

De natura dei

Timothy Merkel

*Pase lo que pase,
Sea lo que sea,
Próxima estación – esperanza.*

(Manu Chao)

On the Origin of Substance and Source of Spirit.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

In the beginning... but what was, in the beginning? What was the beginning? What is this God character doing all of a sudden, before we've properly worked out the beginning?

In the beginning, perhaps there was nothing. Perhaps there was Chaos. Perhaps a vacuum, a persisting emptiness; perhaps an absence so profound not even a vacuum can exist. Perhaps, in the beginning, there was All. Perhaps every atom of matter that was, and is, and is to come, and every second of time, slept gently for the aeons of unmeasured infinity, compressed infinitesimally into that point which has no part, the spark, the diamond of all we know and all that will never be known, somehow blazing somehow, alone yet together, afloat in that infinite bourne.

Was that God, that which was Nothing? Was that God, that which was All?

Was that God who dared speak, dared break the eternal silence, dared bring words and structure and logic, command and decree and destiny and purpose, to a world that knew them not? Who dared believe Chaos could be Cosmos? Who uttered in a still, small voice, every word endowed with the weight and the glory of the ages upon ages to come – to be made – who spoke: *Let there be light* –

And there was light.

The great light that gave birth to countless worlds, that outshone and outshines any light to follow, that declared for life, for the extent of all it gave birth to, imperial decrees of acceleration and attraction, substance and energy, even as it irrevocably flung the Many away from the One.

The hidden light of profoundest unplumbed mystery, that scientists peer for lifetimes into the darkest reaches of the sky to try to glimpse.

The light of the world, by which we see the faces of each other.

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From the First Light, the Big Bang, the Spoken Word of Existence, the initial setting-forth of matter and energy into an active and actual world, any number of infinite possible universes,

composed of any number of various constitutive physical laws and constitutions may have come to be. Of these infinite possibilities, the very one which we inhabit and perceive came to be; at the very least it came to the presence of a relation with one particular observer, being us, and most likely it did a great deal more than this as well. But even within this one universe, one among infinite possibilities, vast unimaginable reaches of space and time – of spatiotemporal possibility – amassed themselves. Quite probably time is not infinite in extent (although it most certainly is infinitely divisible); we can with reasonable certainty calculate the point when time began, and with some further consideration make reasonable guesses at the point when time will end. About space we are more uncertain, whether it is infinite or finite in extent; mathematicians and physicists accept the plausibility of both. Yet even if it is not infinite, it is so vastly large in proportion to that part of it which pertains to us and which we inhabit, that by approximation we may well declare and consider ourselves as an infinitesimal point within whatever geometrical figure the universe might describe; at any rate, within this universe existed and exists countless possibilities for the organization of matter and energy, which have coalesced into countless galaxies of different sizes and sorts, which each contain in turn countless stars and planets of various conditions.

In such a realm of infinite and countless possibilities, is it any wonder why we stand here today? The mystery of existence is as obvious as the nose on my face: simply its being there explains itself. These vast sizes and infinite chances often seem to connote a certain existential angst to many, as if the plain facts of their lives and present relations were not validation enough to succor them against intractable tides of believing themselves lonely and lost. To others it imbues a kind of arrogance, transmuting of the miracle of their inconceivable safe landing in Being into a cause and ground to extrude their ego out of their relations, and take the audacious license of declaring themselves the crown of creation.

But indeed if we are an infinitesimal point, in an infinite relation to a spaciousness we might well call infinite – then of this infinite space, any point upon it may be declared its center, and considered equidistant from every other point. By the plain fact of our being here as a single possibility amongst the infinite ones, we – our very senses and perceptions – are the locus through which all the actions and spirits and energies of the universe proceed – because in that boundary, the tenuous membrane of our five senses¹ delineating a pale shadow of selfhood in a small dusty corner of the Web of Existence, begins, and ends, and is all that we are, and all that we are for: Relation. Relation to a living world.

1 “Man has no Body distinct from his Soul, for that call'd Body is a portion of the Soul discern'd by the five Senses, the chief inlets of Soul in this age.” -- William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. Our capacity for perception inevitably generates Relation – both to other beings and to our emergent reflective identity -- as a product of Experience. This must necessarily imbue human and any conscious endeavor with an inescapably spiritual dimension, “spiritual” in this sense being the very definition of the relational element of living, and “spirit” any being or entity so relationally engaged; I shall take opportunity to elaborate upon this further subsequently.

