

SEIZING AN ALTERNATIVE

Toward an Ecological Civilization

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**Section VII: Reimagining and Reinventing
the Wisdom Traditions: World Loyalty
Track 5: Thinking Independently
in the Tradition of Classical Greece**
Donald A. Crosby, organizer



Thinking Independently in the Tradition of Classical Greece, Abstracts **By Donald A. Crosby**

Fifteen speakers present current philosophical perspectives on a number of subjects, including relations of present philosophy to the Greek philosophical heritage, varieties of process thought and its applications, philosophy of nature and other metaphysical topics, and ways of recognizing and overcoming destructive effects of anthropocentrism on nonhuman creatures and their environments.

Summaries

Another Footnote to Plato
George Allan

Whitehead famously claims that all Western philosophy is a series of footnotes to Plato. The Plato found in the footnote composed of Whitehead's later metaphysical writings is that of the later dialogues with their emphasis on being as power, and in the self as stirred imaginatively by the power of beauty to create new vital actualities, which together weave the matrix of all begetting. My essay is a footnote to this footnote, an adventurous reading of Whitehead's adventurous reading of Plato.

Adventures of Ideas offers Whitehead's most explicit appropriation of the Platonic concepts of Eros, Harmony, The Receptacle, and Psyche. My explication of what Whitehead means by them then lures my imagination to map them onto the later work of Whitehead's most innovative student, Susanne Langer. Eros: the act-form of becoming, the power of agency that is the form of all creating. Harmony: the beauty of living composite things. The Receptacle: the rhythmic pattern of the reciprocal influence between organisms and their ambient that results in the emergence of life and its unguided evolutionary development. Psyche: the emergent human self, an organism marked by mind as a phase state of its complex organic life.

Mind is the human capacity to imagine possibilities and remember what has happened and by these means to feel itself as an individual, an agent whose life as a whole, not only its specific actions, has an act-form. An affirmation of the unique worth of their lives

sets persons at odds with their society. But society reconciles individual good with the common good by developing shared traditions and the public rituals that express them. This makes possible the emergence of civilizations, forms of society in which individual creative departures from the norm are prized, resulting in enough flexibility in established ways for them to survive amid the world's vicissitudes. The axial civilizations and the axial religions at their core are an expression of this effective strategy for avoiding the undoing of the great improvements in the quality of life that civilized order has made possible.

We worry now about the end of the axial ways. Plato acknowledges that his Republic is only a dream. Whitehead warns us about the dangerous rigidities of inert ideas and the obscurantism of dogmatic certainty. Langer speaks of *The Breaking*: the collapse of traditions and their sacred canopies, and the fear that in their absence our all-too-finite lives will have lost the basis of their meaningfulness. I take heart, however, from the support of three still-vital strands of the Platonic tradition, as filtered through Whitehead's and Langer's footnotes.

First, it offers us an understanding of the power of the continuity of life: all things from organic molecules to human beings are pulsating energies oriented toward the actualization of impulses within an ambient of other life-forms. How we act and what we accomplish, for good or ill, is the result of the interdependence of things and their contexts. We have the capacity to solve our problems.

Second, we can best tear off the veils that obscure an appreciation of this ontological insight by recovering a recognition that becoming is foundational, and therefore that processes are always finite, purposes opportunistic, and achievements fragile. We are without recourse to eternal possibilities, everlasting harmonies, and ultimate agencies. Our history is a contingent story.

Third, this story is profoundly meaningful. Our civilized efforts are an Adventure into an open ambient where the best way forward is always a tentative compromise among obscurely grasped divergent goods. We act in response to Beauty's erotic lure and Truth's treasure horde of past accomplishment, yet freed through Art's imaginative boundary transgressions from excessive loyalty to the constraints of those traditional ideals and creations. We venture on, braced by the sense of Peace that comes in recognizing that what we do now in these troubling times is what those who have preceded us also did. We now act as best we can for the sake of goods we cannot adequately comprehend or achieve, in the company of others who once acted as best they could for goods they believed worth seeking, their ends and means not ours but across all the vast reaches of time and space the act-form of our lives is the same. The journeying is all.

Greek Cosmology, Whitehead, and Emergence
Lawrence Cahoone

I will return to what, in retrospect, seem the three most viable metaphysics of ancient Greek thought, those of Democritus, Plato, and Aristotle. While the (respective) atomism and formalism of first two are both alive and well in contemporary physics, Aristotle seems less so. But Aristotle's view is more pluralistic than either, and accepts a hierarchical order of substances. All three can be found in Whitehead's metaphysics, the most comprehensive 20th century successor to the great synthetic philosophical-scientific schemes of the 17th century. Whitehead would seem to be the antidote both to static being and to non-relational substances, and he is. But he continues the search to find precursors of the most complex properties in nature (life, mentality, signs) in the most simple (actual occasions).

