rather than as a manifold of mere objects is indeed to see it as a terrain that matters to itself and is therefore of ethical and not merely instrumental significance. But to say of the world that it has *spiritual* significance may be to imply something larger; it may be to imply that this world can appoint meaning and normative direction for *us*—for our lives. From this point of view, our role in a spiritual scenario is not merely to exercise moral restraint in relation to things that matter but actively to find our place in a larger order that magnetizes our existence with its normative meaning. In order for panpsychism to afford a spiritual standpoint in this sense, then, it would have to offer the promise of engagement with a world that is responsive to our address. It is by no means the case that all forms of panpsychism satisfy this requirement. Our environment may be represented in panpsychist terms, as imbued with its own forms of agency, purpose or intelligence, without this implying that this environment is responsive to communicative overtures on our part. Rivers and forests and mountains may be regarded as having their own business, so to speak, which it is our custodial responsibility not to disturb, but this business may not otherwise be *our* business.

In any case, rather than trying to speak for all versions of panpsychism, I shall here outline one particular version of communicative panpsychism that can, I think, unequivocally function as a spiritual standpoint. The version in question is a cosmological one, in the

tradition of Spinoza, Schelling and David Bohm, though with a greater emphasis on communicativity than any of its predecessors.

However, before embarking on an account of this version of panpsychism, I should emphasize that it is not a standard one. It may therefore be advisable to preface this account with a brief introduction to more standard versions, of which there are at least two, which I shall call analytical panpsychism and animistic panpsychism. These two positions have made their respective appearances in two very different discursive contexts.

Analytical Panpsychism

Analytical panpsychism has arisen in response to the problem of mind—the problem of how to explain the origins of mind in a material universe (for a sampling of current theories of panpsychism, see Skrbina 2009). This is indeed a baffling problem—‘the hard problem of consciousness’, as it has recently been styled (Chalmers 1996)—since the organisational transition from entities devoid of consciousness, such as atoms and molecules, to entities with an inner life of feeling or sentience, such as organisms, seems to elude explanation. Mechanical explanations that do attempt to analyse consciousness in terms of atomic or molecular organization fail, since no amount of re-arranging of externalities can explain the phenomenon—known to us from our own experience—of felt interiority. Evolutionary arguments seem similarly doomed, since merely detailing the physical mechanisms of evolution that produce organic from inorganic forms of matter, and complex from rudimentary forms of life, fail to explain the need for *experience* at all. The higher forms of life in which mind is in fact demonstrably present could have evolved as complex information-receiving and information-sorting mechanisms capable of informed adaptive behaviour without ever harbouring the slightest glimmer of conscious experience. (They could, in other words—in the terms currently deployed in discussions of the hard problem of consciousness—have functioned purely as *zombies*.) Some theorists, stymied by this intractable problem of the origins of consciousness, have argued that consciousness did *not* originate—that it is consciousness, or at any rate mind, all the way down, so to speak. In other words, they argue that there never was a transition from brute matter to sentient being because matter in itself was sentient all along.

Most contemporary analytical panpsychists have arrived at panpsychism by way of this kind of argument, and their reasoning follows the analytical pattern that prevails in the philosophy of consciousness: like neuro-scientists, they seek to explain consciousness in terms of organizational structures and the evolution of these structures in response to selective forces. The only difference between panpsychist-type explanations and neuro-scientific-type explanations of mind is that the structures posited by the panpsychist are psychophysical rather than merely physical. The main puzzle for the panpsychist is to determine how far down the ladder of physics mind actually goes. Most panpsychists who follow this basically Whitehead- and Hartshorne-influenced school of thought are ready to impute a very rudimentary form of mind to molecules and atoms and perhaps even to sub-atomic particles, but balk when it comes to elementary particles that are subject to wave-particle duality. The embarrassment that seems to attend any attempt to take mind *all* the way down the ladder of physics is a problem for this kind of panpsychism, since calling a halt to the regress will bring the theory back to the problem with which it began, namely that of deriving sentient being from brute matter.

However, the panpsychist whose aim is to explain the development of higher order consciousness in terms of the irreducibly psychophysical nature of micro-level entities faces an even more serious problem than mere embarrassment at trying to provide a plausible account of what the mind of an atom or sub-atomic particle might be like. This is the so-called ‘combination problem’, a problem already acute for Leibniz in his attempt to analyse reality in terms of an infinitude of indivisibly simple souls variously compounded to create the animate entities—plants, animals and people—we encounter in our everyday lives (for a recent exploration of the combination problem, see Blamauer 2011). The problem is that it is hard to see how minds—whether simple or complex—can combine at all. Minds are not like bricks that can be placed side by side to make a wall. Simple sentient beings may indeed cooperate—to build a living body, for instance—but it is far from obvious how their minds could become assimilated to form a larger mind, the mind of that body. Mind is in a sense dimensionless. Each mind is field-like, its extension (in whatever direction) indeterminate. For this reason, mind seems ineligible to function additively. Moreover, each mind already has a quality of indivisibility: as a centre of subjectivity, it is an indivisible unity, and again there is no way of even imagining how two such centres could become one, let alone become enlarged and further differentiated in the process. So there seems something misconceived about the very project of trying to account for complex minds in terms of organised compounds of simpler ones.¹

Animistic Panpsychism

Another panpsychist-type view that has recently gained considerable currency is a view that has been characterized as animistic although, in order to mark its difference from earlier anthropological conceptions of animism that are now discredited, it has also been described as philosophical animism (Plumwood 2009, Rose 2009). Philosophical animists tend to distinguish their view from more metaphysically elaborated versions of panpsychism inasmuch as their goal is not to *explain* the world, via appeal to metaphysical categories, but to institute new *protocols* for being in the world. These protocols are generally inspired by modes of being exemplified in Indigenous, often hunter-gatherer, societies. In the terms used by Graham Harvey, one of the more influential proponents of this new animism, we are to treat all *things* in the world as *persons* (Harvey 2009). To treat them as persons is not to impute dualistically conceived spirits or souls to them, as nineteenth-century anthropologists supposed that animists did, though it is indeed to see things as alive. Being alive, however, is defined more in terms of due protocols than in terms of theoretical conditions that things must satisfy in order to count as alive. Personhood is thus in this context more a matter of etiquette than of metaphysical status. To treat things as persons is to treat them *personally*, where this means negotiating with them in matters that concern them. Harvey compares living in an animist world to walking down a crowded street: one does not simply plough through the crowd, mowing down whoever happens to be in the way; rather, one weaves in and out, giving way to someone here, being given way by someone else there. One negotiates the crowd instinctively and pragmatically, without needing to deliberate. A principle of respect for the personhood of other people underlies this negotiation, though such respect need not in any way be sentimentalized: to respect the personhood of others in a crowd does

¹ One promising approach to this problem might be to consider how a bee hive—a colony of honey bees—appears to acquire a form of ‘distributed intelligence’ of its own that is not reducible to the consciousness of individual honeybees, though it is not independent of such individual consciousness either. See Holldobler and Wilson (2009).

not imply that one likes them or is obliged to care for them. In his *Animist Manifesto*, Harvey puts it like this:

All that exists lives
All that lives is worthy of respect

You don't have to like what you respect
Not liking someone is no reason for not respecting them. (Harvey 2009: website)

Harvey adds that respecting someone is also no reason for not eating them. He thereby makes the necessary point that animist ethics does not imply a totally hands-off approach to the other-than-human world. The approach it implies is, again, a personal one, meaning that it is fully relational: one *negotiates* who and what one eats according to the necessities and availabilities of circumstance. If one feels compelled to eat or otherwise make use of another (non-human) person, one has to make a case for doing so, a case that could in principle be approved by that other person him-/her-/itself.

Harvey draws on the fascinating work of Brazilian anthropologist, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, who reveals the ethnocentrism of the Western distinction between the plurality of *cultures*, on the one hand, and the undifferentiated totality of *nature*, on the other. Amongst Amazonian tribes, culture is regarded as singular, and all things have culture. Pigs, eagles and rocks, for example, have culture, and the culture that mediates their experience is the same as ours. Where we might see pigs as pigs, downing swill and suckling their young in a pigsty, the pigs see themselves as humans, dining on duck soup, acculturating their children and living in a proper house. “Animals impose the same categories on reality as humans do: their worlds, like ours, revolve around fishing and hunting, cooking and fermented drinks, cross-cousins and war, initiation rituals, shamans, chiefs, spirits” (de Castro 1998: 472). The human form, from the viewpoint of this type of cosmology, is the generic form of a *person*, or any locus of subjectivity, and does not belong intrinsically to us as a species. The claim to humanity is, in other words, an indexical claim, with the pronominal significance of ‘I’. We human beings see ourselves as human because all loci of subjectivity see themselves as human, in this pronominal sense. From the perspective of other species, we ourselves do not appear as human: we may appear as a prey species if the other species is a predator or as a predator species if the other species is prey. What differentiates different classes or types of being, then, is not the presence or absence of subjectivity, together with the entitlement to culture and personhood that accompanies subjectivity, but bodily difference. Body is nature, and different classes or types of body represent different manifestations of nature. But body is not understood in terms of an underlying material substrate or substantial essence, as it is in Western thought. Body is rather a kind of ‘suit’ that brings with it specific capacities, affects and dispositions. Viveiros de Castro uses the analogy of a wet suit: we don a wet suit not to disguise our body but to be able to function like a fish, to breathe underwater. In being specifically embodied, then, each animal species is endowed with distinctive equipment, but this equipment—the body—is not an essential marker of identity, because inside the ‘wet suit’ every being is human. In other words, every being is a locus of subjectivity, and subjectivity is experienced as the same – as ‘I-ness’ – in all.² Mind (culture) then is the constant throughout the living world; it is through body (nature) that diversity animates.

² This understanding of subjectivity has recently received powerful new validation via the Cambridge Declaration of Consciousness composed by eminent neuro-scientists to underline the fact that the experience of consciousness is the same in all vertebrate (and some

In sum, according to Viveiros de Castro,

in normal conditions, humans see humans as humans, animals as animals and spirits (if they see them) as spirits; however animals (predators) and spirits see humans as animals (as prey) to the same extent that animals (as prey) see humans as spirits or as animals (predators). By the same token, animals and spirits see themselves as humans: they perceive themselves as (or become) anthropomorphic beings when they are in their own houses or villages and they experience their own habits or characteristics in the form of culture—they see their food as human food (jaguars see blood as manioc beer, vultures see the maggots in rotting meat as grilled fish, etc), they see their bodily attributes (fur, feathers, claws, beaks, etc) as body decorations or cultural instruments, they see their social system as organized in the same way as human institutions are (with chiefs, shamans, ceremonies, exogamous moieties, etc)... animals are people, or see themselves as persons. Such a notion is virtually always associated with the idea that the manifest form of each species is a mere envelope ('a clothing') which conceals an internal human form, usually only visible to the eyes of the particular species or to certain trans-specific beings such as shamans. (de Castro 1998: 471)

The Amerindian societies which are the focus of Viveiros de Castro's studies have clearly found colourful ways of storying the central animist insight that every centre of subjectivity is, to itself, an I, and that the experience of I-ness is the same across all kinds of being. Insight into such Indigenous traditions also reveals the ethnocentrism of the Western assumption that matter is the primary datum, and that imputations of subjectivity to matter have to be justified. From a range of Indigenous perspectives, 'matter' is not seen as a given; rather, material embodiment is the outcome of complex negotiations that are essentially social (in a trans-species sense) rather than either mental or material in nature.

One of the most uplifting insights that Harvey draws from his review of Viveiros de Castro and other ethnologists is that, though we as human beings may forget the complex cross-species negotiation that lies at the heart of culture, other species do not forget. As soon as we start to observe the protocols again—by engaging in ceremonial forms of exchange with the wider community of persons, for example—those persons immediately respond, by turning up at our rituals or offering other 'signs' of their attention.

The new animist viewpoint clearly provides a rich basis for ecological practice, and has been widely embraced internationally by pagans, wiccans and other practitioners of nature spirituality. It has also inspired ecological philosophers and theorists such as David Abram and Patrick Curry, and here in Australia, Val Plumwood and Deborah Bird Rose. Personally, I also find this new animism appealing and I acknowledge its contribution to ecological ethics in a contemporary context. I am happy to adopt and follow its protocols. However, from within the reference frame of the Western episteme, such animism does leave certain philosophical questions unresolved: In what sense is a rock alive, for instance? Are all human artefacts alive? How can entities, such as hills, mountains, woods, streams or springs which are often invested with animist identity, count as living things when their identity is clearly nominal? Such things are often part of other, more extensive landforms or systems rather than

invertebrate) animals: the quality of human consciousness is no different from that of our fellow beings. See <fcmconference.org/img/CambridgeDeclarationOnConsciousness.pdf>, accessed 18 September 2012.

clearly individuated entities or systems in their own right. What *is* it about things—*all* things—that entitles them to be treated with respect, as persons? Moreover, in animism there does seem to be a localism that, though a healthy counterpoint to the tendency of Western colonialism to universalize its own self-serving prejudices, nevertheless perhaps overlooks the spiritual significance of the larger universe. In order to pursue all these questions, then, I return to the discussion of panpsychism, as formulated in Western philosophical terms.

A Cosmological and Communicative Version of Panpsychism

As we have seen, the standard version of analytical panpsychism is beset with certain internal problems. My own reason for preferring a holistic/cosmological over the analytical or atomist version of panpsychism, however, is not really because it avoids those problems—though it does do so (which is not to say that it does not face problems of its own³)—but because the goal motivating my inquiry from the outset has been not so much to explain the origin of consciousness as to understand the nature of the world at large and our place in it. That is, my inquiry originated in cosmological questions such as: Why is the universe—the observable world, as represented by physics—a *universe*, a unity? Why does it hang together in the way that it does? Why is space—the frame of physics—unbounded yet unbroken, an indivisible wholeness, a fieldlike manifold? Why doesn't it break up, granulate, fragment, and hence cease to be the field that it is, the ground for physical existence?⁴ Physics, of course, has no answers to such questions. It cannot explain why there are laws that hold physical structures together and thereby guarantee the overall cohering of things. From the viewpoint of physics, this cohering is *ad hoc*, contingent; there is nothing in the nature of physicality *per se* that appears to underpin it.

However, if an inner, subjectival dimension is seen as integral to the nature not merely of matter but of physicality *per se*—the entire field of spatiotemporal existence in its totality—then the necessity of this cohering of physical existence into a unity, a *universe*, an indivisible manifold such as that of space-in-time, is explained. This is because subjectivity is itself, by its very nature, fieldlike, holistic, internally interpermeating, indivisible, unbounded.⁵ One's subjectivity, as we have seen, cannot plausibly be constituted atomistically, as an aggregate of discrete units of experience, nor even as a continuum of point-like experiences. If mind—as the expression of subjectivity—is as primal as physicality, then—if mind is immanent in physicality *per se*—it is clear that physicality must reflect the indivisible nature of mind. Physicality must exhibit the same field-like structure as mind.

Of course, the question might be pushed further back: we might ask why mind, in turn, is necessarily indivisible and field-like. Granted, if reality has a subjectival dimension, we can see that it must be field-like, but why is this so? Why is indivisibility inherent in the nature of subjectivity? In answer to this question, I would suggest that the field-

³ One of these problems might be termed 'the combination problem in reverse': if we start with a universal field of subjectivity, how are relatively distinct and autonomous finite subjects to be individuated? See Mathews (2011c).

⁴ Of course, there are theories in physics which do ascribe a sub-particle foamlike or granular structure to space. But these are not inconsistent with the perfect macro-level cohering of space as the frame for physical processes.

⁵ Historically speaking, the philosopher Henri Bergson has provided the most detailed phenomenology available demonstrating the necessarily holistic and internally indivisible and interpermeating nature of consciousness.

likeness of mind is tied up with the self-evident fieldlikeness of *meaning*—the intrinsically interleaving and over-layering and interpermeating nature of meaning—and thereby with the constitution of experience through meaning. The kind of holistic internal indivisibility that confers unity on mind, in other words, is tied up with the necessary indivisibility of meaning. Subjectivity is the medium for a tissue of meanings that cannot be pulled apart without ceasing to be meaning—and without subjectivity thereby ceasing to exist. In other words, to the extent that mind finds meaning in its experience, its structure must partake of the interpermeation and indivisibility that is characteristic of meaning. This is not, of course, to say that we might not identify or describe individual experiences by abstracting them from the field of experience—as *this* sense datum or *that* itch, *this* moment of elation or *that* insight into the nature of, say, number. It is just that such experiences cannot actually *exist* in isolation from the entire field of the subject's experience, and this field-like structure of subjectivity is a function of meaning.

In speaking of the field-like structure of subjectivity as a function of meaning, I am using the term 'meaning' not in a semantic or symbolic sense but in a more fundamental sense, to indicate the basic feeling of things *matter*ing—of things having relevance, significance, value. In other words, I am using 'meaning' in the sense of meaningfulness, the meaningfulness that we impute to life itself when we ponder 'the meaning of life'. And meaningfulness in this sense is clearly the province of beings with an interest in their own existence. I have elsewhere termed such beings *selves*: a self is any entity, human or otherwise, that is systemically organised to maintain itself in existence by its own intentional and reflexive efforts.⁶ Selves are thus defined by interests: they have a constitutive interest in self-maintenance and self-increase. It is relative to the interests of selves that things—particular objects, circumstances—assume significance, relevance, value. If there were no selves in the world, everything would just be what it is—nothing that occurred would matter more or less than anything else, so nothing would be meaningful. Specific meanings—the meanings of specific words or gestures, for instance—develop out of this underlying meaningfulness: 'I', 'you', 'dog', 'run', 'red' all develop, as discriminations, against this background of interests. If nothing mattered to us, there would be no reason to make the semantic discriminations we do make—or indeed any semantic discriminations—in the first place.

To see the universe as a whole as having a mental aspect in addition to its physical aspect, then, is to see it as structured by meaning in the present underlying sense. And to see it as structured by meaning is to regard it as mattering to itself—as constituting a self-realizing system with an interest in its own self-existence and indeed self-increase. To regard the universe in this way is to view it as a self—a very special, one-of-a-kind self, indeed, but a self nonetheless, self-actualizing, self-preserving and self-expanding. I have offered arguments for such a view of the universe elsewhere, but it is not hard to appreciate, even at first glance, that a view of the universe as self-actualizing, self-preserving and self-expanding is not incongruent with contemporary cosmology (see Mathews 1991, 2003, for arguments in support of the view of the universe as a self-realizing system).