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For in the countless possibilities made available by countless potential combinations of law and space and time, somehow in this spot where we are right now some rather peculiar things started to happen. Or perhaps it is not so peculiar – after all, with countless possibilities everything must happen in countless possible different ways. And what is to say that Life is only the chemical procession we know in our world, that other consciousnesses do not organize themselves in ways unfathomable to us in deeper levels of the ether? But at any rate, when we actually take the trouble to probe into and question the Life that is generally, and wisest, taken for granted, the answers resemble nothing so much as some kind of phenomenal joke – maybe the best one ever told. Lightning struck some chemicals and turned them into amino acids, to the accompaniment of a cosmic laugh track. Then at one point they bumped into each other in the right way and became proteins, and through a prolonged and extraordinary primordial song and dance there came to be DNA and single-celled organisms; after which, at some certain point, one single-celled organism ate another one and there were mitochondrions and nuclei and eukaryotes. And on and on, one utterly absurd implausibility tumbling after another through limitless aeons, down to the rise of agriculture and an eyeblink later you sitting there in your chair reading this paper. Why not, with infinite possibility? Why the hell not?

This scientific story is one particular easy way to perceive ourselves as products of infinite possibility. For indeed we, we ourselves, sitting in our chairs, are irrevocably embodied in the consequences of countless past extraordinary coincidences, happenstances, spates of phenomenal luck, and miracles – embodied in fact *as* the consequences of all this, since it is these very occurrences, prodigious as they may seem, which explain not only why we happen to be here, but also why we happen to be in this condition, embedded in these particular experiences. It is thus that we are manifested, we and all the other beings we encounter in the duration of our world-experience; it is these manifestations, and the complications of their juxtapositions, which confront us with purpose, with responsibility, with destiny, with vocation – with all the beautiful terror, and the terrible beauty, of a conscious existence. For living *as* product of infinite possibility – this is a far different thing than the mere acceptance of the story or the fact of being such a product, and requires a greatly different wisdom.

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In the beginning... but what was, in the beginning? The matter-side is well discerned by science; but the spirit-side exists in any relationally engaged matter. Thus Martin Buber begins at this very point: “In the beginning is the Relation.” The beginning of Experience is the beginning of

the experienced world; the beginning of interaction between entities is the beginning of Spirit. For Duality cannot exist without Trinity; the interaction and relation between the two is always present in any duality. So, in music, the character of two tones struck together is altogether different from either of the characters of the two tones struck individually; the chord is also in geometry, which takes it as undefinably true that two points, when they exist, will automatically also signify the existence of a line. In this phenomenon we begin to glimpse a more precise definition of Spirit: that which is breathed between two beings in relation – that which is shared – that which moves like a wind over the face of the Earth – that which in its instant generation irrevocably allows Meaning and Significance to enter the world. Indeed, what world was there, before any eyes were upon it? So the generation of the experiential world is, not only primally, but ever and always, in the opening of the eyes to the experience of the Other, in speaking You; the relational act is in each instant the creation of a new universe – the universe of the present.²

And so if Spirit is what fills the empty spaces, the joints and the interstices of the universe, surrounding every being with relation, then it is easy to see what can be meant by speaking of our spirits, or the spirits of the world, or any other kind of spirit in particular: its size is the extent, and its quality the depth of embeddedness, in a being's relations. The possession of a spirit would thus be inherent in any being, or in any denominated organization of substance; it is as if the entire universe were utterly filled with points, yet also utterly filled with the lines described between these points, and the figures described by the infinite possible contours of enclosing lines; the entities and the correlate become again the One, as is also thought of the Trinity. The spirit, and the spiritual world, spiritual interaction and spiritual awareness, additionally reify themselves by themselves becoming concepts with which we can have a relation, and fill experience with the potentialities of their perspective.³

This arrangement of constructs is perhaps a bit complicated to envision in a neat procedure from beginning to end, but it need not matter. For Buber, the mere fact of being, not just in the abstract but in the vital sense of *me being a being*, is of utmost importance, taken for granted merely because of and for the sake of the experience of it. Regardless of how we arrived, we are undeniably present in the here and now, embedded in a current set of relations, living a life full of spiritual choice; these are conditions which though they may be rationalized nevertheless must

2 This is also borne out by what appears to me to be the most plausible philosophical interpretation of quantum theory, the “many-worlds” theory – see articles by Eliezer Ludkowsky. In this conception, every single decision occurring in the world branches our particular world off from a cascading quantum multiverse, rendering Creators of even the most seemingly random organization of sub-atomic particles.