I will argue that we can turn instead to a pluralism of thinkers with whom Whitehead was in active conversation in the 1920's, thinkers whose notions have recently been recaptured by scientists in the study of complexity and self-organizing systems. These notions are a combination of : 1) emergence, or the irreducibility of whole properties to part properties; 2) a hierarchical ordering of natural systems; 3) on the basis of a pluralistic ontology that counts "substances," "forms" or organizational structures, and processes or events equally as features of the world. If we accept emergence, hierarchy, and the pluralism of complexes and entities in nature, then we need not locate all the complex properties of the world in either atoms or atomic occasions, or ultimate laws or forms, and our "entities" or substances can be complex and relational systems. The ultimate ends of the spectrum matter less than the dynamic organization of components. Mechanism, atomism, formalism, and reduction, are not problems once incorporated into a pluralistic, comprehensive vision.

Historically, the "dialogue" between Democritus, Plato, and Aristotle, and the dialogue between Whitehead, G.H. Mead, Conwy Lloyd Morgan, and Dewey, are parallel in exposing the different structures a cosmology can have. An "ecological metaphysics" ought not only to place humanity in nature, but recognize the hierarchy of complex systems that emerge in nature's evolution, which provide a basis for finding value in complexity.

A Process-Panentheist Reorientation to Nature: Coming Down to Earth
Anna Case-Winters

Our current ecological crisis requires a reorientation of the human being in relation to the rest of nature. Western classical tradition has contributed to the present disaster by its desacralization and objectification of nature. Both God and the human being are seen as "over and above" the natural world. They are separate from it in the dualistic framework that separates spirit from matter. This way of thinking has proven dangerous and destructive. It provides the ideological underpinnings for thinking and acting in callous disregard for environmental consequences. Theologians today must re-

examine these theological constructions. The interaction of Christian theology with the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead has proven transformative in precisely those areas which have been most problematic: desacralization and objectification of nature. The desacralization of the natural world is called into question in Whitehead's discussion of God and the world. There a view emerges that assumes "internal relations" rather than absolute separation between God and the world. God and the world are co-constituted. Instead of a view in which there is an "infinite qualitative distinction between "Creator and "created," Whitehead introduces the category of "creativity" which characterizes both. There is reciprocity and mutual influence between God and the world. As Whitehead proposes, "It is as true to say that God creates the World as that the World creates God (*Process and Reality*, [1929] 1978, p. 21). God may be thought of as the "chief exemplification" of creativity, even as the leader of the creative advance, and the Ground of both Order and Novelty that make creativity possible. The old duality between Creator and created, however, is left behind. Process-panentheism, particularly as further drawn out in Hartshorne's writings, allows for a better articulation of divine presence in and responsiveness to the world. God's transcendence is maintained as the all-inclusive, all-surpassing reality, but it is relationally conceived-- an immanent transcendence. These insights lead toward a kind of "resacralization" of the natural world, investing it with intrinsic value. A different way of living with and within nature is indicated.

The objectification of the natural world that has attended classical theism is also effectively countered in Whitehead's thought. His philosophy of organism proposes that there is both a physical and a mental pole in every actual entity. This view, termed "panpsychism," does not entail consciousness necessarily but only the capacity to "experience." (David Griffin's term "panexperientialism" may serve better descriptively.) A value of this philosophy of organism is its refusal of a spirit-matter dualism in which God and the human being have a monopoly on spirit, and the rest of nature is objectified as simply "material." Whitehead's insight provides a way of thinking about all of nature (human beings included) as being on a continuum. The human being is not separated or "over and above" the natural world, but embedded in it. This way of thinking brings the human being "down to earth." It also invests the natural world with what might be termed "subject status." Granting subject status invites a complete reorientation of the relation between human beings and the rest of nature.

Beyond Emergentism: The Intrinsic Sacredness of Nature
David E. Conner

In *Science and the Modern World* Whitehead praises Aristotle for being "entirely dispassionate" in his consideration of the metaphysical significance of the idea of God, noting that "he is the last European metaphysician of first-rate importance for whom this claim can be made." (249) Whitehead goes on to say, however, that the purely metaphysical or philosophical motives behind Aristotle's idea of the Prime Mover "did not lead him very far towards the production of a God available for religious purposes." Then Whitehead adds, "It may be doubted whether any properly general metaphysics

can ever, without the illicit introduction of other considerations, get much further than Aristotle."

The thesis of this paper is that the question of the ontological status of the Sacred within Nature is, or ought to be, of fundamental importance for our present conference on "Ecological Civilization." Admittedly it is possible to embrace environmentalism on utterly pragmatic or even selfish grounds--but such grounds are in my view short-sighted, and prone to lapse into a calculating analysis of ad hoc environmental trade-offs based on mere expedience. The conviction that Nature is intrinsically valuable or sacred is at least potentially a major factor prompting and supporting a new awareness of the urgency of the environmental crisis.