⁶ Self in this sense can be defined in terms of autopoietic theory. See the work of Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela; but this notion of self-realization as the essence of self goes back at least as far as Spinoza.

From the viewpoint of such a cosmological version of panpsychism, then, the empirical world, as charted by physics, is the outward appearance of an inner field of subjectivity, indeed of conativity, where by ‘conativity’ I mean precisely the will or impulse of a self to realize and increase its own existence. As such a cosmological subject, the universe will cohere as an indivisible unity, where this unity and indivisibility will be reflected in the lawlikeness that ensures its spatiotemporal coherence under its outer, physical aspect. However, although the universe, under both its outer and inner aspects, coheres as a unity, it also undergoes self-differentiation. In Spinozist and Einsteinian style, its field-like fabric ripples and folds locally to form a dynamic manifold of ever-changing, finite ‘modes’; viewed from the outside, these modes appear as the empirical particulars described by physics; viewed from the inside, they constitute a texture of ever-unfolding experience. This universe is thus both a psychophysical unity and a manifold of psychophysical differentia. Amongst its differentia, there are some which are themselves organized as self-realizing systems or selves. These include organisms and perhaps higher-order living systems, such as ecosystems and biospheres.⁷ We might call such finite selves the Many to the cosmic self’s One. This set of finite selves represents a tiny but extremely significant subset of the wider, ever-changing set of differentia. Selves are significant, amidst the vast array of other differentia, because they represent real (because self-realizing) though relative (because not substantively discrete) loci of subjectivity and conativity in their own right. It is their relative ‘innerness’ that affords a viewpoint from which the universe can be observed under an ‘outer’ aspect (there being, of course, no perspective external to the universe as a whole), thus making sense of the psycho/physical distinction as applied to the One. And it is to these finite selves that the universe, as a locus of meaning in its own right, can address itself, in instances of communicative engagement.

The reason such a universe is disposed to engage in communication is because communication represents a horizon of self-realization and self-increase for any system structured *ab initio*, as this universe is, by meaning. And communication with (real though relative) finite selves constellated through its own self-differentiation represents the only possibility of communication for such a universe, it being necessarily a one-of-a-kind respondent. From the present point of view, then, the universe is capable of and actively seeks communicative engagement with its finite modes, or at any rate those of them capable of such engagement. Wherever this communicative engagement is actualised, we might speak of a *poetic* order—an order of poetic revelation—unfolding alongside the *causal* order. Such a poetic order, or order of meaning, will exceed the causal order but in no way contradict it.

Ontopoetics

Clearly it is this inherence of a poetic order, or order of meaning, in the physical realm that confers spiritual significance on panpsychism and suggests its status as a spiritual standpoint. Participating in the poetic order through communicative engagement with a psycho-active universe would seem to qualify as an instance of spiritual experience. So let us consider in more detail how this poetic order may be understood and how, in particular, it may be activated.

⁷ They do not, be it noted, include micro-systems such as molecules and atoms.

By ‘poetic order’ I mean an order of meaningful configurations of circumstances that constellate as a result of intentional (though also sometimes unintentional) *invocation* on our part. We invoke the world in certain terms, and the world responds—if it does indeed so grace us—by arranging itself to match those terms. The terms in question will be unavoidably *poetic*, in the sense of metaphorical, since the only ‘language’ available to the world is a language of *things*. That is to say, while the world cannot literally speak to us in either words or gestures nor discourse on abstract topics, it can arrange concrete particulars in meaningful configurations in the same way that poetry and dreams use imagery to create and convey meaning. So, for example, if I invoke a sun-god, I may be rewarded that evening with a spectacular sunset. If I invoke Jesus Christ in the morning, I may lose my way in the afternoon and arrive at a numinous green hill redolent of Calvary. If a group of us come together to enact a Dreaming story about the way colour entered an originally black-and-white landscape, a rainbow might appear at the site of our ritual. Scriptures, myths, legends and folk tales provide poetic narratives that have proved conducive to the world’s response. One’s whole life, or the life of one’s community, might become charged with such a narrative, and become a terrain of unfolding revelation. Such revelation need not be prescriptive. Moses may have brought stone tablets down from the mountain, but burning bushes are more the style of panpsychist poetics. Such poetics are meaningful, signalling presence, intent and intimate attunement, but their purpose is not necessarily to edify. The communicativity of this psycho-active universe seems rather to be an end-in-itself, its intimate attunement an invitation to love that makes edification—in the form of ‘thou shalt’ and ‘thou shalt not’—superfluous.

I use the term *ontopoetics* to signify this phenomenon of meaningful exchange between self and world. The term covers both the phenomenon itself and the study of, or discourse about, the phenomenon, as well as the invocational practices that induce it. Ontopoetics is the *performative* face of panpsychism, and though it stands against an implied metaphysical backdrop, it is in no way obliged to choose amongst different versions of panpsychist metaphysics. Indeed, it may not trouble itself with questions of metaphysics at all, but may restrict its focus to the strictly performative, exploring invocation and the experiences of communicativity that accompany it purely as practice. Conversely, as I have already indicated, panpsychism as a philosophical position is not necessarily committed to ontopoetics. To speak of ontopoetics is to imply not only that the world is psycho-active, as panpsychism avers, but also that it is responsive to us, that we bring to it—or can bring to it, if we choose—something that calls it forth on a new expressive plane, a plane of meaning and not merely of causation. Only a cosmological version of panpsychism such as the one I have outlined here implies such responsiveness.

Although ontopoetics is far from prescriptive, it does have far-reaching normative implications, as I have explained elsewhere:

The significance of ontopoetics... lies as much in its implications for our own existential situation as in its implications for our understanding of reality. For just as the nature of reality is, from this point of view, determinate but never fully discursively determinable, because its manifestation is responsive to the terms of our address, so our own way-forward can be revealed to us under different aspects, depending on the terms of our address. Our lives harbour possibilities of poetic manifestation far larger than those defined by the materialist terms of modern

societies. These possibilities derive from our inviting reality to use us as opportunity for new stories, new meanings, meanings that story landscapes, earthscapes, at the same time as they story ourselves. To invite reality to use us as terrain for stories in this way is clearly to make an epistemic shift from “knowledge”, in some objectivist sense, to *imagination* as our primary epistemic modality. By this I mean not that we will come to inhabit a world of fantasy but that through imagination we will create narrative contexts for our lives. Via the force of onto-poetics, these contexts may, if they succeed in engaging reality, become subtly actualized, opening up new, narratively determined pathways for us. Of course, to offer ourselves up as terrain for poetic inscription in this way, rather than insisting on sole authorship of our lives—which is to say, rather than insisting on life as autobiography—need not be altogether to eschew the rational-utilitarian modality in favour of imagination. The rational-utilitarian approach remains important to us as individuals for practical purposes just as it remains important to societies for practical purposes. But to rely exclusively on this approach in plotting our course, as modern civilization does, is, from an onto-poetic perspective, entirely to miss the larger possibilities of existence which emanate from poetic collaboration with reality. (Mathews 2009b: website)

Finally, the gist of onto-poetics might be summed up as follows:

Onto-poetics [is] defined as the communicative engagement of self with world and world with self. Such engagement...may take many forms, but in each instance it will involve not merely a causal interaction but an *exchange of meaning*. The presupposition of onto-poetics, in other words, is that the world is not merely an object-domain, as represented by physics, but also a field of meaning, a potentially communicative presence with a psycho-active dimension of its own that may be “sung” into responsiveness to us.

That the world is capable of being responsive to us in this way is of course...a very ancient assumption; indeed as a modality onto-poetics is as old as humanity itself though without being exactly coincident with any of the relevant traditional configurations of human affairs, such as magic, myth, religion or the occult. It is precisely because onto-poetics is not identical with such traditional configurations—where these were the very formations that were so deeply shaken by science and the European Enlightenment—that onto-poetics is perhaps recoverable in the post-Enlightenment climate of today. Science brought to light aspects of reality that were hidden both to the ancients and to later cultures that preserved an archaic sense of reality, but modern civilization, based exclusively on science, is, from an onto-poetic perspective, as blinkered in its own way as science considers ancient cultures to have been. Possibilities of experience that were routinely open to and taken for granted by peoples who shared an archaic sense of the psycho-active nature of all existence are extinct for modern peoples. These are *empirical* possibilities that have been lost to an outlook, shaped as modernity has been, exclusively by science. Science has in this sense arguably closed off as many empirical possibilities as it has opened up. At the same time however, the extraordinary empirical possibilities that science has indeed vouchsafed us require that archaic experiences of the psycho-activeness of all existence be completely re-contextualized. The time is ripe, in other words, for an epochal convocation of ancients and moderns that would aim to effect an integrative thought-shift potentially no less profound in its existential consequences than the presocratic shift towards reason, away from naïve animism, that occurred in the cradle

of Ionia two and a half thousand years ago. And it is no coincidence that the need for such a post-Enlightenment convocation is coming into view at a time of global ecological collapse, when the consequences of modernity, premised exclusively on science, are threatening the fabric of our planetary life system. We need today to recover a sense of inter-conformation with reality that is conceivable only if reality is somehow construed under the aspect of meaning as well as causation. (Mathews 2011b: website).

These reflections bring us back to the issues with which I opened the present paper—issues, I suggested, that any inter-faith conversation in the early twenty-first century must presumably address. We are now in a position to consider in a little more detail the response of an onto-poetic panpsychism to each of these four issues.

Panpsychism as Spiritual Standpoint

(1) Turning firstly to the issue of cross-cultural religious and spiritual difference, it is obvious, as I have remarked, that different societies experience strikingly different manifestations of the sacred—for example, the stern and chaste Hebrew God with his retinue of equally chaste angels and his elemental vocabulary of floods, plagues, obedient waves and pillars of cloud and fire; the elegant, amorous gods and goddesses of Olympus; or the legions of ferocious, bulging-eyes mountain deities together with the kitchen gods and bureaucratic village deities that preside in rural China. There is also a host of other kinds of phenomena that exceed the reach of materialist science yet are apparently also genuinely experienced in various societies, such as the vision lakes and rainbow bodies of Old Tibet, the fairy folk and little people of Old Europe, and the devil dogs, rainbow serpents and featherfoot spirits of Aboriginal Australia. Let us call all these phenomena—whether religious or folkloric—*spirit phenomena*. We can immediately see how spirit phenomena reflect the specific cultural assumptions of the societies in which they appear: the Virgin Mary is unlikely to manifest for Tibetans, for instance, and dakini are unlikely to show up in Ireland. In the face of the ubiquity of spirit experiences, on the one hand, and the fact that they are clearly referenced to specific cultures, on the other, commentators generally take one of two paths, the sceptical or the metaphysical. To take the sceptical path is to dismiss all such phenomena as mere cultural constructs, fictions projected, possibly for sound functionalist or psycho-cultural reasons, onto the screen of an inherently psychically inert materialist reality. To follow the metaphysical path, by contrast, is to take at least some of the many experiences of inspiritment at face value, as basically veridical rather than merely delusional. That is to say, from a metaphysical point of view, it may be acknowledged that phenomena of inspiritment provide evidence of an actual spiritual dimension of reality—they are not attributable merely to projection or self-deception. But then the question arises of how to account for the different faces of inspiritment without positing, for each different culture, a distinct ontology, where such ontologies would inevitably contradict one another.

This dilemma can be avoided if spirit phenomena can be accounted for within a metaphysical frame of reference that all societies share. The only reference frame that all societies share, however, seems to be the reference frame of materiality—the world of concrete, physical, empirically accessible things. If spirit phenomena from different societies are seen in panpsychist terms as different emanations of this same base of materiality, there seems to be no inconsistency between them. From such a panpsychist perspective, spirit phenomena are merely instances of the material world manifesting differently in different societies. Such differential manifestation seems unobjectionable if phenomena of inspiritment are understood

ontopoetically as arrangements of circumstances constellated by a psychoactive world in response to the communicative overtures of a people. Since the communicative overtures of a people will be couched in the specifics of their own cultural terms of reference, a responsive world will offer different revelations to match the respective idioms, the respective poetics, of different societies.

It could be argued that spirit itself, considered in traditional religious terms as distinct from matter, might likewise be capable of manifesting differently in different societies, and that this in fact explains the diversity of spiritual experience across cultures. In other words, spirit phenomena could be seen as emanating from a kind of spiritual substratum rather than from a depth dimension of matter, thereby obviating the need to resort to panpsychism. This is in fact a view widely espoused by people of an ecumenical outlook: ‘spirit’ is seen as one and the same across cultures but as manifesting differently within cultures. The difficulty with this view is that, taken baldly, it posits an ineffable noumenon that seems explanatorily redundant. All that can be said about ‘spirit’ qua substratum from this perspective is that it gives rise to the kind of phenomena we describe as spirit phenomena. We cannot describe spirit in any of the terms of its manifestations—such as theism, deism, the godhead, Universal Mind—because all such terms are already culturally mediated rather than signifying that which subtends the various cultural manifestations of spirit. But this means that characterising spirit phenomena as emanations of an underlying, noumenal realm or plane of spirit amounts to no more than the tautology that that-which-gives-rise-to-spirit-phenomena gives rise to spirit phenomena. Characterising spirit phenomena as emanations of the depth dimension of matter, however, is far from tautological—it is genuinely explanatory and makes sense of hitherto baffling aspects of physical reality as well as spiritual experience. It does not seem unreasonable, then, to follow the panpsychist in integrating our understanding of spirit phenomena non-reductively with our understanding of physical phenomena in a way that is explanatorily illuminating of both spirit and matter.

Of course, the view that I am here describing as panpsychist may indeed turn out to be consistent with strands of certain major religious traditions—of Hinduism, Buddhism, Daoism and even Christianity, under the panentheistic reading of the latter. However, the word ‘*panentheism*’, I would note immediately, conjures through its inclusion of ‘*theism*’ a culturally specific emanation of the depth dimension of matter, rather than denoting that depth dimension itself. I would for that reason resist equating panpsychism with panentheism. The cluster of religious associations conjured by *theism* are moreover ones that the panpsychist—in search of a new and experimental point of departure for an ecological age that seeks to reorient itself spiritually to the natural world—may wish to leave behind. Nevertheless, there seem to be strong resonances between cosmological panpsychism and (1) the *Aham Brahmasmi* concept in Hinduism, (2) the concept of *Rigpa* in the Dzogchen school of Tibetan Buddhism, and (3) the field-and-flow cosmology of Daoism; these resonances would all certainly repay further study.

(2) From our earlier discussions it can be seen that panpsychism affords an explanation of spirit phenomena which is consistent with—though by no means reducible to—science. Panpsychism points to a depth dimension of the physical universe that is reflected in its external aspects—its fundamental spatiotemporality and field-likeness, for instance—though it is not describable in the purely externalized terms of physics. Spirit phenomena understood as emanations of this depth dimension of the universe can thus be accounted for in rational terms, though these are philosophical terms that exceed the terms of science.

(3) Although panpsychism may be amenable to theorization, and in this sense may qualify as rationally accountable, no particular theorization of it can be exclusive. Since the terms of its theorization are philosophical and hence interpretive rather than scientific, no definitive theory is to be expected. The various theorizations of panpsychism, lacking definitiveness, are not to be taken literally—or ought not to be so taken—nor are they to be adopted dogmatically. In my own opinion, moreover, theorizations of panpsychism (such as the cosmological version I have outlined here) are not in themselves reasons-to-believe in panpsychism. They merely serve as reassurance that the notion of a psycho-active universe is not irrational. The sources of belief in this context will remain experiential: we will experiment with the practice of invocation (or other, like practices) for ourselves to see whether it actually does elicit a response from the world. If such a response is forthcoming, it will be this, and not any abstract theory, which compels our belief, and indeed our passion. But if we are convinced in advance of the irrationality of the panpsychist position, we will never experiment with the practice nor, hence, find out for ourselves whether or not it is tenable. Rationalization, in the form of metaphysical theory, thus gives us permission to experiment with practices and explore experiences—such as those that fall within the realm of onto-poetics—for ourselves, thereby testing the panpsychist hypothesis.

It is entirely possible, then, for a metaphysical outlook such as panpsychism to escape the traps of essentialism while yet remaining accountable to reason. It can be tentative in its formulations, its existence claims remaining experientially (though not of course scientifically) testable. In this sense, panpsychism may be construed as an outlook that rests on a try-it-and-see rather than a dogmatic basis.

(4) Finally, to explain the way in which panpsychism, particularly under its onto-poetic aspect, represents a response to the call of ecology, I can do no better than refer back to an earlier essay of mine that explores this issue. Entitled “On Desiring Nature” (Mathews 2010), the essay begins with the broad question of what it would take for modern societies, with their predominantly instrumental outlook, to make the transition to an ethos of sustainability. It is argued in the essay that such a transition would require a transvaluation of desires that could be accomplished not by environmental education alone nor even by the kind of ecological fieldwork that would induce us to treat other living things as persons, but only, ultimately, by a metaphysical shift—a shift I describe in onto-poetic terms. Parts of the essay are reproduced here as a final section.⁸

The Call of Ecology

Now that modern societies have at last more or less conceded the necessity for environmental sustainability, eco-philosophical inquiry can focus a little more concertedly on the question of what exactly it would take to make our societies environmentally sustainable. *A prima facie* answer to this question is that modern societies will become environmentally sustainable when they *fit into nature*, where by ‘nature’ I mean the larger life-systems of the planet. Instead of monstrously devouring these life-systems, as we are currently doing, we need to become biologically integrated into the biosphere as a whole.

True. But how might this be achieved? Two ways are usually cited. On the one hand we could rein in our desires and reduce our consumption, thereby lessening our impact on the

⁸ “On Desiring Nature” was originally published in the *Indian Journal of Ecocriticism*, Sarup Book Publishers, New Delhi, and acknowledgment is hereby made thereof.

biosphere. On the other hand we could continue to allow our desires free rein, yet find alternative, low-impact ways of satisfying them.