3 Here incidentally a simple geometrical case against the holding too fast of the boundaries typically presumed or (in my view) imposed between beings and between supposed dualistic opposites may be elided (a case which is also presented in different forms throughout many diverse philosophies such as those of Parmenides and Zen Buddhism (cf. Chiara's project): for the supposition of the rightness or absoluteness of any boundary described between beings or between opposites must include some case that this supposition is superior to every other possible boundary among the infinite numbers possible, and a brief consideration of even the variety of human conceptions of such boundaries will demonstrate that such a case is manifestly impossible to make. This is an important consideration to keep in mind in light of my coming discussion of morality.

be lived, and lived generate our world.

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On Divine Nature, and Conceptions Thereof.

God is said to have created the world through the utterances of words, and in more mystical traditions even to have constructed the very fabric of the universe with the Hebrew alphabet. But it seems more plausible to me that the creative energy inherent in language flows equally in both directions: we, too, create God by the uttering of Her name, just as She creates us by whispering ours over the face of the waters. Extended, Buber says, all lines of relation intersect in the eternal You; every abandonment of ego and objectification in favor of awareness and encounter and listening is a further ascent into an all-pervading spirit; the recognition is also a construction, a further extension towards an asymptote. And though a creation often implies a maker and a material, perhaps a collaborator, perhaps a purpose – these considerations all are the manifestations of the same mutually exercised and balancing force which pervades all relational action, all thus equally present in the first instance of the relational act.

The ultimate Unity of creation and the ultimate Unity of the soul are one ultimate Unity; Infinity can be seen in a grain of sand, and the Divine Presence in every living thing; it is merely a matter of semantics and of perspective as to which contains which, which is primary, whether there is a difference at all. And so, although I do not and will not make any prescriptions to anyone about the kinds of relation they are called to, and indeed I recognize and sympathize deeply with the reservations held by many concerning the kinds of power to which they are prepared to submit their life,⁴ I do most firmly believe that every human being should, if the ego does not blind out their relations, be able to find no end of presence in the world with which they can recognize a spiritual relationship – which can point them towards encounter and reverence and conviviality, and the joy of co-creation.

This is not at all to say that every recognition of God by people is a wholly healthy one; such recognitions always reflect the health and character of the relations engaged in by the recognizants; the empty linguistic term is filled by the spirit of the one who utters it. When the Universe, and the evolutionary generators of living diversity on Earth, are gods and creators, every action of Creation only and ever gives birth to yet another facet of God, another manifestation of ultimate Unity. When humans believe and truly understand themselves to be gods and creators, they too profoundly multiply the peculiarly fecund outlet of Spirit in their

⁴ It must be noted, however, that in most cases, whist much fuss and worry is being exerted keeping oneself free from overt allegiances, hidden bonds abound and bind many secretly to god-like entities: economies, states, parties, brand loyalty, prejudices: Mammon masking division as unity

nature, and through full investment in their relations, the beings and spirits they are connected to, herald anew an age of miracles. But when a voice is heard to speak: "I am God, and there is no other; you shall have no other gods before me" -- then is something truly sinister afoot. For to deny the deity of one part of the glorious self-generated Creation is to deny the connectedness of all; to assert that there is only one part of the glorious self-generated Creation worthy of reverence and awe is to foment division in ultimate Unity, and set at contradiction that which would be in harmony; to advance a small part of the spirits of the world at the cost of proclaiming decide against all the rest is to torture and suppress the fullness of the divinity within.

Neither is this to say that there can be no pure religion which sees God as One; indeed, the worship of Divine Unity is one of the most sublime devotions. Yet this Unity, to be well revered, must be seen as what it is, truly infinite and truly all-encompassing -- most certainly not as an abstraction of one's personal moral and societal prejudices. The greatest peril in monotheism is that it easily becomes egoism in disguise -- be it the egoism of an individual, of a culture, or of the human species as a whole. And no amount of devotion to ego is compatible with devotion to a world endowed with Relation and infused with Spirit, where good and evil have sense in the light of plurality, where no individual is an island entire to itself, but always function and is organized as an organ within a great organism.