Clearly, however, the claim that Nature "is intrinsically valuable or sacred" requires further examination. One currently common way of making this claim is to rely on the logic of "emergence," which states essentially that organisms of increasing biological complexity and diversity (and thus, at least by implication, of increasing value) have somehow "emerged" from the primordial matter of planet earth. Three important examples of emergentism are found in Ursula Goodenough's *The Sacred Depths of Nature*, Don Crosby's *A Religion of Nature*, and Terrence Deacon's *Incomplete Nature*. Though these books are highly worthwhile, I believe that they show that emergentism can furnish only a provisional or makeshift basis for the conviction that nature is intrinsically sacred. My objections to emergentism are (1) practical, and (2) philosophical.

- 1) In emergentism, the values that do emerge in nature derive ultimately from the experience of the creatures themselves. The matrix that existed before life emerged is held to be, of itself, devoid of value or purpose. Thus the source of creativity, however it is imagined, lacks the kind of ontological unity or transcendence that would, for most people, "make it available for religious purposes," as Whitehead puts it. This is the practical objection.
- 2) The philosophical objection is that emergentism is simply not convincing as an explanation of the origins of life (and therefore of value) on earth. The proponents of emergentism cling at least implicitly to the premise that the primordial elements from which life emerged have no intrinsic purpose or value. This is an arbitrary assumption based on presuppositions that are Aristotelian (the notion of bare substance), Cartesian (the notion that mentality is completely separable from physicality), and Newtonian (the notion of mathematical mechanism or predictability applied to the behavior of nature).

These inadequate presuppositions are effectively countered by Whitehead's proposals, in combination, that (1) "the process itself is the actuality, and requires no antecedent static cabinet," (AI) (2) every conscrecing (processive) occasion is characterized by a physical-mental dipolarity, and (3) that "value is coextensive with reality." Whitehead's statements about God need not be taken (as they often have been) as leading ineluctably to a quasi-personal or anthropomorphic notion of deity. In conclusion I refer

to the idea of the Divine Logos found in the writings of Heraclitus of Ephesus as an example of a pre-Aristotelian religious outlook that ascribes transcendence and conceptual unity to the Sacred without falling into the trappings of theological personalism, thus suggesting directions that an environmental spirituality might take today.

Transcendence, Immanence, and Anthropocentrism
Donald A. Crosby

We notice that a great idea in the background of dim consciousness is like a phantom ocean beating upon the shores of human life in successive waves of specialization. A whole succession of such waves are as dreams slowly doing their work of sapping the base of some cliff of habit: but the seventh wave is a revolution—"and the nations echo round." In the last quarter of the eighteenth century, Democracy was born, with its earliest incarnations in America and in France; and finally it was Democracy that freed the slave.

—*Alfred North Whitehead*

The "great idea in the background of dim consciousness" of which Whitehead speaks in *Adventures of Ideas* is the idea of democracy and liberty, the idea that all humans, regardless of ethnicity, gender, or socio/economic background or level, are equally entitled to self-governance, equality before the law, equality of opportunity, and freedom from slavery and oppression. The roots of this idea in the West lay in the dim past, for example, with Christianity's notion that every human being is a cherished child of God and that, in the words of one of Paul's New Testament letters, "[t]here is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

But the institution of slavery was for thousands of years the unquestioned basis of economics and society, an institution it seemed impossible for a labor-intensive society to do without. As Whitehead notes, the ideas of democracy and freedom began to surge with developments in philosophical thought in the 17th and 18th centuries, were furthered by the Industrial Revolution, and reached political expression in the American and French revolutions and the abolishment of the slave trade and slavery by England and the United States in the 19th century. But there was much beating of the waves against an adamant cliff before it began to crumble and give way at last to the persistent force of the battering waves.

A similar strongly resistant, long established cliff of habit today is an uncritical and uncaring anthropocentrism that holds nonhuman animals and their (and our) natural environments in bondage to hegemonic human enterprises, populations, whims, prejudices, and treatments. The slow erosion of this cliff began to occur due to influences of the sciences of cosmology, geology, Darwinian evolution, and ecology that date from the 16th through the 20th centuries—influences that continue in their effects to this day. But a thoroughgoing revolution which "the nations echo round" has yet to

take place. Anthropocentrism is still firmly in place, and widespread ecological consciousness and a humble sense of human responsibility for the wellbeing of the direly threatened planet Earth and its endangered creatures has yet to exert anything like a revolutionary and radically transforming influence.

What are some of the roots of this seemingly implacable anthropocentric outlook among human beings and human institutions today, and how might a revolutionary overthrow of it be furthered and a replacement of it with a pervasive earth-centered perspective be advanced? In this essay I argue that a major barrier to such a revolutionary transformation is a traditional and long assumed emphasis on transcendence, when it comes to thinking about the nature and destiny of human beings in their relations to nature, and that the focus needs to be brought to bear instead on cosmic immanence and the unqualified immanence of humans within the natural order. Transcendence and anthropocentrism are close attitudinal relatives, I claim, and radical immanence and serious ecological sensibility are intimately related as well. I want to discuss under three headings how the second part of this statement holds true and how a fundamental shift toward an immanent view of reality and of the place of the human species in reality is required as an appropriate response to the ecological crisis of the present day.