Obviously both these strategies—limiting desires on the one hand and satisfying them in harmless ways on the other—are commendable. They will reduce our impact on nature. But nature needs more than a reduction of our impact. Nature is not a given from which we can endlessly take, even if by doing so we do no harm. Nature has to be continually recreated, not from some source outside the system but from inside it, from the very entities that draw their life and sustenance from it. ‘Fitting into nature’ then means more than merely not harming it, minimizing our impact on it; rather it means actively replenishing it, actively reconstituting the biosphere in everything we do. Ultimately this is a matter of wanting what the biosphere needs us to want. Our desires have to mesh with the desires of other elements of the ecosystem in the sense that the effects of the actions we take to satisfy our desires must afford the very conditions needed by other elements of the system. This is how the biosphere works. Every being, in seeking its own good, is also serving the interests of others. So—one of my favorite examples—the bettong, a miniature kangaroo in Australia, wants truffles, and its digging for truffles aerates the forest soil in just the way necessary for forest health.

In nature this intermeshing of interests has of course been achieved through natural selection: the bettong does not *choose* to want truffles; it has simply evolved to want them. Human desire on the other hand is patently not bound in this way. Our desires are mediated by culture, and cultures vary across space and through time. In our present culture of consumerism our desires are deeply contrary to what the biosphere needs us to want: the actions we take to satisfy our desires generally do not create, as by-products, the very conditions required for the sustenance of other elements of the ecosystem. To the contrary, the actions we take to satisfy our desires generally bring about as their side-effects conditions inimical to other elements. To change this—to bring about the complete transvaluation of desires that would be required to re-enmesh human desire in the biosphere, rather than merely minimizing the impact of our current consumer wants without significantly revising them—would involve a major cultural shift.

How could such a shift be achieved? How could we be induced to start truly and actively desiring what the biosphere needs us to desire instead of what we presently do desire?

Education is the solution usually cited in this connection. Sciences such as ecology and conservation biology are beginning to provide insight into the requirements of biotic systems. The science is crucial, and the education programs that flow from it are invaluable. But they are unlikely in and of themselves to bring about the wholesale transvaluation of desires that deep sustainability requires. Desire is after all not such an easy thing to educate. Desire is inextricable from emotion: love and hatred, fear and aversion, anger and tenderness—all such emotions inform and are informed by complex textures of desire. Our desires are accordingly unlikely to be shifted unless our emotions are shifted, and emotion is not likely to be shifted in a fundamental way by science. Science is profoundly dualistic in its representation of nature, in the sense that it represents nature in purely materialist terms. This is as true of ecology as of other sciences: ecosystems are figured as purely physical systems, devoid of inner correlates such as self-mattering and self-meaning. How then can we expect *people*, whose values and deepest motivations are shaped within meaning-systems, to become emotionally engaged with systems which are represented as wholly lacking in self-meaning? To ask humans to allow their emotions and hence their desires to be shaped by the activities of ecological entities which are ‘blind’, in the sense that they are moved merely by physical

causes rather than by meanings, seems to be asking us to give up meaning in favour of the meaninglessness of mere matter. This is surely, in effect, asking us to give up nothing less than our humanity. No wonder people resist the call of deep ecologists and others to ‘ecological selfhood’, if this is what ecological selfhood implies! If it is to be possible for humans truly to ‘fit into nature’, in the sense of wanting what nature requires us to want, then we shall have first to reconceive of life-systems as meaning systems—as systems which, like human systems, are imbued with psycho-activity as well as physicality, with subject status as well as object status. In other words, setting aside the dualist understanding of nature encoded in science is a precondition for allowing our emotions to be engaged by nature and hence for a transvaluation of desires to occur.

Assuming that we do set our dualist assumptions aside, at least experimentally, in the interests of deep sustainability, what would then need to happen for us actually to become emotionally engaged with nature?

First-hand observation in the field may be a key. By this I mean not experimental manipulation of natural entities for the purpose of answering preconceived questions about them—the kind of observation mandated by science. Rather, I mean something more akin to the nature-watching of field naturalists. This kind of ‘loving attention’ or ‘attentive love’, as feminist theorists have described it, has the effect of making natural entities morally salient to us: to the extent that we have become emotionally invested in their lives, we shall want to protect them from harm.

However, while an overall attitude of attentive love may induce us to limit our impact on nature, to conduct our own lives in ways that do no harm to nature, it is not calculated actually to reconfigure our desires, to re-pattern them in the radically new and creative ways that would be required if they were actively to replenish and serve the needs of nature. Attentive love may, in other words, induce us to rein in our desires but it is unlikely to be powerful enough in its effects to bring about a complete transvaluation of desires, in accordance with the requirements of ‘fitting into nature’.

To situate ourselves psychically as actors within the system, with a view truly to ‘fitting into nature’, we need, I think, to take a further step, one that could be described in terms of *synergy*. By synergy I mean, very precisely, the coming together of two or more parties in such a way that the self-meanings they bring to the encounter become mutually inflected and enlarged by the communication that takes place between them. Through synergy, self-meanings become mutual rather than exclusively self-referencing, and in the process such meanings are enlarged and transformed. Out of these enlarged self-meanings, new patterns of desire arise, patterns which bind into their texture the signatures of the other parties to the encounter.

In what could instances of synergy between humans and nature consist? It is perhaps relatively straightforward to imagine such interactions between humans and certain communicative creatures. Some musicians, for example, have written about making music with birds or whales. It is less straightforward to provide examples of synergy with the life system at large. Setting our dualist assumptions aside and allowing that the world is potentially communicative and responsive to us, we will have to imagine forms of *address* conducive to self/world encounter.

At this point the quest for deep sustainability perhaps intersects with the practices of religion or spirituality. For one way it may be possible for us to address the world is via *invocation*—in other words, by asking the larger scheme of things to manifest its self-meaning to us.

How might the larger scheme of things be expected to respond to invocation? Traditionally, in spiritual contexts that allow for such response, it does so through meaningful conjunctions, serendipitous or synchronistic arrangements of circumstances. In this sense the ‘language’ of the world is a concretised and particularized one. It is the language of poetics, of imagery, of meaning conveyed through the symbolic resonance of *things*. It is in such language then—traditionally a language of poetic narrative—that our invocations may need to be couched. It follows that in any society in which desire is reconfigured truly to ‘fit into nature’, the ultimate frames of reference may need to be poetic ones; science together with other forms of thinking and knowing may need to be subsumed under and oriented towards larger poetic narratives.

When I address the world by way of a narrative frame of reference, a story with the kind of poetic undertow that characterized the numinous legends and tales of ancient societies, and when the world responds to me with an emanation of circumstances clearly referenced to that same story, I cannot help but be smitten. The response of the world is unmistakable in its poetic appositeness, an appositeness already familiar and recognizable to us from the night-time realm of dreams, or those dreams at any rate imprinted with the strangeness of a source beyond the circle of ordinary experience. And there is in this appositeness, in the attunement of this response to the particular poetics of our call, a rightness, a directedness to the meanings at our own most personal core, that draws us inescapably into intimacy. Each time the world arranges itself with poetic intent, each time it manifests in the poetic image of our invocation, it is as if it presents itself to us for the very first time. It is as if the veil of the ordinary is drawn aside and a mythic world that exists only for our eyes, pristine and untouched, still dripping with the dew of creation, is vouchsafed to us. There is such intimacy in this revelation, such incomparable largesse in the gift, such breath-taking unexpectedness, we cannot help but surrender to it. Thereafter we will become as infatuated, at some level of function, as a mystic, holding the world as a beloved in our hearts despite the undiminished perils, griefs and trials it presents to us in our everyday transactions.

Invocation in the present sense may be practised privately or collectively. Contemporary examples of collective practices include forms of invocation involved in bioregional rituals—ceremonies or festivals enacted to celebrate place or landscape or other aspects of the greater life-system, such as the Return of the Sacred Kingfisher Festival on the banks of the Merri Creek in Melbourne, a festival which, according to the testimony of participants, abounds in poetic ‘manifestations’.

Of course, festivals are not the only forms of poetic address to world. Many activities can assume an invocational significance if undertaken with appropriate intent. Pilgrimage, for instance. In China, one of the original and most ancient sites of pilgrimage, mountains have always been the pilgrim’s destination. China’s official religions, Daoism and Buddhism, have situated their temples and monasteries, and dreamed up their gods and immortals, to fit in with this tradition. Nevertheless, it was originally the mountains themselves that were the sacred objects. But the act of pilgrimage can awaken a communicative dimension in any landform. Pilgrimage can, in other words—like many other forms of invocation—‘sing up’ the world, as indigenous people here in Australia say. I myself experienced this when I undertook, with two pilgrim companions, a walk to the source of our Merri Creek. The

journey to the headwaters took us seven days. Along the way we were showered with unexpected synchronicities, poetic interceptions and revelations. The little creek responded to our ‘singing’ like a true goddess, with poetic gifts and graces in abundance that transformed our modest outing into something larger than we could have imagined.

Traditional cultures, especially indigenous ones, have always understood the efficacy of invocation in eliciting poetic responses from the world. This, rather than a wish to manipulate reality by sorcerous means, has probably been the impulse behind much that we in modern civilization regard as ‘magic’. In modern civilization, magic in its instrumental (sorcerous) sense would appear to have been completely superseded by science, but that should not blind us to the (arguably) reliable efficacy of invocation, nor to the metaphysical implication of this efficacy—that it points to the psychophysical nature of reality. To experience for ourselves the intimately apposite poetic responsiveness of place or landscape to our communicative overtures, of creek or river or mountain to our pilgrimage, is to be shifted on our metaphysical moorings. It is to feel graced, even loved, by world, and flooded with a gratitude, a loyalty, that rearranges in us the deepest wellsprings of desire. This communicativeness that can be called up anywhere, any time, is surely related to the poetic dynamic at the core of reality that Aboriginal people here in Australia call ‘Dreaming’. Once we have discovered this intimate and responsive core for ourselves, we might begin to feel towards the world the way Aboriginal people feel towards their Dreamings. Psychoanalyst Craig San Roque has poignantly described this feeling:

‘Dreaming’. You hear them talk about it, this sweet thing. Sometimes they call it ‘The Dreaming’, an approximation for the English language speakers, sometimes in Arrernte they call it ‘Altjerre’ or in the Western Desert language ‘Tjukurrpa’, or the Warlpiri, ‘Jukurrpa’. What does this really mean, this state of things which brings tears to Paddy Sims’ eyes, seated cross legged before a canvas, singing quietly, painting ‘The Milky Way Story’? This thing which women depict and men define in sand-drawings, deft fingers moving upon canvasses stretched on the bare ground, or smudged on a backyard cement slab near the Todd River? Tjukurrpa, land claims, faraway looks, marking this rock and that, casually. Reverence, breaking into song in creek beds, shrugging, walking off. Tjukurrpa, lightly held, with a gravity so exquisite, so solid, so omnipresent. Tjukurrpa, perhaps the most misunderstood, most ignored, most beautiful, most mysterious, most exploited, most obliterated phenomenon in this country. (san Roque 2006: 148)

Through communicative encounters with a world that seems so readily to entwine its poetics with ours, apparently simply for the joy of wrapping us and itself in layer upon layer of narrative meaning, we might come to share those faraway looks, that dreamy-eyed love that binds Aboriginal people so indissolubly, so unnegotiably, to ‘country’, to world. This will be the ‘background love’, akin to the background radiation in physics, that emanates from our contact with source, and within the field of which all our specific day-to-day desires are constellated. But how transformed our day-to-day desires will be when constellated within this field! All our desires will now be referenced to this background desire for the poetic attention of our world. Our sense of self will be inflected with desire for this attention; our activities will aim to attract the beam of this great significance into every corner of our lives. With the potential for illumination by this transformative light, our instinct for survival will find a new context and the opinions of our fellows will no longer serve as the exclusive yardstick of our personal significance. Gone then will be our anxiety about the image we cut with others, and with it our hankering for the endless accessories and commodities that

announce our social status and so drive consumerism in our present culture. Gone too, in this poetic effulgence, will be our susceptibility to the trivial indulgences and tawdry trinkets of such consumerism, the endless repetition and distraction parading as variety. For our aesthetic delectation there will instead be a feast of unique beauties, both miniature and vast, as well as the enthralling poetics of encounter itself, of unfolding intimacies with an array of differently-bodied presences. Our desires will have been realigned, expanded, tuned to new and larger possibilities of self-actualization through poetic engagement with the multi-minded reality of a psycho-active universe. Framed by such a larger, essentially erotic, poetics of existence, our day-to-day desires and the day-to-day practices that spring from them will indeed become aligned with the intrinsic psychodynamics of nature.

In conclusion, then, it has in recent years become clear, as a result of the environmental crisis, that a renegotiation of our modern civilization's relationship with reality is required. Ecology has thus far provided a key to this renegotiation. But ecology is still a science and in that sense perpetuates the materialist premise of science: ecology is the study of living systems under their purely physical or causal aspect. However, insofar as human culture is a meaning system it cannot, as we have seen, properly be subsumed under a purely physico-causal system. If human culture is to fit into nature, actively replenishing and recreating it, as true sustainability requires, human desire must become inherently contoured to the needs of nature. For this to occur, nature must be understood by us as structured by meanings as well as by physical causality: reality must be recognised as a psychophysical system with an inner, poetic aspect as well as an outer, causal one, capable of capturing and commanding us emotionally as well as making a claim on our moral consideration. We might use the term *ontopoetics* to denote both the order of meanings that structure this inner aspect of being at large, on the one hand, and the practices by which we engage with this order of meanings, on the other. In that case we might say that while the science of ecology, with its ethics of restraint, has defined the first phase of the renegotiation of our relationship with reality, a cultural project of *ontopoetics*, with its goal of the wholesale transvaluation of desires, may be integral to the second, upcoming phase, of what can no longer be termed merely an environment movement, but must be revisioned as a shift in the very context of meaning for human cultures.

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CHAPTER 8

First Response

Firstly, thank you, dear colleagues, for your frank and edifying contributions. Being an environmental philosopher myself rather than a philosopher of religion, I found that your testimony provoked me into harder thinking about my own “position” vis a vis the spectrum of world religions. I normally picture myself as placed outside that spectrum, taking a stance somewhat critical - on ecological grounds – of traditional religions; it was therefore productive to find myself included within it, and consequently answerable to the religious establishment. It became clear that I really cannot claim to have a well-defined “position” or fixed set of core “beliefs” at all, but am rather – please forgive the cliché – on a journey of discovery, an open-ended navigation, the terrain of which is not staked out by institutional or scriptural boundaries or even by defining narratives. The so-called “position” outlined in my first paper was just an articulation of my present point on that journey. The particular theorizations there adduced were quite contingent. Such theorizations serve the – important - purpose of showing that one’s orientation to reality is not irrational, but they are generally by no means the reason one arrived at that orientation in the first place. So I am not wedded to those particular theorizations, let alone to the term, *panpsychism*: I do not identify as a panpsychist in the way one might identify as a Christian or a Hindu (though it’s fun to put it on the census form), and there is no defined tradition or community or *sangha* to which I belong by virtue of signing off as a panpsychist. So the philosophical ideas outlined in my “position paper” are not really my “core beliefs”, since they are not really *beliefs* at all. I would be ready, I think, to revise most if not all of them.

But the present exercise in dialogue has caused me to reflect on what *is* core to my intellectual, imaginative and spiritual life, and I think I can say, along no doubt with legions of followers of religion, that *love* is at the centre, though in my case this is a love - as big as my heart can hold - for Earth itself and all its beings. This love is underpinned by a sense of the unfathomable mystery and numinosity of the cosmos. I have always been struck by how akin the dark, unbounded, expansive, field-like texture of the cosmos is to the texture of subjectivity itself – how standing out alone in the night, in some spare and deserted place, feels so uncannily like standing inside a vast consciousness. There is a hard-to-miss affinity here, picked up by some strands of Buddhism and perhaps Hinduism, between outer space and inner mind, suggesting panpsychist possibilities. But this sense of mystery is also, for me, accompanied by an open-ness to the potential responsiveness or communicativity of Creation. (I love this word, *Creation*, even though the idea of a separate Creator has no place in my imagination.) I think of this communicativity as *revelatory*, though not necessarily in any way prescriptive. It seems rather merely companionable in intent: its communiqués signal presence, intimacy, without necessarily legislating or instructing, let alone affording safeguards, salvation or redemption. I am frankly baffled by the perceived need for salvation that lies at the heart of faiths such as Christianity. From what are we to be saved? We are already so inalienably at home in this world, flesh of its flesh, breathing its breath, dreaming its dreams, our every cell, every thought, stamped with its particular contours. How could we possibly conceive of being more at home? Certainly suffering and death stalk the earth, but suffering and death are the price of this vast economy of sharing, and we are never more at-one with the great family of beings who have preceded and given birth to us than when we are suffering and dying, as each and every one of them, in their unnegotiable singularity, has already so acutely and momentously done. And in the final oblivion which is our common fate surely lies our deepest belonging.

To say this is not of course to say that we shall not continue to experience fear, terror and dread as we pick our path through life, but these experiences are also part of the creaturely

inheritance that ties us indissolubly into the texture and terrain of earth-being. And we are well equipped, as human creatures, to take responsibility for our own safety, to use our formidable reason and our extraordinary sociality to devise our own precautions and amenities, thereby softening the harsher aspects of our creaturely estate. This has never been truer than it is today in the modern industrial era, when humankind has so spectacularly taken control of its own destiny. In this era we have seen the importunate origins of religion, the appeals to divine beings to act as guardians of the tribe and overthrow its enemies, truly superseded. For practical purposes we can now take care of ourselves. But the technological means whereby our civilization has achieved this spiritual coming of age have perhaps exacerbated the sense of apartness from Earth, the ecological deracination, for which we seek redress in salvation. Our spiritual task, at this juncture in our cultural evolution, is not, to my mind, to persist in the quest for salvation from an ostensibly alienated condition but rather to recover our spiritual inalienability from Earth. To achieve this in the context of a civilization built on the technological defeat and domination of Earth is a very tall order. It will require nothing less than a new industrial revolution and, I believe – and perhaps *this* is one of my core “beliefs” – a new set of spiritual underpinnings.⁹

This then is my orientation. I am unsure what to call it, but my life’s work has been to seek articulations of it in an effort both to denounce the brute-and-blind, instrumental mode of being-in-the world that has characterized modernity and to help induce instead a more tender, responsive, votary mode. I like to envisage our children walking the earth as though in a luminous landscape of myth, spacious and numinous, as Aboriginal people once walked, rather than, as we currently do, trampling and over-riding the rest of life at every step.