It should be incidentally clear that the atheism that rejects and departs from and considers useless from the structures of organized religions is of a character altogether different from the atheism that privileges one's sense of self in one's ontology. Indeed, organized religions often serve as a front for atheists of the latter kind, appropriating sacred language of devotion and relation for the dispersal and perpetuation of a set of arbitrary social structures which justify or lend support to systems of oppression. Without engagement in relationality, no religion can truthfully claim to have words worth speaking about God -- while Buber's garret-room student, who adheres to none of formal definitions or organized constructions prevalent in our time which claim to represent the true nature of God, and yet stretches forth his hands to the Infinite in the deepest reaches of night, remains as little an atheist as the most pious monk in the holiest mountaintop abbey.

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So, in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth; or else it was the case that the heavens and the earth of themselves came to be; or else it is the case that these are the same thing. In each case a primal spark initiates and directs the history of our Cosmos till Here and Now -- and we self-beings, utterly present in the Here and Now, arise to consciousness of our singular

spirithood, our enlistment in the ranks of the hosts carrying out reality's unfolding.

God is a relational endeavor, the holy emergence from the encounter between beings; whether the actions of the universe have conscious or unconscious force, the conscious engagement with them is a divine engagement. Thus, though all are unified through their existence in the divine spirit, all also retain the responsibility for the generation and manifestation of the divine in their unavoidably lived realities. Thus the Rig-Veda saith:⁵ *Who verily knows and who can here declare it, whence it was born and whence comes this creation? The Gods are later than this world's production.* Gods are born when entities reconcile the fact of their selves to the fact of their world (if indeed such concepts are manifested towards these entities as facts); the quality of the practice of relation by each enspirited entity seeking such reconciliation, and the terms upon which the reconciliation is founded, determine for each entity the character, the benevolence or malevolence, of the born deity. We know in our deepest hearts, writes Buber, that we are in need of God – yet it is ever equally as true that God is in need of us. The generation of God is the relational act; the most supreme form of God is the ultimate intersection of the relational act. Thus, if God is to stand in relation to us, within our particular delimitation of being, the character of our life must be relational. And thus there is a way forward to the conundrum expressed at the end of the Rig-Veda's creation hymn (*he, the first origin of this creation, whether he formed it all or did not form it, whose eye controls this world in highest heaven, he verily knows, or perhaps he does not*) – for even the deity's comprehension of the world it unfolds from itself is dependent utterly on the experiences of the beings the world consists of, and it falls once again to our personal account to live our actualities with divine orientation.

It is not my place to abolish the idea of consciousness from the beautiful mathematics of physics's aeons, or the delicate yet vibrantly robust interchange of energies in a Cretaceous forest, or a hive of mound-building ants, or birds and dolphins with their ineffable music – and I would support the argument that it is beings and processes such as these which are the primary inlets of divine energy in our world – but it is certain that a being who has laid claim to the capacity and responsibility of such a profundity of conscience as we claim to practice must be gravely held to account on a spiritual level. Thus Buber can call the creation of man God's most daring risk, most sacrificial endeavor: in permitting the emergence of such a being of such power, the organization of Cosmos in this place arrived at potentialities thitherto inconceivable – potentialities which have perhaps been equally present throughout the course of human history, but which at this particular moment lie dangerously out of balance: on the one hand, potential for unprecedented works of spiritual transcendence, for practices of intricately complex relationality, and a constructive force to shepherd Gaia's diversity to unimagined levels; on the other hand, egoism, pride, hubris, distrust, selfishness, domination, exploitation, and myopia, all

5 Hymn 129.

the familiar pitfalls implicit in peculiar positions of power.

Indeed it is so, that humanity is pure spirit; indeed it is so, that humanity is pure nature; indeed it is so, that nothing sets us apart in dignity from any other being; indeed it is so, that we are privileged by the fact of existence and consciousness to be ourselves the beings we ourselves are. The contraries are both true; one may indeed wake up to see both of Buber's world-pictures on the wall, and know that each are One and All. But I do not believe with Buber that such a sight, fully glimpsed, must fill the watcher with horror. Rather, it may not even possible to fully glimpse each simultaneously, but I feel that the closer one comes to this state of perception, the greater will one experience enlightenment and joy.

Humanity is nature and humanity is God. God is nature and nature is God. The three worlds align, enmesh, and give birth to the one world of experience; the greatest peace is in the experience of the three worlds without exclusion. For all three realms reach both backward and forward, interlinking themselves in an eternal Trinity. And though I can speak of the identity in many more words, and I can paint the cycle and flow of the three energies in music, the only supremely relevant point of intersection is in the singular individual experience – which when filled with all three worlds becomes the experience of the All.