The three headings are: (1) the concept of a radically transcendent God in relation to the world and the concept of humans in relation to such a God; (2) Whitehead's concept of a transcendent-immanent God and the concept of human beings in relation to Whitehead's God; and (3) the concept of nature set forth in the version of religious naturalism I call Religion of Nature and the accompanying concept of the lives and experiences of humans in relation to the world, as envisioned in Religion of Nature. In my view, this last metaphysical option is better suited than the other two to counter the entrenched anthropocentric attitude and the deplorable practices stemming from it that are a fundamental blight on our time.

Bergson and Whitehead: Dueling Platonists
Pete A. Y. Gunter

Bergson and Whitehead are one in the belief that human history and human societies are dynamic but also turbulent. Equally, both share the belief that to survive and flourish in the modern world requires that we face that turbulence and dynamism and deal with it: conceptually and practically. Both also, in denying a corpuscular-kinetic model of nature, proclaim a view of reality as inherently interrelational, creative and spontaneous.

But as is widely known, on several points their disagreements are equally clear. For convenience's sake I will lump them under the heading: intellectual and non-intellectual. Whitehead is ever the rationalist, painstakingly creating a universal categorical scheme. Bergson instead, and in this respect, seems the non-rationalist, proposing, in place of a categorical scheme, vivid images capable of suggesting fresh, more adequate approaches to the world. Whitehead believes that logic / mathematics will, with extreme

generality, come to accurately describe the general structure of the real. Bergson does not.

Looked at in these ways, the contrast Bergson-Whitehead reduces to a proportion: *Bergson: Whitehead = Plato: Aristotle*. Plato gives myths. Aristotle gives categories. Bergson gives myths (images). Whitehead gives categories.

This proportion, revealing though it is, I believe, is provisional or, put otherwise, secondary. A more fundamental proportion relating the two philosophers would be: *Bergson: Whitehead = Plotinus: Plato*.

(Or, The Enneads: The Timaeus = Bergson: Whitehead). To take Bergson's side of this proportion first: Bergson posits a supraintellectual (n.b. supra) deity from which the cosmos emerges through a creative emanation. For Bergson this universal emanation is paralleled by the creativity of its human creatures, in art, technology, science and morality. For him, one can, and must, go from a supraintellectual intuition to mathematics and mathematical applications (to parody this process of expression, from Zen to Popular Mechanics). With Whitehead, by contrast, one has the Demiurgos (becoming, the Dunamis) with its eyes fixed firmly on the Good, making mathematical pattern in the world: helping eternal objects condescend in abstract patterns, through the agency of actual occasions.

Bluntly and very briefly, Bergson and Whitehead, though sharing similar cosmologies, duel endlessly from the vantage point of their contrasting metaphysical assumptions.

Why, in a turbulent and dangerous contemporary world, can these dual views (and even their dualities) help us to deal with that most fragile thing: Reality?.

Cultivating Tragic Beauty: Whitehead and the Greeks
J. Thomas Howe

I propose to present material in the areas of tragedy and aesthetics, namely, the concept of beauty. In particular, I am interested putting Whitehead's account of both in conversation with classical Greek understandings of beauty and the tragic. By means of this conversation, I hope to provide a better understanding of the Whiteheadian claim that the meaning of human life comes from the cultivation and enjoyment of beauty. This claim comes with a number of important questions: what does it mean to live an aesthetic life, a life where beauty is the first and foremost consideration? In what ways is such a life obligated by other concerns, namely ethical ones? Can greater attention to beauty enhance our sense of responsibility towards the care of other people and the natural world in which we live? My assumption is that beauty does come with ethical obligations and having a better understanding of the ways in which Whitehead's understanding of beauty both compares with and departs from classical Greek understandings of beauty should bolster this assumption.

Adding to this conversation is the fact that grasping what Whitehead means by beauty and the aesthetic life requires also an understanding of tragedy. For Whitehead, beauty is always “tragic beauty.” Beauty exists only in finite, particular entities. Thus the enjoyment of it is necessarily subjects one to the experience of loss and perpetual perishing. A life in pursuit of the cultivation and enjoyment of beauty is one that is embroiled in a tragic world. In my paper I will try to deliver a better understanding of what this means and the sort of implications it has for questions about the significance of human life. I will do this by showing the tragic qualities of Whitehead’s understanding of the world and the ways in which this worldview is informed by classical Greek notions of tragedy and the tragic.