The influences that gave rise to this core orientation in my case were, firstly, childhood experiences in a liminal zone between country life and the city, between secularity and the mood of a residually Abrahamic sacrality, and between the uncertainties of abandoned traditions - a zone in which a lot of freedom to explore and observe, unfettered, existed. Later, in my undergraduate years, I found consummate expression of my core but still inchoate intuition in the philosophy of Spinoza. When I discovered Aboriginal ethnography, and in due course found entrees into Aboriginal Australia, I was electrified by the resonances, and enchanted by a spirituality of *country* – earth-country, sea-country, sky-country - to which my heart could readily and gratefully give its assent. Country is sentient, affective, communicative, responsive. “Country in Aboriginal English is not only a common noun but a proper noun. People talk about country in the same way that they would talk about a person: they speak to country, sing to country, visit country, worry about country, feel sorry for country and long for country. People say that country knows, hears, smells, takes notice, takes care, is sorry or happy.” (Rose 1996: 7) When one walks in country and calls out to it, it replies with synchronistic manifestations. Country is always *living country*. “This is living country.....In order to keep country alive, you have to experience it, you have to get the feeling for it, and when you get the feeling for it and are reading the country, you can help to keep it alive. You can communicate with it.” (Hoogland in Sinatra and Murphy 1999: 18) Or, as Traditional Owner, Matthew Dhulumburrk, puts it, “The land and sea not empty sheds that man has built. There’s something in it.” (Rose 1996: 8) Living country is furthermore the terrain of a *living cosmos*, since Dreaming inhabits not only land and sea but sky and the

⁹ The “next industrial revolution” is a term used to describe the radical re-design of technologies and re-organization of industry that will be required to integrate human production with ecosystems and biosphere processes. See Lovins and Lovins 1999; McDonough and Braungart 2001.

Milky Way and all the stars. The universe is not an “empty shed”; there is already “something in it”. This sense of a living cosmos turned up again, for me, in the indigenous tradition of China, Daoism. Daoism, emanating from the conditions of civilization rather than those of a hunter-gatherer society, had more in common with Western thought than Aboriginal culture did, yet it retained a root Indigenous connection with the living cosmos, and a sense of the rightful role of that cosmos as normative template for human life. I remain a keen student of Daoism, in and outside of China, and an erratic practitioner of Daoist arts.

If the term, *panpsychism*, theoretically over-determines the position to which I can comfortably lay claim, this notion of *living cosmos* could perhaps stand in its stead. We, and all living things, including the earth itself, are integral to the fabric of the *living cosmos*, cut as we are, one and all, from its living cloth. Our nature is an intimate answer to its. Far from being strangers in a strange land, crying for redemption...salvation...release...liberation...transcendence, we belong in this cosmos psychically and physically in the same way that a fish belongs, in every fibre of its being, to the sea. For the sake of convenience then, though at the risk of reification, perhaps I could call my “position”, *living cosmos* panpsychism (by way of poetic analogy with Gold Mountain Daoism or Pure Land Buddhism, for example!).

Deontic and Axial Perspectives

Before proceeding to reflect on other religious positions from the viewpoint of such *living cosmos* panpsychism, I would like to introduce a distinction which I think might help to explain some of the deep discontinuities between *living cosmos*-type traditions and traditions that serve as vehicles for a more explicitly *ethical* consciousness. This is a distinction, which I have recently explained elsewhere, between *axial* and *deontic* conceptions of the normative root of society. (Mathews 2012) The *deontic* conception emerged under the material and metaphysical conditions of Indigenous hunter-gatherer ways of life, while the *axial* conception emerged with the advent of the type of agrarian societies that evolved into the urban-industrial formations of the modern era. The axial outlook, based on empathy, is aligned with our modern conception of ethics. The deontic is more ontological in scope, concerned with conserving the conditions for the ongoing self-regeneration of the living cosmos. This deontic/axial distinction very much informs my responses to the various religious positions, so I hope you will bear with me if I take the time to spell it out in a little more detail.¹⁰

The kind of ethics that prevails today in the West, as well as in many other contemporary societies, emerged during the *Axial Age*, and is core both to the Western philosophical tradition and to most present-day “world religions”. The Axial Age, so called by the philosopher Karl Jaspers in his book, *The Origin and Goal of History*, was the period from 900 to 200 BCE, which saw the emergence of Greek philosophy in the West and Confucianism in China, together with religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism and the monotheism of Judaism that later branched into Christianity and Islam. All these traditions, which emanated from *civilization* - by which I mean expansive patterns of culture established by sedentary, stratified, agrarian societies that were sometimes ushered in by pastoral ones - included a central commitment to the so-called Golden Rule of do unto others as you would that they would do unto you. (Armstrong 2006, xiv, 391-392) This central commitment has also been defined as the ‘moral point of view’, the injunction to step into the shoes of another

¹⁰ The next two pages are adapted from Mathews 2012.

and see the world from their point of view. (Baier 1958) Sometimes this new, properly ethical consciousness that demands recognition of the interests of others has been articulated in terms of compassion, sometimes in terms of reason, but it always presupposes the *empathic* recognition that others do indeed have an inner, subjectival life like our own that must be acknowledged and taken into consideration in our dealings with them.¹¹

This axial consciousness, which focuses on others as *individuals*, each with a unique inner life emanating in a distinctive point of view, is for us today virtually definitive of ethics. The individual as the locus of will, sentience, feeling and cognition is generally deemed the proper object of ethical consideration. Although the purview of ethical consciousness may initially have included only humans, it should have been self-evident from the start that in principle it extended to all sentient beings. Anyone who has ever sincerely gazed into the eyes of just about any animal could surely have intuited this. But for a variety of reasons, and particularly in the West, animals tend to have been excluded from the scope of the Golden Rule, or at best only secondarily included, and the resulting ethic, across cultures, has been markedly, though contingently, anthropocentric.¹²

Axial consciousness however is not the only way of making normative sense of the world, and ethics is not the only lens through which we may conceive of “the right”, or the normative root of society. Axial societies were preceded by non-axial societies, and non-axial – or, as I am calling them, deontic - societies still persist, marginally, alongside axial societies today. Deontic societies were paradigmatically hunter-gatherer ones. As my model for thinking about such societies I will take those of Indigenous Australians.

The deontic conception of the normative root of society revolves around the notion of Law – tribal Law or Dreaming Law. Law is not ethics in the axial sense. It is not a practice of empathy attuning the self to the feelings of others, thereby inducing a compassionate concern to promote and protect their interests. Law is ontological. “Everything come up out of ground – language, people, emu, kangaroo, grass. That’s Law.” (Rose 1996: 9) Law identifies the patterns in things that enable the *living cosmos* to renew and re-articulate itself in perpetuity. (Kwaymullina 2005,12-13; Kwaymaullina and Kwaymullina 2010, 204-206; Grieves 2009; Mowaljarlai and Malnic 1993; Rose 1992) Law furthermore spells out how people can participate in this pattern. It emphasizes that it is the living cosmos that has given people existence and it details what people *owe* the cosmos in return, what they need to do - *ought* to do - to ensure that this generative order is perpetuated. Law is in this sense *deontic* rather than *ethical* – it is about duty and obligation, setting out an order of grave imperatives that transcend compassion. From the perspective of deontics, a certain complementarity is required amongst the elements of the cosmos: night and day, wet and dry, drought and flood, life and death, eating and being eaten, flourishing and affliction, abundance and decline - all these contrary aspects of the cosmos must forever vie with each other, without either element ever gaining final ascendancy over the other. All species must moreover play their part in

¹¹ It is worth noting here that, from the axial perspective, differences amongst different ethical theories – utilitarianism versus rights, dialogical ethics of care versus rationalist ethics of justice or respect for persons – are of little consequence. They are all different ways of codifying the basic axial insight that others, as individual centres of aspiration towards life, matter, where this insight rests on empathy, however that empathy is inculcated – whether through encounter, enculturation, argument, or other means.

¹² For a discussion of the reasons, see Mathews 2012

these dynamics, suffering the conflicts and reversals that eventually balance out into the eternal recurrence of life.¹³

However, from the perspective of Law, the “equality” of all elements qua contributors to the stability of the cosmos is not an equality of individuals but of species, kinds or clans. Individuals are, in this scheme of things, intersubstitutable: it does not matter *which* individual members of a given species or clan instantiate the relationships that perpetuate the ordained pattern, provided those relationships are perpetuated. If one individual consumes too much, for example, or otherwise oversteps its species or clan boundaries, it may be another individual of that species or clan that pays the price – that is brought into ecological line. Compassion and a sense of justice or fair play at the level of individuals have little part in the scheme of things prescribed by Law.

This is not because empathy is absent from Aboriginal society. On the contrary, social empathy is a given for peoples who live in face to face communities which engender a high degree of social attunement. In such societies empathy accordingly does not need to be *prescribed*. It is part of the natural order of things and does not need to be given the force of Law. What does need to be prescribed is, as I have remarked, the means required for the perennial regeneration of nature, since Aboriginal societies traditionally took their livelihood directly from nature, and needed to understand the intricate patterns that ensured its continued productivity. It is to the perpetuation of these patterns that Law is primarily directed.

In axial societies, on the other hand, little attention is paid to the patterns that are continually constellating in and constituting the natural world because, in the distinctive praxis of axial societies, nature in its larger ecological outlines is backgrounded. A space is carved out of the larger ecosystem for agriculture, and this agrarian space is settled and made-over almost entirely for human purposes, until it becomes the self-sufficient, self-enclosed, intensively tilled and built space of civilization. In such spaces thought is referenced almost exclusively to the human; the ecological principles that sustain life at large lose salience, except to the small extent that they impact upon agrarian production. Engagement with a living, responsive, communicative cosmos, central to hunter-gatherer experience, gives way to the worship of anthropomorphic deities, deities progressively abstracted from the physical texture of the empirical cosmos. The sense of a living cosmos is thus eventually lost to agrarian consciousness, as is knowledge of the principles that sustain such a cosmos. But a consequence of agrarian production, and of the industrialization to which it in due course gives rise, is the progressive stratification and urbanisation of society. Stratification creates inequalities of wealth and power, which engender social tension. Urbanisation breaks down the familiarity of the clan or tribe, and in time makes of a people a society of *strangers*. Restraint, based on empathy and belonging, is thus no longer learned spontaneously as it is in egalitarian, face to face communities, but must be *prescribed*, if the civilizational formation is to prove socially functional. Such prescription is the substance of axial ethics. In other words, while civilization as a social formation is inherently inegalitarian and, to a degree, depersonalized, it throws up, as its antidote, the axial insight. The spread of civilization as a social modality accordingly saw the advent of the Axial Age.

¹³ In her classic ethnography, *Dingo Makes Us Human*, Deborah Bird Rose identifies the basic principles that mesh together to make up the Law: balance, response, symmetry and autonomy, each principle interacting with the others to ensure the equal implicatedness of all elements in the actualization of the living cosmos. (Rose 1992)

To recapitulate then, the *axial* or properly ethical conception of the normative root of society is premised on empathy for individuals as centres of sentience and conativity, or the aspiration towards life. The *deontic* conception of the normative root of society, on the other hand, rests on a notion of Law that is ontological rather than ethical, in the sense of compassionate, in its basic orientation. That is to say, its primary intention is not to protect individuals qua individuals but to assure the conditions for the perpetuation of a living cosmos.

In a certain respect, axial consciousness represents an advance on deontic consciousness, inasmuch as it opens up a whole new horizon of individualistic awareness that vastly expands our own reflexivity. As such it constitutes a developmental milestone from which there is no turning back. But in another respect, axial consciousness represents a lapse from deontic consciousness, as it loses sight of the larger normative order to which all living things owe their existence. In my view both perspectives, dialectically interleaved, are required if we are to succeed in the normative task of religion.

Against this backdrop of my own standpoint, I shall now reflect on the position papers of several other contributors to our present project, specifically those on Daoism, Non-theistic Hinduism, Traditional Christianity, Traditional Judaism and Zoroastrianism. Inevitably, I am not in philosophical agreement with all the claims of all the authors, since many of these claims cut across one another. I must confess however that it feels wrong to critique the truth claims of any religion to the very face of one who professes that religion, since religions often mean so much more to their adherents than do mere philosophies; religions involve faith and community membership as well as epistemology and often implicate the deepest sources of identity in the self. And while it would be the height of foolishness to consider one's own view – whether philosophical or religious – the only one with a claim to truth, since different ideas, theories and stories reveal different aspects of reality, and each frame of reference affords only one window on the world, still as philosophers we do argue with one another, and expect truth claims to be supported by arguments and responsive to objections. It is in this awkward philosophical space between the condescension of relativism and the dogmatism of an either-or approach to truth that I will try to orchestrate my responses to the above positions. I take heart from words spoken by the Dalai Lama when he recently touched down in Sydney. Even the Buddha, he pointed out, did not insist on One Religion, but urged all his followers, including monks and scholars, to question his teachings, investigating and experimenting with them rather than accepting them out of faith and devotion. (Keane 2013) To treat the truth claims of religion routinely in this way would of course transform religion as a social phenomenon, since “teachings” would no longer have the stability that the institutionalization of religion requires. But perhaps it is this very “stability”, lending itself as it does to institutionalization, that is precisely the source of religious bigotry and in-group/out-group conflict. If the truth claims of religion were expected to stand on their own merits, rather than resting on doubtful forms of authority, religion might play a very different, much less divisive, role in society.

Daoism

Bede Benjamin Bidlack's paper on Daoism was for me deeply congenial, since, as I have mentioned, I am already personally engaged with Daoist thought and practice. I was intrigued with Gold Mountain Daoism, as a lay sect well adapted to the needs of Western practitioners, and would love to learn more about it. (Alas, googling it turned up no centres in Australia.)

Daoism is the indigenous tradition of China, derived from pre-civilizational shamanic practices yet articulated under conditions of civilization for over two thousand years. As such it speaks from both the deontic and, at least partly, the axial perspective. It preserves the deontic sense of a *living cosmos* – through the category of *qi*, the psychophysical breath or energy that is, as Bidlack says, the “very stuff of the universe”. It also preserves the deontic assumption that the unfolding of *qi* in accordance with *Dao* – the way of nature – provides the normative template for human existence: we fulfil ourselves by aligning ourselves with the energetic or conative unfolding of *Dao*. But as a tradition that has been further elaborated under conditions of civilization, Daoism also speaks to humans as individual ends-in-themselves, and as such to the individual’s desire for self-perpetuation: it offers a prospect of immortality that is ambivalently situated between corporeal longevity and corporeal re-entry into the eternal flow of *Dao*.

To say that Daoism spans the deontic and the axial is not however to say that Daoism fully accomplishes the transition to the axial perspective. The person who is reborn in *Dao* to achieve immortality, as an authentic being or Real Human, is not necessarily, from a Daoist perspective, a paragon of righteousness in an ethical sense. As a Daoist, one does not judge the world but tries to accommodate oneself to it at least cost to oneself, in accordance with the principle of *wuwei*. This may mean walking away, extricating oneself from situations dangerous to oneself or others. Alternatively, it may mean fighting, if the cost to the self of not fighting looks to be higher than the cost of fighting. In this case however the martial techniques one selects will themselves reflect the principle of *wuwei* or accommodation, taking advantage of the strength of the opponent or harnessing other forces afforded by the environment. Many of the practices of Daoism, let us not forget, are martial practices. The aim of the Daoist practitioner is not to conform to some hypostasized external standard of goodness but rather to unblock the natural sources of self-actualization in one’s own original make-up. One’s behaviour may in consequence defy conventional standards of propriety. Emanating a lightness of being, the realized practitioner is likened to a butterfly, “showing off and doing as he or she pleases”, as Bidlack puts it, rather than exhibiting the altruism or spiritual gravitas of a saint. The Daoist immortal, glimpsed amongst rocks and trees in remote and ill-defined locations, is unlikely to come to the rescue of any mortal in distress. Beseached to return to court as sagely advisor to the emperor, such a carefree spirit is likely to cock a snoot at the messenger and hang a “gone fishing” sign on the door instead.¹⁴ However, Bidlack points out that by attaining alignment with *Dao*, the realized person, freed from deeply conditioned social imperatives to impress others and jostle with them for rank and power, in effect becomes a moral exemplar, not so much through empathy as through liberation from the mentality of oppression and competition that holds the structures of civilization in place. The effect of Daoist practice is thus ultimately ethical even if the intention is not overtly so: it dissolves the will of the practitioner to dominate and control others. Such a practitioner then becomes an example for others, helping to release them from the grip of these socially prescribed imperatives. For good measure, Daoism has expediently grafted Buddhist and Confucian precepts and prohibitions onto its institutions.

¹⁴ I am thinking here of the story in chapter 17 of the *Zhuangzi*, when court officials approach Zhuangzi, who is fishing by a river, to try to persuade him to enter the emperor’s service. Zhuangzi’s famous reply is that he would rather be a live tortoise dragging his tail in the mud than the dead ceremonial tortoise shell encrusted with jewels that he has heard is sequestered in the emperor’s temple.

In respect of its unwillingness to judge the world by a hypostatized or external moral standard, such as is divinely sanctioned in, for example, the Abrahamic religions with their “commandments” inscribed on stone tablets, Daoism seems congruent with *living cosmos*-type positions. From the latter type of position, no assumptions are made about the moral “goodness” of the cosmos beyond its generativity of life. The *living cosmos* practitioner seeks to align with the conative grain of other beings and natural systems just as the Daoist does, and at least in part for the same reason, namely that doing so is the best way to preserve the self. This is true for every “self” in the system, human and non-human alike: the strategy most conducive to self-preservation is accommodation and adaptation to the conativities of others which, in aggregate, manifest in the dynamic and ever-unfolding pattern of the whole. This is of course, in Daoist terms, the strategy of *wuwei*, and the virtue to which it gives rise is the systems-virtue of *harmony*. From the perspective of *living cosmos* panpsychism, we might call this strategy the law of *least resistance*, premised on an ascription of conativity to all things, including the living cosmos itself. (Mathews 2011) Indigenous societies call it Law, the logic according to which natural systems preserve and perpetuate themselves. The normative tenor in each of these cases is deontic rather than explicitly ethical in the axial sense: it is focussed on the conditions for the ongoing regeneration of reality rather than on explicitly ethical values such as love, compassion and benevolence.