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On the Theological Wisdom of Science.

Darwin's theory of evolution was met with strong opposition by the Christian church when it was introduced in 1859, and many branches of this religion still have yet to reconcile their cosmologies with the philosophical and self-perceptual implications, with the mythopoesis, of this particular scientific worldview. Even now, the full spiritual consequences of understanding the evolution of life are not well comprehended by most of us in the West, religious and non-religious alike, because they are so deeply conflicted with a self-perception that is very dear to us in our culture, which Christianity has served arguably as a generator of but certainly as a vehicle for: that humankind, because of its power, deserves dominance – that we, with our profound capabilities, deserve a privileged position in this particular Cosmos, in this world and planet we inhabit – that our spiritual capacity, recognized by most as mental capacity, is superior to all other beings we know, and that therefore we deserve a place next to God, who yet we banish to heaven whilst we rule the Earth in his name. This self-perception has even entered the unconscious metaphysics of many evolutionary scientists, who spend decades of research attempting to uncover the greatest Missing Link of their universe, that between being human and being special – not even to mention the countless so-called atheistic scientists who devote the

entirety of their effort at understanding and learning about the world to projects that alienate the world from us or subjugate and exploit it.

But evolution need not be atheistic at all, despite the claims of believers wary of any assault on their preconceived ontological paradigms, and the patriotic declarations of those who imagine that science holds absolute domain in the rational realm, accepting nothing from nor providing anything to the discourse of the psycho-spiritual – an opposition united on a strange assumption stemming solely from the extent to which the name God is used so loudly and carelessly. But if the scientific conclusions of the study of the evolution of life are to be held as generally trustworthy, it inescapably conveys all kinds of characteristics concerning the Absolute, the origin and purpose of existence, and other aspects of relationality typically conceived of as pertaining to whatever it is we attempt to describe by the linguistic term “God”. Careful consideration of this reveals a character altogether different from the rather abstract and moody caricature of Divine Power that dominates Christian and humanistic discourses alike, passing back and forth between each with ever increasing virulence, rather like a bad cold, which has not done great service to the spiritual potential of humanity.

For many of us on this side of the world, whether they maintain the presence or absence of this Divine Power in Creation, seem to manifest little actual disagreement about the actual practice of how to engage with certain parts of the world. Believer and skeptic alike seem to agree, for instance, that it is all right to be rapacious overlords, to believe the planet is a resource put in place for our unlimited benefit, that the other beings of the world have no rights next to our desires, either because God made them all for our whims and pleasures, or because there is no God and thus we ourselves are the highest power and have the right to assert dominance with our power. Or, in an identical reflection of this process in the human sphere, that it is all right to have colonized all corners of this globe, turning all the land and labor and culture of the world to the service of the pleasure of Western civilization, stamping out a vast diversity of wisdom and perception and relation in favor of a consumptive, egoistic monoculture humanity, either because they are infidels who do not know the One True God, the God we have created in our image, or because they are ignorant people who were not clever enough with the scientific method to learn how to build bombs and stock exchanges.⁶

No, the God evolution sets forth is very far from an abstract lawgiver setting out rules of

⁶ This is quite a statement of guilt to lay on all at once, and I understand if a reader is inclined to disagree with the breadth of my statement. In practice I have generally found that the viscerality of the reaction I get to such a claim is proportionate with the extent to which my interlocutor does not wish to be personally implicated in this epochal criminality – which is altogether understandable yet all the more unfortunate inasmuch as inhabitants of the West by and large still reap huge economic rewards from the still very present economic institutions and sociopolitical structures founded in the colonial centuries. The provision of a full historical account of the ideological roots of the European colonial enterprise, and of the extent of the degradation it has wreaked in all parts of the world, is somewhat beyond my scholarly capabilities, but the inspired or curious reader may trace it through many avenues in several separate schools of thought.

conduct, verifying prejudices on the one hand and privileges on the other – an *ex nihilo* justification for the Ego. Think about it: what ought a God do? Generally, it has a hand in making the world. Often it goes about destroying the world at some point as well. Sometimes it has a relationship with people, often to help them know why they are here, to give them a sense of purpose and belonging; other times to help out in moments of particular stress; sometimes it is a force which actively gives strength to people; other times it instructs them how to be good people. Beyond its relation with people, it sometimes spiritually inhabits non-human beings or physical part of the world, and usually has a role in the general sustaining of all life as well as the course of fate and history; and it tends to have some connection with the notion of the Ultimate. These are the first things off the top of my head from a brief running-through of the theologies I know; other examples should also point us in the same direction. The relation of us to our idea of God, in short, inhabits the realm of some very basic choices we make about the way we see ourselves, the world, and our relation to the world, and insofar as any concept makes claim to truth in that realm, it makes claim to truth in cosmology.