Great Apes and Wisdom: Trading Anthropocentrism for Animalcentric Anthropomorphism
Nancy Howell

The challenge of de-centering humanity from scientific, philosophical, and theological reflection is very difficult—especially when humanity is understood to be unique, separate, or superlative in relation to other animals. The scientific debate includes sparring over the role of anecdotal evidence in demonstrating the remarkable capacities of animals for empathy, emotion, morality, or even spirituality. The theological and philosophical discussions often function historically or deductively with preconceived notions about animals not grounded in contemporary science of animal behavior, sociality, or cognition. The irony is that some animals (such as the bonobo Kanzi) have engaged human culture with greater success than scientists have engaged bonobo culture (especially bonobo communication). Consequently, the cost of anthropocentrism is loss of animal wisdom, which theology and philosophy often neglect. The negative effect of anthropocentrism is the absence of perspective-taking that extends beyond one’s sense of self and immediate community. The movement beyond anthropocentrism is critical for understanding that the search for intelligent life can begin with non-human animals and that animalcentric anthropocentrism (a term suggested by Frans de Waal) not only opens human wisdom to animals, but also to marginalized human beings. Whiteheadian thought is especially important as a countercurrent in philosophical and theological understanding of humans and non-human animals because of the power of internal relations, cosmic creativity, and the God-world relationship to account for the complex wisdom in nature.

Whitehead’s Panpsychism and Deep Ecology
Leemon McHenry

In opposition to mechanistic materialism of the seventeenth century cosmology, Whitehead advanced a metaphysics in which the basic units of existence are understood as occasions of sentient experience. As Whitehead developed his theory of nature, it became clear that he viewed the world as a living organism. In this presentation, I offer a critical evaluation of Whitehead’s philosophy of organism as a

foundation for environmental ethics and compare his views to other philosophers who have espoused a deep ecology.

Rebalancing What Is Useful in Western Philosophy for Present Philosophy
Robert Cummings Neville

Whitehead was famous, or notorious, or amusing, for claiming that Descartes was the great empiricist, Locke the great metaphysician, and Kant the great dead-end in modern philosophy for his time. Whitehead had a rare generosity of mind and empathic understanding with regard to reading his tradition, but he recognized that for the philosophical issues dominating his own time, only some of that tradition is useful and figures might be useful in ways hitherto unexpected. I aim to do a reading of our current philosophical situation that is interestingly different from Whitehead's situation, mainly because of its global nature and advances in cognitive psychology, which were underdeveloped in his time. At stake is the identification of the best resources for wise guidance in the direction of interest, attention, inquiry, living, action, and communal life. Whitehead's insistence on comprehensive metaphysical thinking will be reinforced, but with attention to problematics from East and South Asian intellectual and religious traditions.

On the Edge of Time: Wisdom and Love in Evolution and Human Life
Karl E. Peters

Each actual occasion of the evolving universe has been a present moment, created out of past interactions and on the verge of new possibilities. According to Henry Nelson Wieman, "Wisdom is . . . the search for coherence in the development of the individual, in social development and in knowledge." One could add the search for coherence in the emergence of all dynamic systems from atoms, molecules, living systems, ecosystems, and a planet such as earth. "Love is the desire to bring into each of these forms of coherence the innovations relevant to each kind of development." At the human level, "development means expanding the range and coherence of what can be known, controlled, and valued by the individual in community with others" (Wieman 1968, 124-25).

This essay will attempt, first, to show how both wisdom and love at the human level are grounded in an evolving human bio-cultural evolution. Wisdom and love for humans is rooted in some biological capacities for behavior of our primate ancestors and develops more complexly with the evolution of the human emotional-rational brain. Second, the essay will apply the human search for coherence and innovation (wisdom and love) to a consideration of both classic cases (such as the wisdom of Solomon in adjudicating the claims of two women for the same infant) and of contemporary examples regarding how wisdom and love in individual, social, and environmental living might address the need for a more peaceful, just, and sustainable world.

Beyond Human Virtue
Patrick Shade

Utilitarianism has made recent strides to chip away at the anthropomorphism typical of traditional ethical thinking. Philosophers such as Peter Singer have noted that especially if we prioritize pleasure and quality of life, some non-human animals are as viable (and some more likely) candidates for at least beings of moral concern. Singer and likeminded thinkers thus acknowledge and seek to overcome the speciesism that tends to infect moral discussions. Comparable moves are less common among proponents of other ethical theories, unsurprisingly so given their emphasis on rational deliberation (especially Kantianism) or prudence (in the case of virtue ethics). Care ethicists have in Frans de Waal an ally who identifies meaningful continuities between human relationships and primates whose behavior is at least a prototype for caring moral acts.¹ To the extent that care ethics bears affinities with traditional virtue ethics, there are avenues for further explorations of moral behavior in non-humans.