However, there is one respect in which *living cosmos* panpsychism differs markedly from Daoism and that is on the question of the potential responsiveness of world to self. Qua “stuff of the universe”, *qi* might be psychophysical, in the sense that its nature is as akin to the mental as to the physical (though this is not how the Chinese would put it, not being burdened with as resolutely a dualist vocabulary as the West). However, this by no means implies that the *qi*-universe is any more responsive to us, in a communicative sense, than is the energy-universe of physics. Though the *qi*-universe of Daoism is alive, it is entirely impersonal. In the *living cosmos* of panpsychism however, reality is not only psychophysical but is an *ontopoetic* matrix of potential meaning that may be constellated through acts of invocation. In other words, the province of onto-poetics, so redolent of the Dreaming dimension of Aboriginal traditions, seems absent in Daoism, or at any rate from those philosophical strands of Daoism with which I am familiar. (As a temple tradition in the Chinese world however, Daoism is generally embedded in local folk religions positively bursting with deities, legendary heroes, immortals and mythical narratives that provide a rich poetic field for practices of invocation.) The poetic manifestations whereby a living cosmos responds to our acts of invocation may convey such a depth of intimate attunement to the dream-language of our own unconscious that we are drawn ineluctably into love with it – a love which is foreign to Daoism per se.

Where Bidlack then rightly emphasizes the sheer corporeality of Daoist practice, its goal being the energetic re-arrangement of the human body and its re-alignment with larger currents of *qi*, the goal of *living cosmos* panpsychism cannot be characterized in such exclusively corporeal terms. That is, while *living cosmos* panpsychism is no more dependent on texts for its insights than is Daoism, and while Daoist-type practices may be indispensable for bringing us into psychophysical attunement with the living cosmos, this attunement prepares us for a further engagement with reality which is transacted not merely in the body but in the realm of meaning. It is this communicative dimension of panpsychism that weds us to our world, that transforms our experience of impersonal environs into an experience of “country”, a local terrain that engages us in poetic exchange and that we are required not merely to refrain from unnecessarily harming – as in Daoism – but actively to cherish.

In light of this a contrast might be drawn between the goal of panpsychism and that of Daoism. Concerning the latter, Bidlack tells us that “Daoists understand the Dao as an impersonal, self-generating Way of the cosmos. Neither a God to worship nor a Truth to know, the Dao is a Way with which to harmonize. Finding one’s natural state in the Dao (*ziran*), one can easily live a long, prosperous and healthy life because all activity will flow through the person from the Dao (*wuwei*).” (Bidlack 17) In contrast, the goal of the *living cosmos* panpsychist is not only to seek energetic accommodation to reality, as the Daoist does, but also to cultivate a kind of poetic rapprochement with one’s environs that is conducive to a sense of intimacy with them. This could perhaps be characterized as a state of in-loveness with reality, faintly redolent of Spinoza’s “third kind of knowledge”, the intellectual love of “God”, which was not intellectual in the contemporary sense at all, but based on an intuitive apprehension of the relational unity of all things under the attribute of Thought. Closer to home, Australian anthropologist, Basil Sansom, captures the idea of such a goal, I think, in his account of the relationship of Aboriginal people to Dreaming: “anyone who lives a fortunate life should come to participate more and more fully in the unity of the Dreaming”. That is, with appropriate induction, “each person [can] live a life of progressive revelations”. (Sansom 2001, 2-3) As people mature, they penetrate more deeply into the interior of reality to discover the inner meaning of things: “they have the opportunity to develop as visionaries, that is, as *clever* men and women who have privileged understanding and can *see right through*, their vision penetrating *all the way* to the *inside*”. (Grieves 2009: 11) People in such a communicative relationship with reality are likely to exhibit many of the benign qualities normally associated with morality, without necessarily being motivated by explicitly ethical codes of compassion or benevolence.

In sum, I see Daoism and *living cosmos* panpsychism as predominantly deontic approaches to reality. As such, both positions are well placed to address the spiritual blindness with which modern civilization has established itself at the expense of the biosphere. At the same time however, neither can afford to ignore the developmental insights of axial thinking. There are many ways in which these axial insights might be integrated into or reconciled with their respective outlooks – Bidlack has indicated some of these ways, I have gestured here towards others. To accomplish such integration while yet retaining the crucial sense of obligation to the larger project of life on Earth should, in my opinion, remain a key challenge for both these traditions.

Non-theistic Hinduism

My first response to reading T.S. Rukmani’s paper on non-theistic Hinduism was to wish that I knew a great deal more about this topic! I know so little about Hinduism that I feel unqualified to respond to the paper, except to draw some broad parallels with themes that I explored in my own paper. And there are several such parallels. Various of the Hindu ideas that Rukmani outlined had great resonance with the approach to reality that I am here calling *living cosmos* panpsychism.

Religion and science

I am very much in sympathy with Rukmani’s conviction that, though science has vastly expanded our understanding of reality, and freed us from anthropomorphic superstitions and illusions, it cannot by itself make final sense of reality. There is more to reality than meets the empiricist eye, though this “more” is not to be cashed out in terms of anthropomorphic

gods and goddesses or other supernatural phenomena. Ideally, science and non-theistic religion, resting on different forms of experience and hence different modes of access to reality, should complement each other and point in a convergent direction. Rukmani - convincingly - finds such complementariness between science and Hindu philosophy. Since *living cosmos* panpsychism also, I think – as I argued in my position paper - complements science and points in a direction that is convergent with it, I find agreement between *living cosmos* panpsychism and Hindu philosophy in this connection.

Brahman

Another of the key points of convergence between *living cosmos* panpsychism and Hindu philosophy, as outlined by Rukmani, is with respect to the ultimate nature of reality, which in Hinduism is called Brahman. Brahman is mind-like in nature, and is sometimes characterized as an (unconditioned) “Self” (as opposed to the ordinary, conditioned “self” of human experience). (Naess 1995) Interestingly, however, as Rukmani points out, the notion of Brahman is derived from the Sanskrit notion of “expanse”, which points towards *space*, which is of course the fundamental nature of the universe at large, the primal cosmological datum. To me this suggests that space in the cosmological sense may be the “outer” manifestation of a Self which is mind-like under its “inner” aspect (though I am not at all sure whether Rukmani or other Hindu philosophers would put it this way). Brahman, from this point of view, is the psychophysical One which self-differentiates into the empirically manifest Many. Such a view is exactly congruent with *living cosmos* panpsychism (Mathews 2003) – or, more conventionally, with the “neutral monism” of Spinoza: reality is an ineffable One which manifests (to us) under two primal attributes, an inner, mental one, namely Thought, and an outer, physical one, namely Extension.¹⁵ For Spinoza, empirical particulars are modes of this ineffable One, where this, again, is exactly congruent with *living cosmos* panpsychism – and, it would seem, with Rukmani’s Hinduism. For, as she says, “[i]f there is only one reality then all that exists must share in the nature of that reality or, even better, it must be that reality”. (p. 6)

Dharma

Dharma, as I understand it, is immanent in Brahman, and is a normative law that, far from being handed down externally from on high, becomes self-evident as soon as one grasps the nature of reality – the internal relatedness of all beings or the implicatedness of the Many in the One. Brahman, as Rukmani says, maintains the universe in a teleological way. As such, Dharma is a normative law that extends not only to our fellow humans but to all beings. “The Upaniṣad makes the point that one’s behaviour is to be correct not only towards other fellow human beings but also towards animals, beasts, birds and ants.” The immanence of this law, together with its more-than-human extension, suggests that it is deontic in origin, dating back, like Dao, to early indigenous origins – where this is consistent with the extreme antiquity of Hindu thought. Such an intimation of deontic origins is confirmed when Rukmani remarks that a “holistic understanding of shared reality must be used to develop a respect for all that inhabits the earth without being arrogant about the place of the human species in the world. Each and every thing serves a purpose in the maintenance of an overall balance, and therefore our purpose is also to develop a sense of respect for all that exists. (p 19)

¹⁵ The term, neutral monism, is of course not Spinoza’s, but Bertrand Russell’s, but it can be considered as applying to Spinoza’s monist but dual-aspect view of substance.

However, dharma is also articulated in decidedly axial terms: “[b]uilt into [Dharma] is an ethics of compassion and sympathy for all that inhabits the world”. Another interpreter cited by Rukmani formulates Dharma in classically axial terms: “one should desire for others what one desires for oneself and one should not do to others that which is unpleasant to oneself”. The delightful examples that Rukmani offers of Dharma practice – bowing down to mother earth and asking forgiveness before stepping off the bed each morning; putting out food for animals, birds and even ants – link Dharma strongly to *ahimsa* or non-violence rather than to a deontic principle like Dreaming Law. Dreaming Law is basically ecological rather than non-violent in its import, which is to say that it is dedicated to maintaining the conditions for the regeneration of life, where this involves acceptance of a limited role for death and violence (in, for example, the form of predation) rather than an unqualified adherence to non-violence. Perhaps this apparent blending of deontic and axial perspectives in Hindu interpretations of Dharma is simply a natural result of the long and variegated evolution of Hindu thought through millennia of changing forms of social organization, from nomadic pastoralism with its roots in hunter-gatherer societies to earlier and later forms of civilization. Tensions however do exist between the deontic and axial perspectives, and Hinduism, like *living cosmos* panpsychism, needs to address them.

A point of difference: the purpose of existence

In expounding the notion of Brahman, Rukmani emphasizes the ultimate identity of Brahman with atman: “[t]he Upaniṣads ... declare Brahman to be the same as or identical with one’s inner self, i.e., *ātman*.” However, atman is not identical merely with personal or ego-consciousness but is the inner core of the self, which can only be experienced through a process of “seeing oneself as one truly is....The *ātman* is something one arrives at when all the outer trappings that cloud one’s mind, like egoism, love, hate and anger, are peeled away and one is left staring at the core of one’s being.” In other words, the inner nature of Brahman, or the One, being unconditioned and boundless, is equally the inner nature of all that is constellated in Brahman, namely the Many: all beings partake of that inner unconditioned and boundless nature. “If there is only one reality which shares in all that exists or is in consonance with what constitutes everything, one has to admit that all that exists has to have the same nature as the ultimate nature of reality itself.” To experience the inner core of the self however requires a process of mind de-conditioning which can only be achieved with the help of specific meditational techniques.

To actualize our own inner identity with Brahman and to realize the nature of Brahman in our own nature through such techniques is, Rukmani explains, the very purpose of existence from a Hindu perspective. “The purpose of existence is therefore to try to realize the nature of that reality in one’s own nature through knowledge and meditation techniques.” Such a state of self-realization is figured as liberation. “Liberation is achieved when, through correct knowledge, the *ātman* realizes its identity with Brahman.” (p 9) Rukmani is also adamant that meditation leading to experience of the identity of atman with Brahman is the *only* avenue for experiencing Brahman, since seeking Brahman outside the self will introduce a self-other dualism which will logically pre-empt any apprehension of the One. Given that direct experience of the ultimate nature of reality and one’s own part therein is presumably, under any description, transformative of one’s own existence, Rukmani seems to be saying that it is only through introspective or reflexive techniques such as meditation that we can arrive at this state of existential insight and consequent transformation.

Emphasizing meditation as a path towards realization is not at all inconsistent with the perspective of *living cosmos* panpsychism. Indeed it is highly consistent with it. Nonetheless,

I think *two* paths towards realization might be distinguished. The first of these, developed in traditions such as Hinduism and Buddhism, is, as we have seen, the “inner” or introspective path of meditation. But the second path, developed in Indigenous traditions such as those of Australian Aborigines, may be characterized as an “outer” or onto poetic path, based on invocation and poetic rapprochement with a reality within whose narrative unfolding one might thereby become enmeshed. That is to say, by embarking on a resonant story with invocational intent, one might find the world erupting into narrative manifestation around one, though doubtless also taking the original story in new, unanticipated directions. To experience such narrative enmeshment is to find oneself inside the Dreaming, so to speak, eternalized within the mythic structure of reality. To wake up “inside” the world in this way, proceeding along narrative grooves hidden in its otherwise causal grain, is to relinquish autobiography and assume instead the role of poetic collaborator in a much larger narrative. This is what I take to be the import of Basil Sansom’s remark that, in the course of their life, the person who has, through knowledge, acquired vision shifts progressively from the outside to the inside of reality, entering ever more deeply into the Dreaming. Such a person retains both a corporeal and an autobiographic identity in the outer world, but has shifted their centre of gravity to the inner world. In other words, the narrative grooves of the latter – the grooves of the Dreaming - have become their own, and in narratively losing their separate identity they have graduated into a timeless terrain of meaning that informs the manifest realm of things with its poetic potential.

To become implicated in the inner terrain of meaning in this way is not so much *liberation* from the world, as a *return* to the world, to its deepest interiority - an inscribing of oneself into its mythical texture so that one will dwell in it, inalienably, forever. Whether or not such a path remains open in the shattered, no-longer-regenerative landscapes of late industrial modernity however is debateable. It may well be that such a pathway requires the same conditions that ensure the preservation of the living cosmos.

I will not comment on other themes developed in Rukmani’s paper, except to say that I very much agree with her preference for a notion of atman over the Buddhist notion of *anatman* and for Brahman over *sunyata*. Like her, I am also uncomfortable with (a) any theistic conception of the ultimate nature of reality (including pantheism and panentheism) (b) any literal notion of reincarnation, and (c) any metaphysical notion of personal karma. The notion of karma, like that of Dharma, has affinities with the immanent Law of the deontic perspective, but the scope of the latter form of Law is ecological, not personal. Transgressions of Law will inevitably bring punitive consequences, but not necessarily for the transgressors themselves: other members of their communities, whether human and nonhuman, present or future, may be the ones to pay the price.

All in all, however, significant affinities seem to be discernible between Rukmani’s account of Hindu thought and my account of panpsychism.

Traditional Christianity

I was much more resistant to the arguments for traditional Christianity than I was to either Daoism or non-theistic Hinduism. Perhaps this is not surprising, as I was myself raised in a Christian social milieu but stopped identifying personally as Christian in early adolescence.

As we all know, those who have broken with a faith tradition are often its most irritable critics! My main philosophical objection to Christian thought – and it applies to Judaism and Islam as well as Christianity – arises out of (a) the anthropomorphism (as I perceive it) and (b) the transcendentalism of the Abrahamic conception of God.

In relation to (a), the charge of anthropomorphism, it is clear that the perfections or excellences in terms of which God's nature is defined are the same as those attributable to persons: God is wise, powerful and good. Further purely formal attributes are inferred from these personal or anthropomorphic ones: in order to be perfectly wise or omniscient, a being must be omnipresent in space as well as time; to be perfectly powerful or omnipotent, it must be absolutely free as well as omnipresent, and, according to the Ontological Argument, it must also exist necessarily.....and so on. But the formal attributes are of little spiritual or moral consequence in themselves. As Charles Taliaferro says, it is difficult to love or pray to some entity of which one can form no positive conception, and I infer here that it is the *personal* attributes that make God worthy, for the Christian, of love or worship. After all, Spinoza showed that the universe itself satisfies the purely formal definition of God: it is an infinite, indivisible, eternal and immutable, necessary and self-causing unity. (Mathews 1991) But while such formal qualities in themselves might induce awe, they are unlikely to elicit worship.

Of course, I have no objection whatever to God, and the narratives of the Old and New Testaments, as poetic currency for invocation – stories with a proven historical record of potency. From a panpsychist perspective, reality might respond communicatively to Christian, Judaic, Islamic or other religious invocations, and it might do so with great alacrity. But that is not by any means the same as saying that reality itself is captured by the definitions proffered by such religions. Reality might manifest with equal alacrity to folkloric, alchemical or shamanic invocations.

In relation to (b), the “charge” of transcendence (which would presumably not be regarded as a charge at all from the Christian perspective but rather a positive virtue of its theology), it is clear that separation of God, as Creator, from the world, as Creation, implies a withdrawal of “spiritual” – which is to say, mind-like – qualities from the world: God as spirit or mind is defined in opposition to world as mere matter. (Such a withdrawal of mind from matter might not be strictly *entailed* by the positing of a transcendent Creator: logically speaking, God as pure spirit might create a world that was not only physical but psychophysical. (Indeed, we might wonder why an omnipotent Creator would *not* create a world which was not merely physical but psychophysical: wouldn't a psychophysical Creation be “greater” than a merely physical one, and wouldn't a God who created a greater Creation be greater than a God who created a lesser one.....and so on!) But a God who created a universe which was psychophysical in the panpsychist sense would risk becoming supernumerary, since a psychophysical universe would seem in itself, as *living cosmos* panpsychism attests, to enjoy many of the formal properties of divinity.¹⁶) In any case, my objection to the hypothesis of a

¹⁶ That it would be redundant to posit a Creator God in addition to a living cosmos is evidenced by the fact that in deontic cultures organized around the idea of a living cosmos, there is rarely any idea of a transcendent Creator God. There might be creation myths depicting a pre-differentiated landscape brought to life by the eruption from within of Ancestor Beings whose actions and journeys across that landscape inscribe it with features. But these are immanent energies whose activities represent the self-actualization and self-differentiation of reality. In this sense, there are cultures which, contrary to Taliaferro's claim

transcendent or Creator God is to its dualizing implications for matter, the manifest world we inhabit. Such a hypothesis sets in train, or at the very least powerfully reinforces, all the subject/object, mind/matter, human/nature, masculine/feminine dichotomies that have dogged the Western tradition, and naturalized and legitimated all manner of oppressions, principally the oppression of “nature”. (Plumwood 1993) (This epic implication of Christianity, so abundantly borne out in the history of Western civilization, and carried over as metaphysical legacy into science, can by no means be waved aside by reference to a single environmental philosopher with a Christian background, viz Holmes Rolston.)