Thus, from this short set of attributes, there are several places where we could consider that evolution is telling us to look for God. It can be in the vast infinity of the random process itself, by which chance our world and ourselves came to be. It can be in the miracle of Life, the utterly surprising and beautiful happenstance of the existence not only of us but also of the myriads of others in the extent of our world's time and space. It can be the interconnected Gaia, the as yet insuppressible life-force that has promulgated both us and the vast diversity around us, the network of mutual support and dependence the entire biosphere has built up for the life and well-being of its inhabitants. It can be sunlight, the bestower of energy on the world, or fecundity, the womb of generation, or death itself and the destroying worms that are not destroyers at all, but heralds and agents of the eternal transmutation and transmigration of life-energy. It can be our very planet, the only home we know, and the only reason for the existence of all that supports our existence. Evolution considered as spiritual teaching clearly sets out our role in creation – not a unique and uniquely privileged crown or ruler, but an emergence from an age-old lineage, subject to exactly the same laws as all other beings, one of many members in a great and diverse community; they declare that purpose on this planet has been given to the creation of life and diversity; they do battle against the acquisitive, appropriative machinations of the self-privileging Ego.

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On Good and Evil.

It is commonly asserted that evolution mandates the success of the most greedy and most

opportunistic, but this is simply not the case, being merely (or so I would argue) a hubristic conceptual holdover from many other strains of thought in our culture.⁷ The very fact that every being engages in a struggle to live and survive and nutrify itself shows that every being relies on countless others to carry out these tasks. For while, in the light of evolution, death is no longer a tragedy, since all are shown to arise from the same energy and same spirit, and return ever again to new forms of these, life remains sacred, an exuberant claim to a small share of infinite space and time and spirit by a temporary collective of atoms, and the closer a being comes to an understanding of the relations in which it stands to the other beings connected to it in global and local webs of sustenance, the more it engages with that primal sacredness, seeking the well-being of an entire web rather than imagining it can strengthen or at least distinguish itself by plucking out neighboring strands. Because of what are in our present age and condition very weighty incommensurabilities between our means of understanding and those of other beings, it is somewhat difficult for us to perceive through scientific measures the degree to which those other beings do indeed engage with this primal sacredness, although no end of indigenous religions would hasten to assure us that such engagements are the very substance of which our Cosmos consists. Yet even now, scientists begin to contemplate the power of emergent and self-organizational order, the fundamental importance of community in ecology and family in community, the interconnectedness and interreliance of all global biogeochemical processes, the extraordinary phenomenon of altruism, as bizarrely improbably in any system of economics as it is bluntly obvious from simple vantage points of life and society – even the extent to which individual genetic expressions depend on the entire rest of the code for their significance.

To be sure, evolution gives no code of laws; it proclaims no judgment against a pack of wolves chasing down an elderly reindeer, or a rapidly-growing vine shading out a species native to that region for far longer, or a careening ball of rock from the heavens colliding with our world by phenomenal chance and bringing countless ways of life to an end forever, any less than it as an authority figure would condemn human beings who bulldoze rainforests to plant soybeans for cattle feed. But this is only a limitation of a certain paradigm of looking, which has not even begun to consider our own embeddedness and enspiritedness in the world evolution has created. Even without beginning to explore these, however, I hope to have at least provided some clues concerning how this specific scientific understanding of the world, if it is properly and fully engaged with, may indicate to us a spiritually significant understanding of the world we live in, and the position we occupy within it; and by bearing these in mind as we shift our vantage point, the natures of authority and responsibility may also come into clearer focus.

This Darwinian account of human origins traces the descent of man in a positive or at least positivist light – which and of what nature were the beings and processes that were the

7 On this the philosophy of Alan Watts may also be consulted, for instance, the short work *Nature, Man, and Woman*.

forebearers of our present condition. In contrast, the Biblical tradition, consolidating the entire spectacle of this history into a few concise and magisterial pronouncements of the Supreme Being, considers the descent of man in a very different sense, one which is usually purposefully neglected in scientific accounts: descent from an alleged state of perfection and divine harmony into one of wickedness and moral confusion.