Virtue ethics, with its emphasis on excellence requiring rational choice, appears to emphasize traits that distinguish humans from all other creatures; it thus seems to be an inherently anthropocentric theory. Aristotle's classic characterization of the virtues emphasizes their teleological character, a factor we may be inclined to reject in this post-Darwinian epoch. We can follow Julia Annas by stressing not the fixed character of a telos but rather the aspirational factor involved in cultivating the virtues.² Even while granting such a move, though, critics may still contend that only humans meaningfully aspire to the virtues; other living creatures may aspire in some limited sense to survival but not to excellence or deliberate flourishing. While Whitehead himself offers little direct or sustained commentary on moral theory, one advantage of adopting his approach is that he offers a framework in which we should expect to find continuities between the clearly aspirational human behavior and that of non-humans. Whitehead's articulation of the actual entity as bipolar, such that every being has both a physical and selective, mental pole, encourages us to ask how we can identify and discuss non-human behavior that is selective, even if not consciously so, and potentially aspirational. Complementing this abstract theoretical consideration is the fact that we at least sometimes attribute virtues to nonhumans, the courage of the lion being one of the most meaningful examples.

In my paper, I will examine non-human activity and behavior that can be interpreted plausibly as selective and aspirational; I will then discuss the ways in which such characterizations can help us situate human behavior, even excellent and seemingly distinctively human behavior, in a natural context that acknowledges and emphasizes continuities with other activities in the natural world. These continuities are rooted in the

¹ Frans de Waal, *Primates and Philosophers: How Morality Evolved* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2006).

² Julia Annas, *Intelligent Virtue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

(macroscopic) social relations that sustain and promote both survival and growth; recent findings suggest not only human and nonhuman animals are deeply affected by these relations but some plants are as well.³ The continuities discussed highlight not only that non-human creatures are objects of moral concern but that their activities as agents share important affinities with human agency. These reflections will help us shift away from a predominantly anthropocentric interpretation of virtue ethics.

Process Polytheism

Eric Steinhart

Several analytic philosophers have recently discussed a new kind of polytheism. There are many gods. However, unlike older polytheisms, these gods do not inhabit our universe. On the contrary, each god is associated with its own universe. There are many god-universe pairs. Versions of this analytic polytheism have been discussed by Peter Forrest, John Leslie, and myself. I will show how analytic polytheism can be developed out of process theology (especially the work of Hartshorne).

Process metaphysics rejects Aristotelian substance-metaphysics. It rejects the doctrine of identity through time. Hartshorne often endorses the thesis that persisting things are processes, which are time-ordered sequences of distinct instantaneous stages. Process metaphysics contains an early multiverse theory. For Whitehead, physical reality at the largest scale is a series of cosmic epochs. Hartshorne also acknowledges the division of the total physical process into distinct epochs. Since these epochs are isolated, and have their own laws, it is reasonable to refer to them as distinct universes. Hence physical reality at the largest scale consists of a time-ordered series of universes. However, since there is only one series, these universes do not constitute mutual alternatives, and the class of these universes does not serve the needs of quantified modal or temporal logic. It does not yet provide an adequate account of the actualization of possibility.

Physical reality at the largest level has an organic unity. Its organic unity is the cosmic-mind. Since this unity temporally divides into distinct cosmic epochs, it seems like the cosmic-mind must also divide into distinct epochs. Like the lepidopteran, it has a life with distinct segments (egg, caterpillar, chrysalis, butterfly). Or perhaps the cosmic mind is like the Phoenix, which is born, lives, bursts into flames, and is then reborn out of its own ashes. Each new Phoenix is a new cosmic mind, which is the organic unity of a new cosmic epoch. Hence there is a sequence of cosmic minds, one for each cosmic epoch. Of course, each new cosmic mind is not totally new, but inherits much of its nature from its predecessor. These cosmic minds are all genetically linked, like parent

³ In “What Plants Talk About,” a recent episode of the PBS show “Nature,” ecologist Suzanne Simard argues that Douglas firs create vast underground networks to nurture their own kind. She performed an experiment to demonstrate that larger firs “shuttle” some of their own nutrients to younger vulnerable saplings growing nearby (<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/nature/episodes/what-plants-talk-about/video-full-episode/8243/>).

and offspring. It seems entirely appropriate to refer to these distinct cosmic minds as gods. But all these gods are segments of one divine life. They are all segments of the capital-G God.

For process theologians, God is a process. Thus God is a time-ordered series of stages. For Hartshorne, God is perpetually self-surpassing. The later stages of God are divinely greater than the earlier stages. If this is right, then the earlier stages of God are also lesser than the later stages. Moving backwards, into the divine past, the divine greatness ultimately decreases to an initial minimal value. It can't be zero, but it must be minimal. From this it follows that there must be an initial beginning of the total physical process. Just as earthly life begins with an initial self-replicator, so divine life begins with an initial self-surpasser. This beginning is the necessary simple first cause. It is the minimal cosmic mind, the initial god. Here Hartshorne would almost certainly disagree. But why? His own doctrine of divine self-surpassing seems to require an initial divine beginning.

Putting this all together, there are segments of the divine life; these segments are distinct gods, which are like divine phoenixes. Each next god is born out of the ashes of the previous god. Or, more biologically, as it dies each previous god gives birth to the next god. Each new god produces its own new universe, with its own new laws and physical contents. This doctrine of a series of god-universe pairs is an attractive way of analytically clarifying some of the vagueness found in process metaphysics. However, this series of god-universe pairs has an unattractive contingency: why does only this sequence exist, when others are at least as divine? It remains inadequate for the logic of possibility.