So much for my own key objections to Christianity. In its defence, I consider Christianity to have been a major vehicle for the ethical insights of the Axial Age, but I shall come to that point later. Meanwhile, Taliaferro enjoins us to take the classical arguments for the existence of God seriously and to this end he invites us to accompany him on a detailed examination of one of these arguments, the Ontological Argument. I doubt whether many people have ever been persuaded to accept Christianity out of deference to the Ontological Argument, but it is admittedly a tricky and intriguing argument, one which I have taught many times and touched upon occasionally in my own work. Indeed, once upon a time I wrote a doctoral thesis on the metaphysics of possibility and necessity, a topic to which the question of necessary existence is central. Rather than wrestling interminably with the Ontological Argument in its own terms however, I think it may be more productive to see it as providing an important pointer to the riddle of the alethic modalities per se, viz possibility, impossibility and necessity. Are these modalities in some sense “in the world” or are they merely “of the mind”? If we adhere resolutely to a purely analytic, basically Humean view of possibility and necessity, and eschew an ontological interpretation, then it would follow that “necessary existence” cannot figure as an attribute. That is, all relations of necessity would ultimately, from this anti-realist point of view, be basically tautological or epistemic in nature: they would arise from definitional or conceptual schemas or limitations of knowledge rather than inhering in the world itself. Modality is of course a deep and contested issue, and this is not the place to seek to resolve it, but to deal adequately with the Ontological Argument I think we probably do need to step back into this much larger frame of reference, and interrogate the idea of necessity itself.¹⁷

More effective than the Ontological Argument as a source of faith is surely the Argument from Design, which still of course enjoys currency amongst Christian conservatives in the United States, in defiance of evolutionary theory. For those who accept evolutionary theory, the Christian version of the argument has little force. However, from the perspective of positions like *living cosmos* panpsychism and nontheistic Hinduism, both of which admit of immanent forms of teleology, the argument, under some revised version not inconsistent with evolutionary theory, may still be of interest.

As an objection to the entire Abrahamic tradition, the Argument from Evil is also extremely powerful, and continues to trouble people in their lived experience of faith. Indeed, the prevalence of suffering in the world - as a result both of natural causes and of human malevolence - is a huge problem for any religious or spiritual outlook which tries to “make sense” of reality, since “making sense” of reality generally means attributing moral or

that human beings “are so constituted to naturally believe that there is a God” (p. 27), do not posit a God.

¹⁷ For an introduction to the epistemology of modal logic, see Vaidya 2007.

teleological meaning to it rather than acquiescing in brute causality.¹⁸ In this sense the prevalence of suffering in the world is as much a problem for *living cosmos* panpsychism as it is for theistic traditions.

Taliaferro's defence of Christian theism in the face of the Problem of Evil is a variant of the "best of all possible worlds" argument, namely that in order to maximize the goods associated with the phenomenon of life, God devised a scheme that necessarily included pain and death. Any scheme that omitted these conditions would have yielded far less life or far fewer of the goods associated with life. And to this kind of defence, I would say, fair enough! However, there is still something troubling about the image of an omniscient and omnipotent God standing idly by while the creatures, human and nonhuman alike, that God has created writhe in extreme suffering. To my mind a pantheistic or panentheistic version of theism would offer a less disturbing scenario in this connection, since if the world is God, and all creatures are accordingly part of God, then God suffers everything that they suffer. God in this case sacrifices God's own self – just as the Christian incarnation implies – in order to give life to creatures.¹⁹

Despite my evident resistance to Christianity, I do nonetheless see it as a milestone in human development, inasmuch as it places love at the core of spiritual experience. Christianity is pre-eminently the religion of love: love for one's neighbour, for the stranger, for the outcast, for one's enemy, and above all, love of Christ and through Christ, God. In my view this is not merely the cool and selfless love that has been represented as *agape* nor even the empathic and ministering love that informs compassion, but rather the hot and quasi-erotic love that a handsome and charismatic young firebrand demanded of his followers. Not content with insisting that they love him unconditionally and unquestioningly, he also asked them to see his face in everyone, so that love-of-him could spread out in a world-illuminating blaze. It was, I think, this erotic fire, lit by Christianity in the human heart, that helped to ignite the Axial Age and facilitate the epochal shift to axial consciousness. Without such a quasi-erotic boost, universal ethics in the axial sense might never have become the world-historic milestone that it did. At the same time however, the object of such intensely personal and erotically-tinged love was inevitably individual, specifically the human individual, so that the deontic perspective, with its larger, much more diffuse feeling for all beings and for the living cosmos at large, was definitively burnt away.

Traditional Judaism

Just as I found myself resistant to the arguments for Christianity, so too do I find myself resistant overall to the philosophical claims of Judaism, however ingeniously argued – as they

¹⁸ I am baffled by Taliaferro's remark on p.3 that the Problem of Evil is not really a problem for Christianity because evil is *supposed* to be a problem. Taliaferro thinks that it is a failure of secular determinism/materialism/atheism that it does *not* perceive evil as a problem. But surely to claim this is to elide two different discursive contexts. Evil is a problem for *us*, as humans, but it is not a problem for secular determinism, as a *theory*, because secular determinism does not lead us to expect an absence of evil. Whatever happens – whether good or bad in its effects for us – was determined by the initial conditions of the universe. End of story. Christian theism, on the other hand, emphasizes the goodness of God, where this does set up an expectation of the absence of evil in the world – an expectation which is conspicuously not met.

¹⁹ For a panpsychist version of this argument, that compares the problem of suffering from a panpsychist point of view with the same problem from a Christian point of view, see Mathews 2003, chapter 5.

certainly are by Jerome Gellman. My main philosophical reservations with regard to Judaism are the same as my reservations regarding Christianity: they pertain to the anthropomorphic and transcendent nature of the Abrahamic God (where by “transcendent” here I mean that God is seen as separate from and higher than Creation rather than immanent in it). But since these are not points specifically addressed by Gellman, I shall not repeat my reflections on them but rather record my reactions to the religious beliefs he enumerates as core to his tradition.

Firstly, Gellman states that he is a realist concerning the existence of God, even though neither God’s nature nor God’s existence is empirically accessible: “God is inside a dark cloud of unknowing”. (Ah, whatever my reservations about the philosophical aspects of Judaism, I do adore the sacred language of the Old Testament and admit how deeply it informs my own writing, as it does that of so many other post-Christian authors!) Though “clouds and thick darkness surround God”, God is, Gellman thinks, indirectly knowable. To show this, Gellman uses the analogy of the computer: from what is on the outside of the computer – the text and images visible on the screen – one could never, without a knowledge of programming language, deduce what is inside it – the chip and hard drive inscribed with an arcane computer program. This does not mean however that the internal program does not thoroughly determine the text and images visible from the outside. So it is, on a more metaphysical level, Gellman argues, with God.

Although I have no specific objection to this argument, there is, it has to be said, a certain strangeness to it, inasmuch as it is the kind of argument that is usually used reductively, to explain away metaphysics, rather than transcendentally, to validate metaphysics. That is to say, it is the kind of argument that is used to establish a physicalist account of mind and mental phenomena: the brain is the physical mechanism, hidden to consciousness itself and utterly unlike the phenomena of mental life, that determines those phenomena, so that mental phenomena can be understood in strictly physical rather than metaphysical terms. Still, I can see no reason why such an argument should not also work in reverse, as it were, to remove empiricist objections to the existence of God.

Gellman’s second core belief is an affirmation of the notion of the Jewish people as God’s Chosen People. A very ingenious interpretation and defence of this notion is offered, but I find the thesis problematic nonetheless. All gods presumably start life as protectors or avatars of a particular people, tasked with aiding the tribe in war, despatching its enemies, securing its harvests and such like. Each god is thus the god of a particular tribe; the people of the tribe are, by parity, the people of the god in question. The Abrahamic God was posited by the tribes of Israel, to advantage them in war and sustain them through times of exile, so those tribes were, by definition, the People of God, just as the Greeks, for example, were the people of Zeus, aided in battle and adversity by him. There is nothing problematic about this special relationship between tribal gods and their own peoples until a particular tribal god is represented as universal and exclusive: as God, in other words. Then the relationship between God’s tribe of origin and all other peoples becomes distinctly awkward. If God is indeed revealed to other peoples as the God of all, then God’s relationship with the tribe of origin should surely no longer be privileged except in an historical sense. To continue to claim a “special” relationship with God is for the tribe of origin to court jealousy and hostility from all who now also claim God as theirs – and themselves as God’s. Think of an analogous situation in a family: a father “overwhelms” his firstborn with love, and insists, on pain of obliteration, that his love is returned. Other children are born into the family, and the father is much more easy-going with them, inviting them into his affections rather than co-opting them

as he did the firstborn. But he maintains an especially intense and “special” relationship with his firstborn in order that this relationship should serve as an example of paternal love to the others. If the others do aspire to their father’s love however, will they not feel like second class children relative to the firstborn, and might they not feel jealous of the firstborn and antagonistic to him, especially if he parades his special status in front of them? Such a model of family life may match certain patriarchal cultures in which those who are firstborn do enjoy privileges relative to younger siblings, but it is surely not a model that would sit comfortably in contemporary democratic societies.

I found Gellman’s account of his third core belief, pertaining to the existence and nature of revelation, interesting, but have no comment to add to it.

However, with respect to Gellman’s fourth belief - that the purpose of existence is to become like God - I have to confess to a very different outlook. To become like God is, in Gellman’s sense, to aspire to perfect goodness, in what I would call an axial sense - it involves striving as far as is humanly possible to serve the interests not of self but of others. This goal might be characterized as one belonging to the perfectability tradition that runs through many religions, not only Judaism but certain Eastern religions as well, such as Buddhism. I have strong views about this tradition, and this is not the place to expatiate upon them, except perhaps to say that my thinking is here influenced, once again, by Indigenous thought - specifically in this case by Aboriginal philosopher, Mary Graham.

In her profound reflections on the contrast between the respective outlooks of non-Indigenous and Indigenous Australians (“whitefellas” or Westerners versus “blackfellas” or Aborigines), Mary Graham comments on the great burdens that whitefellas lay upon their own shoulders. (Graham 1993) She observes how whitefellas, cut loose from land, homeplace, Earth, by their philosophical tradition – or perhaps by philosophy itself as the essence of Western tradition - seize on ideas, ideologies, “isms”, as their lifelines to belonging. Their sails become full, we might say, with now this idea or “ism”, now that idea or “ism”. Ideas become “isms” when they substitute for reality as the matrix of our identity. Westerners are never more Western (which is to say, deracinated), Mary Graham observes wryly, than when they are eschewing the West and embracing some alternative cultural, religious or political “ism” – Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Marxism, even environmentalism. Since ideas are *just* ideas, and not real - land or earth alone being real - whitefellas find themselves tossed about on an ever-shifting ocean of abstractions, pulled now in one direction, now in another, stretched towards ideal limits well beyond their actual reach. These are the burdens whitefellas lay upon their shoulders – burdens born of idealities that pour forth from alienated minds to fill the existential void created by self-imposed exile from the earth community. To Mary Graham’s observations I would add the reflection that, as products of illusion, our ideals may not only be unrealistic; they might also, more worryingly, clothe the ambitions and hungers of a self no longer anchored in the real. The ambitions and hungers of a self no longer contained, nor filled up and given substance, by the real can of course as readily lead to ruthless appropriation as to high-minded aspiration. The burdens Westerners lay on their own shoulders can, from this point of view, express the same impulse that lies behind the burdens they lay on the shoulders of others.

In contrast to the idealist outlook of the whitefella, Mary Graham describes Aboriginal people’s perception of themselves as “poorfellas”. Everyone is just a poorfella, that is, a fallible individual set down in a difficult world that promises neither fulfilment nor salvation. Though their lives are fenced around with deontic obligations to kin and country, these

obligations are specific, finite and impersonal, not internalized as personal strivings for perfection. Poorfellas muddle through, snatching bits of happiness where they can, not expecting too much either of themselves or others, experiencing fellow feeling for all beings precisely on account of their shared fallibility and vulnerability. Life is a one-shot thing – there are no rewards or punishments in the hereafter; there is no hereafter. As another Aboriginal commentator, Vicki Grieves, puts it, “Aboriginal Australian Spirituality has been described as embodying a reverence for life *as it is* – it does not promise a life after death, salvation, nirvana or similar that is offered by other religions. For Aboriginal people, this is as good as it gets. Life is as it is, a mixture of good and bad, of suffering and joy, and it is celebrated as sacred. Living itself is religion.” (Grieves 2009:11) We might infer that the reason poorfellas are relatively immune to the temptations of grandiosity – which is how the ambitious “isms” of the whitefella may be viewed from the outside – is that their existence is already inscribed inalienably in the radiant and everlasting theatre of the living cosmos. Poorfellas need not stretch themselves to unnatural individual heights because they are already assured, by birthright, of a place in the actual cosmos.

There is much more I could say on this matter of perfectability but I hope that these remarks will provide at least a taste of my alternative outlook. Hugely important as I think axial consciousness is, I suspect that any attempt to take it to its logical conclusion – in the sense of the perfectability of the human – runs the risk of back-firing.

With my strong reservations about the idea of perfectability, it was unlikely that I would subscribe to Gellman’s fifth proposition, with its promise of universal redemption, though by way of it Gellman offers an ingenious solution to the problem of evil. As I have already remarked, life is, for me - following Mary Graham - a one-shot thing, and our job, as mortals, is to make the best of the creaturely condition that we share with other animal species. As animals, particularly as territorial primate predators, we have aggressive, competitive and sometimes cruel impulses. There is nothing “fallen” about this state of affairs however; it is just part of the biological reality of who and what we are. The only attribute that sets us apart from many other animal species is the degree of our cognitive capacity for reflexivity (aided by language). Through this capacity to reflect on our experience – and, by implication, the experience of others - we can, to a limited extent, free ourselves from our (genetically and socially) conditioned nature and awaken to the possibility of alternative, more thoughtful ways of living. Both the deontic and axial perspectives are products of this cognitive capacity for reflexivity. Failure to exercise reflexivity results in our remaining captive to our primate nature. But this is surely a failure of education or enculturation rather than a personal failure. Reflexivity is so manifestly key to our development as human beings that anyone who understood its significance would seize whatever opportunities for cultivating it were available to them. That many people in contemporary societies display little reflexivity in their behaviour, and do remain captive to their conditioned nature, demonstrates a need not for redemption but for widespread remedial training in reflexive thought – as much by meditational exercises as by discursive ones. Whatever mayhem in society unreflexive individuals may cause, however much they might sin against cosmos and earth-kin, they are always, in my view, already in such a hell of solipsism and such a twilight of unconsciousness that no-one, given the option of reflexivity, would ever wittingly refuse it. Rather than owing us anything, such individuals are themselves owed. Of course we have to restrain individuals whose lack of reflexivity leads to dangerous behaviour, but our obligation, as societies, is surely to cultivate in them the capacity to choose, while always recognizing that reflexivity is a relative affair, its results inevitably limited. We remain,

whatever the circumstances, poorfellas, from whom it would be a mistake to expect too much strain, stretching and striving, let alone perfectability!

Zoroastrianism

As I have had almost no previous contact with Zoroastrianism I am grateful to Farrokh Vajifdar for such a thorough and scholarly account of it. I must confess however that I feel quite unqualified to comment on this much less well-known tradition. That it is a precursor to Judaism seems clear: it is emphatically monotheistic, though perhaps with more panentheistic tendencies than Judaism. Its roots in “the soil” are still discernible – with its tribute to the kine-soul and commitment to enlightened practices of agriculture and animal husbandry – but this is an *agrarian* soil, already under human stewardship. It is not the self-replenishing ecological cosmos of the hunter-gather, whose shamanic traditions are roundly repudiated by Zarathushtra. As an agrarian religion, it entrains a clearly proto-axial ethic, with a strong emphasis on a reified notion of the ethical or Good, counterposed to an equally reified notion of Evil. In this sense the “ascent” from the ecological reality of earth to a realm of intellectual abstractions, which would reach its apogee in Plato’s Theory of Forms,²⁰ has already begun in Zoroastrianism, and it gives rise, unsurprisingly, to the moral extremism and longing for perfectability that I identified earlier as an offshoot of deracination. This deracination, or loss of a sense of belonging inalienably and internally, so to speak, to the earth-community, is also reflected in the proselytising aspirations of Zarathushtra: bereft of belonging, one seeks to create a “family” from scratch through recruiting to a new idea or “ism”. On the other hand, the ascent is apparently tempered, in Zoroastrianism, by close attention to the needs of the human body and by Zarathustra’s insistence that spiritual health is inextricable from physical health. In this respect, affinities with the Daoist emphasis on the crucial role of the body in the good life are discernible.

As far as I can tell, these are the main philosophical currents within Zoroastrianism, and as I have already commented on them under earlier headings, and feel unqualified to comment on them in a specifically Zoroastrian context, I shall refrain from further comment here.

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²⁰ For an interesting analysis of the “ascent” trajectory in major religions, see Berman 1990.

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CHAPTER 13

Second Responses

Thanks to my colleagues in this project for the wonderfully diverse and insightful comments on my first paper. I shall try to respond to all comments, though in inevitably somewhat abbreviated form.

Bidlack

The conversation with Daoism is a particularly exciting one for me because my understanding of panpsychism, while not exactly coincident with Daoism, is deeply informed with it.

Bidlack: “Communicative Panpsychism argues for a unity of the cosmos as a psychic field, but does the psychic field imply psychic activity? If so, what is the nature of that activity? The cosmic image painted by communicative Panpsychism is of a much more static universe than that understood by Daoists. The Dao is constantly active, generating, and changing. The aim of Daoists is to perceive that cosmic movement, find one’s place in it, and move with it.”

Freya: The *living cosmos* is conceived in dynamic, energetic terms, just like the Daoist universe, where energy is, like *qi*, understood in psychophysical terms. It is also self-realizing in exactly the same way as the Daoist universe. Energetic alignment with the larger unfolding of that universe is as much the goal of the practitioner of *living cosmos* panpsychism as it is of the Daoist practitioner.

Bidlack: “The monistic worldview of Daoists emphasises that even the particular choices each person makes have repercussions throughout the entire universe. Thus, a person’s religious practice will benefit not just the individual and his or her immediate world, but the entire cosmos.”

Freya: It is certainly the case that panpsychism offers a promising framework for the idea that spiritual cultivation can be efficacious in this sense. The field-like nature of consciousness per se is such that different experiences or occurrences within consciousness are not segregated from one another but interpermeate in a global way. When individual consciousnesses, or selves, are configured within a larger field of consciousness, as they are

from the perspective of cosmological panpsychism, it is not unreasonable to expect that strong self-transcending effects generated within one individual consciousness or self, as a result of spiritual cultivation, may have non-local effects across the global field, despite the fact that individual consciousnesses or selves are relatively self-individuating and in that sense self-insulating from the larger field. The nature of spiritual practice, being directed towards self-transcendence or the reintegration of self with cosmos, may be precisely the kind of experience that crosses the boundaries of self-individuation and “bends” the cosmic field in non-local ways.