A preëxistent state of harmony between humankind and the natural world should not be a great stretch for scientific imagination. One of the most fascinating insights to have arisen on the unified nature of the planet we live on (at least in recent time and in Western scientific discourse) is the Gaia hypothesis, initially propounded by James Lovelock in 1971.⁸ This posits that life itself, as a whole, creates, regulates, and balances the conditions of its surroundings in a manner that benefits life itself as a whole. This is manifested in such characteristics of the planetary system such as global temperature, the chemical composition of the atmosphere, ocean salinity, and so forth. In essence, the concept of Gaia extends Darwinian conceptions of adaptation across the traditional boundaries between organisms and the environment, in addition to those between organisms and each other. In Gaian understanding, the chaotic, spontaneous actions of life as it seeks nutrients and creates waste creates a metastable whole, capable of resilience to manifold perturbations, consistently producing conditions favorable to the further proliferation of life in its widest sense.

Scientific advocates of Gaia are always careful to deny it consciousness, or at least consciousness of the spectrum in which humans participate. This is perhaps an overly careful attempt to distinguish their ideas from mystical interpretations thereof, and thus retain credibility in a framework of Western scientific thought which still and tragically lends little credence to knowledges and worldviews not rooted entirely in the practice of rationality. Be that as it may, the phenomenon of human consciousness, and even more so the phenomenon of the human experience of consciousness, adds additional complication to the conception of a self-regulating Gaia. Master Dogen of the Zen tradition writes⁹ that fish need not contemplate the limits of the water, nor birds those of the air, but simply exist in those elements, unperturbed by ontological insecurity, and that this simple existence is the essence of Life. It is probably a vain endeavor to attempt to pinpoint exactly when, within the scientific understanding of history, humans lost this trick of simple existence – or, to put it another way, when humans in any describable way ceased to be animals.¹⁰ Within a religious or mythopoetic context, however, precision and

⁸ Developed also by Lynn Margulis, Dorion Sagan, and others.

⁹ *Genjokoan*.

¹⁰ By this account I once again do not mean to ascribe consciousness solely to humanity at the expense of other Earth-creatures; indeed, such beings as cetaceans, pachyderms, octopodes, and the others of the apes, as well as superorganisms such as insect colonies, forests, and mycelial networks may very plausibly be possessed of consciousnesses as or even more fully developed than those of humans. Although this is a point I am privately quite convinced of, it is not within my purpose (nor especially within my capability) to prove so in the confines of this paper, which is restricted as tragically as my own self to the limits of my all-too-human experience as a human being – which, indeed, as my argument above sets out, seems to be of a rather different character (which I would very

factuality are less relevant considerations in the task of reconciling our understanding to our condition, and we are free to talk about the Fall of Man.

The Biblical story of the Fall is widely misinterpreted as representing an occurrence by which evil entered a good world through some combination of human and diabolical agency, although this misinterpretation is quite understandable inasmuch as it stems from a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of evil. Rather, the Fall of Man represents a fundamental change in the relation of humankind to the world. In the precognizant Gaia-Eden, proto-humanoids akin to countless others of the forms of life on Earth killed other beings, ate omnivorously, shat out what they ate, died when rocks fell on them by accident, participated in venery, and otherwise carried out the business of being an Earth-creature without paying too much mind to why and how they were doing it. Throughout all, life generated life, and lives came to an end, even great collectives of lives; at one point in our planet's past, a volcanic explosion lasting millions of years and surpassing the force and power of the entire present human stockpile of atomic weaponry eradicated ninety-nine percent of all life on the planet. It is a testament to the power of Gaia to generate life that the recovery of diversity in the generations of the surviving few took the blink of a geological eye; it is a testament to the absence of humanity on the face of the Earth at that time that no one saw fit to weep.

The great temptation which humanity at some point somehow succumbed to was not the temptation to do wrong, but the temptation to have knowledge of Good and Evil – to differentiate among infinite possibilities what is preferable and what is to be avoided. The primordial misstep that precipitated the Fall of our species was an embracement of Duality in our slowly growing capacities to relate to the world with our minds. “When you learn this,” says the serpent in the Biblical tale, “you shall be like God -- ” and indeed it would be specious to claim that none before humans ever bothered to realize what helped them out and what hurt them in the carrying out of their lives – in fact, if the Gaia hypothesis holds any water, life has been teleologically oriented towards the production and sustenance of life since a very early stage. But the recognition of the duality was the invention of judgment, a tool with which we have practiced greatly ever since, ever honing and wielding it. Many have been the results: with the keen use of this invention we have flown the moon and photographed our world from the outside; we have also created explosives large enough to annihilate our entire race.