The needs of the logic of possibility (modal logic) can be met by continuing the biological analogy. Just like organisms divide to make offspring organisms, so gods divide to produce offspring gods. The offspring relation organizes the gods into a divine tree of life, which resembles the earthly tree of life. Following Hartshorne, each offspring god surpasses its parent god. Within any lineage of gods, the stages of the divine life are perpetually self-surpassing. Lesser gods evolve into greater gods. More precisely, for every god, for every possible way that god can be surpassed by a greater god, it produces some offspring god which surpasses it in that way. Since this principle incorporates possibility, the resulting class of god-universe pairs can serve as an adequate domain of quantification for modal logic (e.g. for counterpart theory).

Perhaps Hartshorne would agree that the relative side of God can be analyzed into an endlessly ramified tree of little-g gods, each of which is the unity of its own cosmic epoch (or universe). Nevertheless, he might further insist that the absolute side of God includes and transcends all the lives of these little-g gods. Perhaps this is consistent with his neo-trinitarianism, which permits there to be infinitely many Holy Spirits. Thus the little-g gods are analogous to these universe-bound spirits. Of course, this reference to Christian theology is not necessary. Perhaps the capital-G God is merely some sort of pantheistic unity. Or perhaps there is no reason to refer to any such God at all. According to process polytheism, divine life is not merely the continuity of one divine

individual; on the contrary, it is a vast ecological enterprise, the actualization of all the many divergent possibilities of divine life. Just as there are many species of earthly organisms, with their own natures, so there are many species of gods, with their own natures too. Why should all the gods be made in the image of humanity? If process polytheism is right, they are not. Through process polytheism, the Greek philosophical tradition can overcome the anthropocentric conception of the divine. When the gods are thought of more biologically, they become more highly naturalized. They cease to be above and beyond the world of life. If theology deals with our ultimate concerns, then a more biological conception of the divine can help to integrate life itself into the structure our ultimate concern, and may also help humanity to see itself as essentially unified with earthly life.

Sacra Natura: Discerning the Immanent Sacred
Jerome A. Stone

Religious naturalism affirms the possibility and desirability of a robust non-theistic religious/spiritual life. To articulate this I ask: a) What is a religious orientation? b) What is the adequate object of a religious orientation? The universe? *Deus sive natura*? Gaia? c) Can we dispense with the G___ word?

Two Whiteheadian themes are explored: the importance of tentative generalization and appreciative discernment.

I ask, how to learn from traditions? The Chinese balancing of Confucian and Daoist traditions and a contemporary Shawnee Indian academic are examples.

I propose some environmental implications of this view. 1) We treat sacred things with overriding care. What if the earth and our sibling creatures were sacred? Of course, to live is to eat, which is to kill. Is this a sacramental act? 2) Mohist egalitarianism needs to be in tension with the Confucian view of particular responsibilities. This may be extended by a gloss on Zhang Zai's Western Inscription about becoming one with heaven and earth. 3) Human distinctiveness needs to be joined with a sense of parity between species. We are superior in some ways, but the male cardinal in the horse chestnut tree is superior to us in other ways. 4) We need to learn selective withdrawal from markets. Markets are mindless and without morals. They are supposed to be. But the global market is not the Messiah. 5) All this needs to be focused on ecojustice.

Overcoming Whiteheadianism's Lingering Anthropocentrism: A Recovery of the Naturalist Option in Process Thought
Demian Wheeler

This paper will argue that three distinctive traditions in American philosophical and theological thought—holistic historicism, process empiricism, and religious naturalism—

possess powerful conceptual resources for overcoming anthropocentrism and imagining an ecological alternative to the ever-looming threat of planetary catastrophe.

The first tradition with which I will deal might be dubbed holistic historicism. A good majority of self-described “historicists,” although placing an ontological and epistemological premium on historicity, ironically promulgates a historicism that ignores most of history: the history of nature. Here, I will draw chiefly (although not exclusively) on William Dean, who has criticized several historicist theologians, especially of the postmodern variety, for perpetuating a narrow, mono-humanistic, and confessionalistic historicism. For example, postliberal historicists (e.g. George Lindbeck) fixate on the cultural-linguistic particularities, communal stories, and grammatical rules of very localized religio-human histories (e.g. Christianity) to the neglect of the natural world and the sciences that study it, thereby falling prey to a non-naturalistic humanism and even reintroducing into theology a kind of premodern authoritarianism (and the outmoded notions associated with it, such as supernaturalism). Nevertheless, I will show that several modern theological historicists have begun to theorize (and theologize) a historically conscious alternative to these text- and language- and narrative-obsessed historicisms, holding out for what Dean terms “naturalistic-humanistic historicism,” a historicism that incorporates the entirety of history—human and nonhuman—into its historicist purview. By dissolving any sharp bifurcation between culture and the rest of the universe, locating human history squarely in the natural sphere, and understanding nature itself as historical, a naturalistic-humanistic, or holistic, historicism significantly mitigates the dualism and anthropocentrism that usually accompany historicist philosophies and theologies.