That said, however, this question of the efficacy of spiritual practice in benefitting the cosmos at large remains for me an open one. I have not personally encountered the kind of evidence that would definitely confirm it. What I can say with confidence is that practitioners of *living cosmos* panpsychism endeavour to sustain the living cosmos by acting in accordance with Law, as outlined in my second presentation, and that they do so on the understanding that transgression contributes to the unravelling of cosmos. But Law is, at least in the first instance, understood in ecological terms: we sustain the cosmos by acting in ways that preserve the conditions for the ongoing generativity of life. Ecological action, emanating from onto poetic attunement to the metaphysics of life, is integral to our spiritual practice. Whether or not meditative practices - such as taiji or neidan (internal alchemy) – necessarily emanate in ecological action, I cannot say. Whether or not they benefit the cosmos in and of themselves, independently of any ecological action to which they may or may not give rise, is, as I mentioned above, for me an open question. Personally I find Daoist rituals of cosmic renewal extremely appealing, chiming as they do with Aboriginal increase ceremonies and the cosmic rites of other Indigenous peoples²¹, but on the question of whether or not such rituals are efficacious in their own right – for example, in the sense of healing the biosphere – I am not at this point in a position to judge on behalf of panpsychism.

Bidlack: “This puts the Daoist in the position to harmonise his or her personal *qi* with the Dao for the benefit of the harmony of all things. The power of onto poetics lies in its ability to enhance the communication between practitioners and their environment; however, it does not emphasise the efficacy of the practice into the cosmos. As Mathews writes: “Indeed, it may not trouble itself with questions of metaphysics at all, but may restrict its focus to the strictly performative, exploring invocation and the experiences of communication that accompany it purely as practice.” From the Daoist point of view, this may be due to an exaggerated importance of the human in the universe. According to onto poetics, there is a “meaningful exchange between self and world”: the world gives meaning to the practitioner

²¹ See, for example, Michael R. Saso, *Taoism and the Rite of Cosmic Renewal*, 2nd ed, Washington State University Press, Pullman, 1990. Also Martin Palmer, *The Elements of Taoism*, Element, Shaftesbury Dorset, 1991. According to Palmer, the main function of contemporary Taoist priests is “that of ensuring the continued cycle of cosmic renewal liturgies. These try to make sure that the balance of yin and yang, the action between Heaven, Earth and Humanity, and the eternal struggle between order and chaos are kept going along the lines of the Way.....these liturgies carry a basic message about the relationship between human beings and the rest of creation, both spiritual and material. The message is that the role we have to play is that of tending the balance and maintaining the harmony. If we fail to do this, then chaos and disorder break out on the Earth, and the world as we know it will collapse. It is within these vast, cosmic, liturgical and ritualistic roles that Humanity finds its true destiny according to Taoism.” P. 125-126

See also J. Collier, *On the Gleaming Way: Navajos, Eastern Pueblos, Zunis, Hopis, Apaches and their Land*, Sage Books, Denver, 1949, for a luminous account of Native American rites of cosmic renewal.

and the practitioner gives meaning to the world. This would suggest that the world is meaningless without the human. By extension, the human becomes the centre and focus of the universe.”

Freya: No, no, no!! This is the very opposite of what it was my intention to convey! In response to our invocations, the world may arrange itself in specific narrative or poetic manifestations. In that sense, our invocations call forth meanings. But this is only possible because the world is already a dynamic, energetic, unfolding terrain of self-meaning. Its responses to our invocations, if they occur, offer narrative templates for our lives – narrative grooves in the texture of reality into which we can slip. True, if reality is a terrain of self-meaning then its moments of rapprochement with us presumably also have some significance for its own process of self-actualization or unfolding, but the world is unquestionably, from the viewpoint of *living cosmos* panpsychism, prior: it is from the depths of its self-meaning that pathways of meaning open up to us, if we are energetically aligned with reality. In saying that practitioners of panpsychism may not trouble themselves with metaphysics but may engage directly in communicative exchange with reality, I meant that they may not trouble themselves with *theory*, with theoretical defences of panpsychism. They might be led to panpsychism through their own experiences of communicative exchange rather than through argument.

Bidlack: “People are an expression of the Dao, but they are not needed. Should people choose to live in disharmony with the Dao, they will suffer, die, and return to the Dao. Should all of humanity do the same and humankind becomes extinct, the Dao and the rest of the universe will continue, without humans. In other words, the perception of an environmental crisis does not motivate Daoist responses to the cosmos. The crisis is a crisis for people, but not for the environment. The environment does not need saving.”

Freya: This is a point of real difference between panpsychism, as I am presenting it here, and at least some readings of Daoism. *Living cosmos* panpsychism is, as I explained in my second presentation and mentioned above, basically deontic in its orientation: there is a Law which all beings must follow if the generativity of life – or at any rate of life on Earth – is to be maintained. Like Dao, this Law prescribes a way of accommodation to the conativities of all things. But as reflexive beings, we humans are free to follow this Law or not. Reflexivity releases us from the grip of conditioning – genetic, environmental and cultural – and enables us to choose our own path. If we choose not to follow Law, conditions for the ongoing generativity of life may unravel, and life on Earth may decline or even perish: runaway climate change, for instance, might, as James Lovelock argues in *The Revenge of Gaia* (2006), cause the oceans to boil away, rendering the planet uninhabitable for life of any kind. Yes, life elsewhere in the universe, if it exists (and there is every probability that it does), will continue to evolve, and the extinction of life on Earth may be seen as nothing more than a local evolutionary dead end due to the emergence of an unfortunate mutation (us). We can indeed draw a certain thin comfort from this larger perspective: the life of the living cosmos may not end with the extinction of life on our own planet. But for humanity, life on Earth is the process through which Dao reveals itself. The biosphere is our theatre of Dao, and yes, we can harm it. We are harming it. Perhaps we can totally destroy it. The environmental crisis is thus not merely a threat to human survival; it is also a spiritual crisis. The living cosmos, at least insofar as it manifests itself to us, can unravel.

Some readings of Daoism do emphasize its ecological affinities and its custodial

implications.²² It is of course important to remember too that in the days of Laozi and Zhuangzi there was no awareness of the potential threat of humankind to nature. Nature seemed eternal, and there was little distinction between nature as we find it here on Earth and nature as it is found in the cosmos. Nor was the cosmos understood in those early days as so vastly exceeding the earth in scale: Earth and cosmos were relatively indistinguishable. So although of course Daoism cannot be anachronistically reduced to an early anticipation of environmentalism, the norms that arise from the affinity with nature that is so fundamental to its outlook may need to be adjusted in light of the radically altered environmental conditions of today.

Bidlack: “Mathews . . . refers to Panpsychism as “better described as post-religious than religious, though it is by no means secular.” Perhaps she could elaborate. As it is, she appears to be participating in the very activity she critiques: essentialism. When she writes of religion here and elsewhere and its presuppositions, she uses the term to suggest an essentialist vision of religion that smacks of Christianity. Thus she needs to refer to her tradition as ‘post-religious’, but does she mean ‘post-Christian’?”

Freya: I will not try to arbitrate on whether or not *living cosmos* panpsychism is a religion. I see it as a metaphysics with normative implications and an attendant practice, that of onto-poetics. I have been asked to present it here in the context of religion. When I described it as post-religious, I was thinking of the fact that it is not bound by any prescribed religious narrative or scriptural canon, and that furthermore it purports to explain different religious experiences in terms of an underlying metaphysical hypothesis – that of a psychoactive universe that can respond to different invocations in the respective poetic idioms of each. If this is not enough to set panpsychism apart from traditional religions, then I defer. As I have mentioned, I see the matter as inherently ambiguous. It is an ambiguity moreover that attaches to Daoism itself, for Daoism too may be defined through practices rather than through prescribed narratives or scriptures. A distinction has traditionally been drawn between philosophical Daoism and religious Daoism, where under its philosophical aspect Daoism consists exclusively of philosophical ideas and the modalities to which those ideas give rise (together with the practices whereby such modalities may be cultivated by practitioners), while under its religious aspect Daoism also includes a whole level of folk religion, instantiated in all manner of gods, immortals and mythical creatures of the type generally found in Daoist temples.²³ This folk dimension of Daoism is highly localized – different immortals and creatures figure in different locations, and the local narratives from which they are derived serve as pre-eminent vehicles of invocation.

A better way of positioning panpsychism relative to religion might be as a meta-stance rather than a post-stance. It is a meta-stance inasmuch as it explains how the differing and sometimes conflicting metaphysical claims of different religions can all be true: different invocations elicit responses from reality that match the poetic idiom of each invocation. But in positioning panpsychism as a meta-stance it must be remembered that its explanatory

²² See, for example, a Declaration by the Chinese Daoist Association on Global Ecology in N. J. Girardot, James Miller and Liu Xiaogan, *Daoism and Ecology: Ways Within a Cosmic Landscape* (Girardot 2001), Harvard University Centre for the Study of World Religions, Cambridge, MA.

²³ This distinction between philosophical Daoism and religious Daoism has been vigorously critiqued by recent scholars. See, for instance, Kirkland 2004.

As an outsider to these scholarly controversies however, I have to say that the distinction looks like a useful one to me, comparing what one finds in many Daoist temples in China with what finds in texts such as those of *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*.

scope is not limited to religion: panpsychism may function as a meta-stance in relation to other spirit phenomena as well. It can explain both the occurrence and the variability of occult phenomena generally.

Bidlack: “Does Panpsychism have such a clear understanding of the world to claim that it best suits the needs of the twenty-first century? Perhaps it does if Panpsychists draw up the boundaries of the discussion as Mathews has done. Such boundaries may lead to Panpsychism as being the only rational religious choice for the twenty-first century. As she concludes after laying the format for interreligious conversation:

In all these ways, then, Panpsychism seems well adapted to the cultural needs and conditions of the twenty-first century – where this no doubt accounts for its current rise, not only as a philosophical theory but as a spiritual orientation and undercurrent of the zeitgeist in popular western culture.

Could one replace ‘zeitgeist in popular western culture’ with ‘hegemony of popular western culture’? On the one hand, Panpsychism is “by no means secular”, but does it try too hard to fit itself within a rational framework such that it needs to justify itself to western science? Is that the only science? Daoist arts and Chinese medicine have grown together over the centuries to develop a method of correlation that confounds scientific study by modern, western methods. Nonetheless, the efficacy of Daoist-influenced arts like *qi gong*, *taiji quan*, and acupuncture are so well documented that some health insurance plans cover them.

The larger overarching issue here is as follows: missing from the list of requirements for interreligious conversation is truth, the traditional end of philosophical inquiry. Is Panpsychism true, or does it meet contemporary needs only to fade away as cultural needs change? Does Panpsychism view truth as the end of interreligious conversation? If not, what is the intended end?”

Freya: I think our task as philosophers is indeed emphatically to try to understand the needs of the twenty-first century. If this is not the task of philosophers, whose task is it? Journalists, media pundits, bloggers, celebrities - people with little awareness of the history of ideas nor hence of the deeply philosophical underpinnings of the mind-set of modernity? Let us take our responsibility as philosophers, as custodians of a two and a half thousand year old tradition that is the very foundation of Western civilization, seriously, secure in the knowledge that if our own answers to the questions of the twenty-first century do not stand up to scrutiny, our colleagues will obligingly cut them down. As philosophers, we need not see this engagement as presumptuous, but rather as mandatory, as part of our responsibility to contribute to the conversation of our times.

Of course, our goal as philosophers is truth, which is why on the very first page of my first presentation I raised the question of relativism, and argued that a facile relativism with respect to religious ontologies is unsatisfactory. Those ontologies surely must be philosophically interrogated, and this interrogation does I think require accountability to science. Science is no longer merely a Western construct, a cultural narrative on all fours, so to speak, with other cultural narratives. While science indeed happened to originate in the West, it has proven readily transferrable to other cultures. It holds up in all societies, regardless of local epistemologies and cultural narratives: aeroplanes fly just as well for Indians, Inuit and Australian Aborigines as they do for Westerners; mobile phones work as well in Mongolia as they do in the USA; advanced military weapons work just as well in the hands of radical opponents of modernity as they do in the hands of defenders of the West.

People who truly rejected science, as a contingent cultural narrative, would be afraid to step on planes, would entrust their messages to pigeons rather than email and would deploy spears rather than guided missiles in warfare. To the extent that societies willingly adopt science-based technologies, they signal their faith in science itself. Religious beliefs, by contrast, are not transferable in like manner. The Christian cannot point to experiences in the life of the atheist that incontrovertibly demonstrate that God created the world in the same way that the daily experiences of people right across the spectrum of modern societies demonstrate the truth of the laws of physics.

Contemporary societies, in other words, almost universally sign up to science, not in deference to Western hegemony but because science is reliably efficacious. This is not to say that science is necessarily the only form of knowledge with such demonstrable universality. If Traditional Chinese Medicine turns out to be as efficacious for people generally as it apparently is for the Chinese, then its model of reality should also be accepted as having universal validity. In this case, religions will also need to be squared with this model, and this model itself will need to be squared with science.

In asking of religion that it demonstrate its consistency with science, I am not of course for a moment assuming that science offers an exhaustive account of reality. There are, in my view, ways of accessing reality that are not empiricist and do not conform to scientific method. These may include, while not necessarily being exhausted by, religious methods. When we adopt such alternative modes of access, we may see things or experience things that could never be seen or experienced through a scientific lens. However, it remains incumbent on us to explain how such extra-empirical experiences and the phenomena they reveal are possible in a world that is otherwise so exhaustively amenable to scientific description. Such explanation is, I think, a task for philosophy, perhaps specifically for metaphysics.

As to my speaking of panpsychism as an undercurrent of the zeitgeist of popular culture in the West, I was referring precisely to the West. I was not suggesting that panpsychism is an undercurrent of the zeitgeist of popular culture throughout the world. I do not think the latter statement would be true at all. Clearly it would not be true in predominantly Muslim societies or in societies gripped by a zealous enthusiasm for modernization, such as China. But I think in Western societies of a predominantly secular outlook, such as Australia, many people, especially the young, will say that although they have no religion, they find spiritual nourishment and solace in nature. While this sentiment need not necessarily equate with a commitment to panpsychism, it certainly can do so, and it does powerfully suggest a view of nature that transcends reductive materialism.

More importantly, the panpsychist tenor of the zeitgeist of the West is presumably a result of the fact that in the twenty-first century we are witnessing the ecological consequences of the anthropocentric mind-set that has shaped both our science and our religions. These consequences are revealing blind spots in our traditions of thought. They are pointing to tragic errors in these traditions. Younger people are acutely aware of these consequences as they are the ones who will have to negotiate a future unimaginably impoverished by them, and they are consequently looking for an orientation to the world – whether religious, spiritual or just philosophical - which does not perpetuate these consequences.

Rukmani

Rather than engaging with Rukmani's comments in question-and-answer form, I would like to clarify my intended meaning on certain points Rukmani raises and then respond to several

of her objections.

Rukmani quotes me as saying that any philosophy of religion must rest on an “experimental, try-it-and-see dimension” rather than a rational base. But I did not intend to deny that religions need a rational base. My view is rather that while religions are indeed required to be fully answerable to reason, they should also be experientially testable by prospective followers so that their doctrines do not harden into dogma. So, for example, with regard to the relation between panpsychism and onto-poetics, I am not suggesting that we fall back on the evidence of onto-poetics as a practice because we cannot provide a philosophical or theoretical basis for panpsychism. I think panpsychism can be readily theorized – the history of Western philosophy alone is full of versions of panpsychism. In that sense panpsychism is eminently rational. However, philosophy need not be our only reason-to-believe in panpsychism. We can put panpsychism to the test by way of practices of engagement with a psychoactive and communicative cosmos. Practices of engagement – or at any rate those envisaged under the description of onto-poetics – will necessarily be couched in a poetic or narrative vocabulary rather than in discursive terms since the “language” of the world itself is necessarily concrete or poetic. The poetics of our invocations will accordingly carry the imprint of our various cultures-of-origin. Such practices of engagement can “verify” panpsychism, to the extent that they are successful in eliciting a response from the world, while also putting the flesh of immediacy, cultural particularity and poetics on the bare bones of a strictly philosophical theory. In these ways panpsychism is saved from the hazards of reductionism, literalism and dogmatism.

Another small clarification is needed inasmuch as Rukmani says that I include analytical panpsychism and animistic panpsychism under the heading of communicative panpsychism, whereas in fact I intend to contrast these two forms of panpsychism with communicative panpsychism. From the viewpoint of analytical panpsychism, entities ascribed with mentality, such as atoms and molecules, are in no way assumed to stand in any kind of communicative relation to us. In the context of animist panpsychism, entities ascribed with mentality, such as rocks, plants and animals, may or may not respond to human overtures, but whether or not they do so is incidental to the main point of this animist outlook. The main point is that entities should be accommodated and treated with respect and consideration. By contrast, it is the potential communicativity of the cosmos at large under the *living cosmos* version of panpsychism that renders this position one that arguably has spiritual significance: not only does it disclose a new horizon of moral responsibility, as animistic panpsychism does; it also appoints for us new pathways of meaning in our lives.

In this connection, please let me refer again to the following passage in my first presentation: “to see the world as a terrain of subjects rather than as a manifold of mere objects is indeed to see it as a terrain that matters to itself and is therefore of ethical and not merely instrumental significance. But to say of the world that it has *spiritual* significance may be to imply something larger; it may be to imply that this world can appoint meaning and normative direction for *us*—for our lives. From this point of view, our role in a spiritual scenario is not merely to exercise moral restraint in relation to things that matter but [also] actively to find our place in a larger order that magnetizes our existence with its normative meaning. In order for panpsychism to afford a spiritual standpoint in this sense, then, it would have to offer the promise of engagement with a world that is responsive to our address. It is by no means the case that all forms of panpsychism satisfy this requirement. Our environment may be represented in panpsychist terms, as imbued with its own forms of agency, purpose or intelligence, without this implying that this environment is responsive to communicative

overtures on our part. Rivers and forests and mountains may be regarded as having their own business, so to speak, which it is our custodial responsibility not to disturb, but this business may not otherwise be *our* business.” p 6

What I wished to convey in this passage was that it is quite possible for us to subscribe to some version of panpsychism without this constituting a spiritual outlook. The more common forms of panpsychism impute subjectivity to individuals but not to the cosmos as a whole. In those forms of panpsychism which I have dubbed animistic, all living things and all components of living environments, such as rocks and rivers, are attributed with subjectivity, where this is taken to entail ethical responsibility towards them on our part: as subjects in their own right, they are not mere means to ends of ours but ends in themselves. While such forms of panpsychism greatly expand the circle of moral significance – since all components of the natural environment now qualify as morally considerable - this expanded moral universe may nevertheless not appoint for us a spiritual path, if by spiritual path we mean a path of meaning dictated by a larger normative order. An ethic restrains us from impinging on others but a spiritual outlook opens up paths of meaning in our lives. So while animistic panpsychism provides a good foundation for environmental ethics, it may not provide a spiritual platform. *Living cosmos* panpsychism, on the other hand, at least as I have described it, may do so. I hasten to add that animistic panpsychism and *living cosmos* panpsychism are in no way mutually exclusive, at least in their ethical implications. From the perspective of *living cosmos* panpsychism, all living things – all particulars that qualify as self-realizing systems or selves – are properly regarded as ends in themselves, individually entitled to moral consideration. But the cosmos as a whole is also, from this perspective, alive with a life of its own, and is moreover capable of responding meaningfully to our invocations. It is on account of this latter possibility that *living cosmos* panpsychism can qualify as a form of spirituality in addition to prescribing an environmental ethic.

I would agree with Rukmani’s objection that animistic panpsychism might seem self-serving inasmuch as it requires that one negotiate “who and what one eats according to the necessities and availabilities of circumstance”, but I would repeat that animistic panpsychism is not the position I am defending in my presentation, though I am sympathetic to it to the extent that it is congruent with *living cosmos* panpsychism, as I have explained above. Moreover, the claim that animistic panpsychism requires one, as Graham Harvey puts it, to negotiate “who and what one eats according to the necessities and availabilities of circumstance”(Harvey 2009: website), might not be as self-serving as it sounds: animism originated in hunter-gatherer societies in which there might have been no alternative to meat-eating. When negotiation of who eats whom is undertaken in the context of agricultural or industrial societies however, it might by no means condone meat-eating.

Finally, to the point that it would take a lot more persuasion than an onto-poetic experience before panpsychism would be adopted by the majority of people as a form of religious practice, I would emphasize again the need for a rational foundation for a panpsychist outlook. It must be clear to the public that panpsychism is a rigorously defensible position with a long philosophical – and, as Rukmani indicates, religious – lineage, rather than a whacky idea on the lunatic fringe, before most people would be willing to try it on experientially for spiritual size.

Taliaferro

Taliaferro asks how panpsychism (minus theism) “is able to account for why there is a contingent cosmos. In what ways might it do so? In what meaningful way can consciousness be attributed to the cosmos or other apparent non-conscious realities? If we think of the cosmos as a massive self, could this lead to overshadowing the reality of individuals, thus creating problems for eco-holism? Matthews refers to the field-like structure of subjectivity, but I need some clarification here. Subjectivity requires (or so I suggest) a subject that is a substantial self that endures self-same over time. How might this issue be addressed? Panpsychism is supported (in part) by considerations of emergence (accounting for how the material gives rise to the mental), but how might it account for the emergence of new individual persons?”

The actual arguments for cosmological panpsychism, which I have set out elsewhere, are Spinozist in flavour. (Mathews 1991, 2003) They revolve around the idea that the universe, from the perspective of modern physics – or at any rate, from the perspective of the General Theory of Relativity (or Einstein’s more speculative geometrodynamics) – is a dynamic, substantial plenum (space itself being an elastic and dynamic, immaterial “substance”, subject to causal influence under the aspect of deformation) that is necessarily self-originating and self-maintaining. As such, it qualifies, albeit in a special way, as a self-maintaining or autopoietic system, or “self”, where a self is defined as any system which is conative (to borrow a term from Spinoza) in the sense that it actively preserves its own integrity against external or internal forces of disintegration. As a conative system, the universe is intentional in essence and therefore qualifies as irreducibly psychophysical rather than merely physical. Intrinsic to the self-actualization of such a living cosmos (the One) is its internal self-differentiation and self-articulation into a variegated manifold of particulars, some of which, in conducive contexts, themselves develop the structure of self-realizing systems or selves (the Many). This process of the internal self-differentiation of a plenum follows the model of the propagation and patterning of waves in a fluid, where in certain complex contexts of interference, “standing waves” develop, which actively hold their structure against the ebb and flow of the surrounding field. Such “standing waves” correspond, in the panpsychist scenario, to stable, self-maintaining entities or selves, whose individual identity is on the one hand real, in the sense that such selves actively preserve their own integrity, though on the other hand relative, in the sense that they are not separate from the substantial matrix of the plenum, being only a particular local configuration of that psychophysical field. Individual conativity emerges in selves in conformity with this configuration that serves the purpose of self-maintenance, but this emergence of local selves is an iteration of the larger dynamics of self-realization at the level of the cosmos at large. In an extension of this argument, it may be speculated that the universe, as a locus of meaning in its own right, can address itself, in instances of communicative engagement, to these local selves.²⁴

²⁴ As this account of cosmological panpsychism is abbreviated to less than nutshell proportions, let me, for the sake of clarity, state it again in slightly different terms. Although the universe coheres as a psychophysical unity, it also undergoes self-differentiation. In Spinozist and Einsteinian style, its field-like fabric ripples and folds locally to form a dynamic manifold of ever-changing, finite ‘modes’; viewed from the outside, these modes appear as the empirical particulars described by physics; viewed from the inside, they constitute a texture of ever-unfolding experience. This universe is thus both a psychophysical unity and a manifold of psychophysical differentia. Amongst its differentia, there are some which are themselves organized as self-realizing systems or selves. These include organisms and perhaps higher-order living systems, such as ecosystems and biospheres.²⁴ We might call such finite selves the

Gellman

I will resume the question-and-answer format in response to Gellman's comments, as they lend themselves well to such a dialogical exchange.

Gellman: "Prof. Mathews sees a "formidable problem" with religious realist claims when fostering inter-religious cordiality. I understand a religious realist to be one who believes that her religious language has at least some reference to transcendent realities that exist independently of our referring to them. I am not sure that I see the connection between religious realism and difficulties for inter-religious dialogue. One can be a religious realist while respecting another religion or even believing that one can learn from another religion. One could be what has been called a 'deep pluralist' – someone who is a realist about her own religion and believes that other religions excel at tasks other than those performed by her religion."

Freya: Realism is a problem insofar as different religions make metaphysical claims that conflict. Buddhism, for instance, sees reality in ultimately idealist terms, whereas Judaism and Christianity appear to have no problem allowing the materiality of the phenomenal world. The Abrahamic faiths posit a single God, exclusive of other gods, whereas Shintoism posits a multitude of deities. Can all such contradictions be ironed out without reference to a metaphysical or meta-religious theory that explains all religious phenomena as different manifestations of or approaches to an underlying *something* that can be explained in terms abstracted from the cultural associations of particular religions? And if such a theory is possible, would it not be *philosophical*?

Gellman: "Prof. Mathews argues that religious faith compromises reason and threatens the project of modernity. There is some truth to this statement. We all know, for example, of the resistance to earth sciences and evolutionary science by fundamentalist groups....However, the rejection of religion for this reason seems to be a faulty generalization, and fails to support a turn to a post-religious era. Many Christians and Jews do not share such an anti-modernist attitude. Indeed, various forms of Christianity have made peace with modernity and have even been instrumental in its development. Liberal forms of Christianity and Judaism pride themselves on embracing science and modern values. Buddhism has no quarrel with science and democracy. True enough, Islam tends to still lag somewhat behind in this attitude, but that is not a reason to advocate abandoning religion."

Freya: My argument was that religions need to be accountable to reason, otherwise brute authority and unverifiable revelation may be invoked by unscrupulous agents in order to

Many to the cosmic self's One. This set of finite selves represents a tiny but extremely significant subset of the wider, ever-changing set of differentia. Selves are significant, amidst the vast array of other differentia, because they represent real (because self-realizing) though relative (because not substantively discrete) loci of subjectivity and conativity in their own right. As loci of subjectivity they afford a viewpoint from which the universe can be observed as externality (there being, of course, no perspective external to the universe as a whole), thus making sense of the psycho/physical distinction as applied to the One. And it is to these finite selves that the universe, as a locus of meaning in its own right, can address itself, in instances of communicative engagement.

subordinate people in the name of religion. This, as we are acutely aware, is a very serious problem in the world today. To the extent that some religions are already, or have long been, engaged in making themselves accountable to reason, the objection does not apply. I was not claiming that existing religions universally fail to render themselves accountable to reason, but only that such accountability should be a requirement for all religions. However, the mere existence of arguments in support of a given religion is not of course sufficient to ensure its accountability: those arguments must also stand up to rational scrutiny. For example, in the case of traditional arguments for the existence of God, I think the Ontological Argument, the Cosmological Argument and the Argument from Design are all vulnerable to Ockham's Razor. If the universe is understood in irreducibly psychophysical, as opposed to merely physical, terms, then it can be argued that *the universe itself* is self-causing and self-organizing and necessarily existent. But if the universe itself can be figured as self-organizing, self-causing and necessarily existent, why do we need to appeal to a Creator to explain its existence and its appearance of design? The universe is already given: it is visible and manifest; we know that it exists. God is not given. God is invisible and unmanifest; we have to infer to God's existence. If we can explain the nature of the manifest world in terms of the properties of that world itself, why should we resort to explaining it by inference to a further, hypothetical entity?

Gellman: "Prof. Mathews wants religions to respect the anti-essentialism of the academy by becoming tentative and experimental. It was not clear to me what exactly Prof. Mathews means here by 'essentialism'. My understanding is that an 'essentialist' believes that for a term to apply to many things there must be features common and peculiar to all of those things, features therefore 'essential' to the application of the term. I did not see how essentialism entered into the critique of religion. Also, perhaps Prof. Mathews can explain why she privileges what she considers an 'academic' distaste for essentialism? What anti-essentialist arguments are convincing to her?"

Freya: My purpose does not seem to have been well stated in this connection. The charge of essentialism arises from aversion to prescriptive definitions, particularly prescriptive definitions of reality at large. This aversion has helped to shape the climate of deconstruction that has prevailed in certain sectors of the Western academy for several decades. Attempts to privilege particular accounts of reality as definitive have been viewed with suspicion within these sectors as exercises in epistemological imperialism: science, for example, has been regarded as a "grand narrative" that is used to naturalize and legitimate the oppression of colonized peoples by discounting their cultural narratives. Metaphysical theories generally, insofar as they rest on reason and purport to authorize a particular account of reality, have fallen under suspicion. To the extent that religions legislate on metaphysical matters, they too may be seen as privileging particular accounts of reality, and hence may be suspected (often with justification) of doing so for imperial or oppressive reasons. While I myself obviously do not share the aversion to metaphysics, I have been sensitized by deconstruction to see how prescriptive definitions of reality can indeed become instruments of oppression. Such definitions accordingly need to be open-ended, revisable, testable. It was for this reason that I was keen to emphasize that though panpsychism is pre-eminently a metaphysical hypothesis, its various theoretical formulations need not be accepted on authority but may be tested and elaborated by individuals in the experiential framework of onto-poetics.

Gellman: "Prof. Mathews worries about the implications of religions formulated long ago to deal with our ecological crisis. She suggests that in this new context religion might lose relevance, being concerned with "hidden or heavenly matters" or yearning for the "elusive

realm of the unknown” while the earth disintegrates. Characterizing extant religions as concerned more with the heavenly than with the earthly might stick for some religious forms, yet this is questionable for many others. Christian liberation theologies do not fit here. The same for most forms of Judaism, which while perhaps teaching an afterlife, focus strongly on how life is to be lived on earth. A prominent form of Judaism in the United States has as its motto ‘Tikkun Olam’, or mending of the world, right here on earth. Social activist Buddhism is on the rise at various places in the world, with a strong emphasis on the present quality of life. All of these are congenial to ecological concerns. I wonder if Prof. Mathews finds fault with these mentioned forms of religion and if so, why. If not, how is she going to defend her move to post-religion?”

Freya: In this connection I was again thinking of the Ockam’s Razor objection, cited above. Why mediate our relationship with the manifest universe by reference to an unmanifest entity or realm if we can explain everything that is explained in terms of the unmanifest via the manifest instead? If we can cultivate an intimate – and hence immediately custodial – relationship with the universe itself, why attenuate this relationship by making our primary attachment to an unseen presence whose role in that universe may (or may not) entrain reverence for it? If the universe is alive, we can love it directly, for itself, and such a bond is likely to be far stronger – and hence far more strongly custodial - than a bond mediated through a third, transcendent party into whom the life of the universe has, from a panpsychist perspective, been discharged.

Gellman: “There exist alternative explanations for the unity of the physical world from within broadly religious theologies. These include: (a) God in his wisdom created the world as a unity. (b) The unity of the world is an expression within the created order of God’s unity. (c) Panentheism: the universe is included within the being of God, where God also has a transcendent nature. Because included in God’s very being, the universe reflects God’s unity. (d) Theological panpsychism: There have been theological panpsychists, such as Tommaso Campanella (1568-1639), who taught that creation was an image or effigy of God. Since God was subjectival, he endowed everything in existence with subjectival existence. Given all of these alternatives, why does Prof. Mathews prefer global panpsychism as the explanation of cosmic unity over explanations invoking God or the like? Religion, which Prof. Mathews rejects, need not exclude a metaphysical explanation of physical unity by recourse to God. As a theist I see no reason why theism has to be abandoned in an ecological age.”

Freya: In reply to all these objections I would cite the Ockam’s Razor argument again: why refer the unity of a certain entity – the universe - to a further entity – God – when this unity can be explained in terms of the attributes of the universe itself?

Gellman: “Suppose we do adopt panpsychism as an explanation for the world’s unity. The explanation of the unity of the physical universe by the unity of subjectivity can suffice with a thin subjectivity, one that holds all of physical reality in its awareness, with some memory, and minimal intentional action. This subjectivity would be rather akin to the thin subjectivity of lower animals. So, there seemed to be a jump in Mathews’ argument from the theoretical backing for global panpsychism, in the physical unity of the universe, to a *poetic panpsychism* of a thick, full-blown subjectivity, one akin to mature human adults with rich subjective features, including a robust sense of self. Perhaps the fuller subjectivity is required to explain the existence of human subjectivity, but maybe this can be explained by a rich enfoldment of dimmer subjectivity. The poetics of Dr. Mathews’ panpsychism strikes me as a

metaphorical motivator for ecological activism, rather than a required consequence of the justification of global panpsychism. I would be interested to learn more about this position.”

Freya: According to arguments I have offered elsewhere (Mathews 2003), subjectivity is a function of selfhood, where selfhood is understood in systems-theoretic terms as the status enjoyed by systems which have properties associated with self-realization. The impulse towards self-realization, which, following Spinoza, I call *conativity*, is defined by Spinoza as an impulse towards self-maintenance and self-increase. While organisms, and perhaps larger biological systems, such as ecosystems and the biosphere, are obvious instances of systemic self-realization, it is arguable that the universe as a whole is also a self-realizing system: it exhibits systems-theoretic properties and is furthermore self-creating, self-structuring and self-maintaining. The universe as a whole is accordingly regarded as a locus of conativity, a Self. But if Spinoza’s view of conativity is accepted, then such a universe will seek not merely to exist and maintain its existence, but also to increase itself. Increase may be understood extensionally, in terms of space and time, where this implies a universe that is spatiotemporally expansive. But it may also be understood intensionally, where this implies a universe that seeks increase through generation of an ever-increasing depth of meaning. In order to achieve an ever-increasing depth of meaning, the universe (the One) self-differentiates into a plurality of evolving local or finite selves (the Many). Out of the conativity of such selves, a rich matrix of creaturely meanings arises, where the development of such a matrix enables communicativity to occur, both amongst selves themselves and eventually between selves and the larger Self. Through the communicative order, the universe deepens itself indefinitely on the axis of meaning, while the causal order, the province of physics, enables it to expand its existence indefinitely in space and time. Within the framework of cosmological panpsychism, the communicative order co-exists with, and does not contradict, the causal order.

Gellman: “Does Prof. Mathews endorse a program for advancing panpsychism? How important is it to her for people to share her panpsychism as long as they are committed to ecological preservation? Does she advocate disseminating global panpsychism, or is her concern for ecological responsibility *per se*? It would be good to address these questions.”

Freya: There are many grounds for ecological activism - ecological activists may be motivated by purely anthropocentric considerations, such as the need to reduce the rate of climate change for the good of humanity; by a rational conviction of the moral considerability of other species; by empathy for animals; by an aesthetics of nature. I am certainly grateful for every instance of effective environmental activism, whatever its source. However, I think that as long as we maintain a purely instrumental attitude to the ground beneath our feet, so to speak, treating it as nothing but a brute and blind platform for our own existence, then instrumentalism will remain our fundamental modality. We may single out selected entities, such as animals or organisms generally as ends in themselves, to be treated in a considerate manner, but if the ground on which we tread and the space in which we move are regarded as of no consequence, then I think instrumentalism will be the default modality of our culture, and an assumption of bruteness and blindness will permeate our consciousness, except in moments of vigilance. In order to achieve a culture in which “environmentalism” is simply part of the grain of our overall agency rather than an ad hoc set of moral restraints, I think wholesale metaphysical reorientation is needed.

Concluding Reflection

I have presented panpsychism here as a metaphysic that can be theorized, and that can moreover be argued to subsume religious phenomena, but I remain anxious to avoid reductionism. Balancing the claims of reason, in the form of theory, with trust in direct experience as a source of inexhaustibly fresh, new, unfolding insight remains a delicate act. Theory itself is inherently reductive and the very process of theorizing is objectifying. If one espouses panpsychism as a meta-stance to both religion and science then, one needs to take hold of it lightly, handling it as loose of leaf and large of mesh, consistent with reason but anchored in an experience of meaning that lies outside the province of discourse. Perhaps I should accordingly conclude where the sublime *Daodejing* begins. In its very first line, the *Daodejing* both names and un-names the Dao simultaneously: “The Dao that can be spoken is not the eternal Dao. /The name that can be named is not the eternal name.”

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