Many of the holistic historicists I will engage (e.g. Dean as well as Sheila Greeve Davaney, Delwin Brown, and Sallie McFague) identify—or at least sympathize—with some form of process thought, which is the second philosophical and theological tradition analyzed in this essay. Following John Cobb, C. Robert Mesle, and countless others, I will suggest that Whiteheadianism, with its emphasis on the processive, relational, nondual, and organic character of reality, completely destabilizes the assumptions, attitudes, practices, and structures that alienate the human species from nonhuman nature and, thus, carries enormous promise for nurturing, and possibly even undergirding, an ecologically sustainable civilization. Be that as it may, many process philosophies and theologies, I will suggest, are also bedeviled by an implicit and unacknowledged anthropocentrism. At this juncture, I will bring Robert Corrington into the conversation, who, more palpably, potently, and pugnaciously than any other thinker on the contemporary scene, has exposed a number of anthropocentric tendencies in the system of Whitehead, Hartshorne, and leading process theologians: a quasi-naturalistic panentheism that posits a deity in and somehow beyond the natural order; a supernaturalism that construes God as a being with personality, awareness, benevolent intentions, and powers to act in the world; an optimistic and romantic cosmology that blunts the pervasive endings and extinctions of existence; an upward-moving, creativity-based teleology that underestimates the predominance of efficient causality and sanitizes the chaos, randomness, waste, victimage, destruction, irrationality, indifference, inertia, predation, purposelessness, repetition, and entropic violence of

nature; a panpsychist, anthropomorphic, and priority-based ontology that “discovers” ordinarily located and decidedly human traits (e.g. decision, freedom, the mental pole, etc.) everywhere in the cosmos; a theory of universal internal relations that overlooks reality’s tears and fractures, disunities and discontinuities. However, rather than completely abandon Whitehead’s vision, I will attempt to recover an alternate, and resolutely anti-anthropocentric, school of process philosophy and theology—the empiricist school. Whiteheadianism’s empirical wing originated with the mid-twentieth-century Chicago schoolers Henry Nelson Wieman and Bernard Loomer and includes a few notable present-day theologians and philosophers of religion amongst its ranks, such as Dean, Nancy Frankenberry, and Donald Crosby. Collectively, these religious and radical empiricists more or less embrace the broad contours of a processive and relational worldview, and yet manage to overcome the lingering anthropocentrism that threatens to undermine the ecological sensibilities and ambitions of a Whiteheadian outlook. To be specific, a process empiricism, which I will constructively piece together from the work of Wieman, Loomer, Dean, Frankenberry, and Crosby, is distinguished, above all, by its naturalistic metaphysics. Such a naturalism is: (1) a thoroughgoing naturalism, interpreting this world, with its immeasurable potentialities, as the one and only reality there is; (2) a sober naturalism, coming entirely clean about the ineradicable tragedies, contingencies, and ambiguities of life (and the divine life); (3) an ordinalist naturalism, viewing mind, agency, and purpose as emergent (rather than omnipresent), relationality as partial (rather than universal), and the natural realm as an incalculable plurality of “whats” (rather than a what); and (4) a pantheistic naturalism, according both metaphysical and religious ultimacy to nature itself.

That final claim fully situates an empirical process philosophy and theology in the third tradition on which I will focus, religious naturalism. Religious naturalists, from Wieman, Loomer, Dean, Frankenberry, and Crosby, to Jerome Stone, Gordon Kaufman, Michael Hogue, Charley Hardwick, and Wesley Wildman, are vehemently anti-supernaturalistic. Nature is all there is or ever will be; there are no transcendent wielders of causation or any entities, spirits, deities, revelations, or realms outside of, external to, or more than the natural order. These American religious naturalisms also reject a supranaturalistic metaphysics, which idolatrously and anthropomorphically conceives of ultimacy as an agential, benign, loving, intentional, active, and purposive divine being (e.g. a fellow-sufferer who understands). Nonetheless, as religiously discerning naturalists, these theologians and philosophers of religion push back on the scientistic, spiritually dead, positivistic, and reductive materialisms that often get conflated with naturalism, asserting that this world, whether in part or in whole (I will make a case for the latter), contains enough sublimity, beauty, grace, splendor, grandeur, value, and mystery, enough aesthetic, axiological, and apophatic depth, to be called religious, even sacred, without stretching these terms beyond recognition (see Jerome Stone, *Religious Naturalism Today*, p. 1). And by regarding nature itself as both the deepest reality there is and the most appropriate object of humanity’s ultimate concern, reverence, devotion, and commitment, religious naturalism, I will propose, is optimally positioned to facilitate the overcoming of anthropocentrism, to reorient philosophical and theological thought toward the natural world, and to help lead the human species back from the brink of ecological disaster.