But the Fall would not be fatal if this were the only implication of what is considered the most primal sin. Judgment is, in the end, but a crude tool, although we have crafted an immensely complicated world from it, which has necessitated the use of an extraordinary amount of it by a lot of us. No, the true sin (if this account is to be believed) is not in the physical act of acquiring

much shrink from asserting to be superior) than what other consciousnesses may be present among us.

knowledge of good and evil, but the psychical state which desired that acquisition, that proposition: "I can be like God!" -- and the subsequent withdrawal of oneself into one's own Ultimate Unity, the Ego, which is an Ultimate Non-entity. For though we all are like God, not one of us is supreme; Hubris is that which considers that one is supreme, that one is greater than one actually is, that one needs not consider the relations one is embedded in as a being. Even the slightest faults can be seen to stem from this attitude, and our great hemispheres of injustice flow from Hubris like a river. And not only is it the primal sin, but it is also one, as Oedipus's dramatic example demonstrates, the dire consequences of which are impossible to avoid.

The Biblical tradition of the Fall is generally considered to teach that Fall occurred as a primal, prehistoric decision, with humanity suffering for the balance of this present age the repercussions of the error of our first parents. But if morality is spectral rather than polar, this process may be considered in a fashion more naturally adapted to our experience of time, which is also for the most part continuous rather than discrete. For a Fall can be envisioned in two ways: that where one proceeds from one level to another, an accomplished Fall, a procession like Lucifer's from the realm of Heaven to that of Earth; but also it may be a fall ongoing, a state of existence, an eternal descent. Alice in the rabbit-hole indeed comes to a bumping stop eventually, before the gates of Wonderland, but in her process from our world to there it seems certain she passed numerous other worlds between, both internal and external. Most often the Fall of Man is interpreted with the conclusion that Man is now Fallen; but I see no reason to not consider the alternative, that Man is still Falling, as still more likely. "In the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die," warns the Lord God, and much theological ink has been spilt over twisting the word "die" to render God a truth-teller. Why not twist the word "day"? The day of mankind's existence as a member of Gaia is as a millisecond in its sight, even from the first flashes of sky-lightning that molded together the first proto-chemicals of Life; so mankind's birth-day, geologically, may be the same as its death-day.

And so if the Fall of Man is connected to Duality in his outward perception and Hubris in his inward perception, the history and process of an ongoing Fall may be traced very neatly through both space and time as a function of the presence and prevalence of both of these within specific human cultures and epochs of history. Arturo Escobar, for instance, finds that much of the structure of our contemporary economic, ecological, and spiritual crises can be found in the strong dualism of Western civilization's habits of relation, if not philosophies and religions,¹¹ and this case is also made in the philosophy of Alan Watts. As for senses of superiority in humanity, who knows when they began to be felt? But it is historically certain that institutionalized systems of this began to be organized around five hundred years ago, when first Europeans set out to impart their at best imperfect relationality to five other continents, engaging in

11 Escobar, *Notes on the Ontology of Design*, a most incisive text.

remarkably long periods (continuing in some places till the present day) of completely denying the possibility of listening to the peoples they disadvantaged, believing themselves privileged to whatever portion of the Earth's bounty they could seize for themselves – which by turns is even now making the planet a mere host to a spreading contagion of homogenous humanity, which does not shrink to devour its own self when its desire for consumption is not satiated.

Social critics such as Annie Leonard¹² now make the claim (as difficult to concretely prove as it is easy to grasp as utterly plausibly) that the entire Earth-system, human and natural elements alike, are now in the throes of subjugation to the singular programme of providing wealth to a certain few, and that this is being permitted to happen by an ever more and more hegemonic alienation of the human experience through technology and the market system, accompanied an ever more and more complete assertion that the powers of nature exist solely for the use of humanity, only occasionally throwing up a 'humanitarian crisis' in some faraway country. In the framework I have been using, it is I think most defensible that we are now further fallen than ever we have been; despite our constant self-congratulatory recognition of Human Progress in such realms as medicine and entertainment,¹³ the fact is, both spiritually and ecologically, that our Progress is built on the blood of countless ways of life, human and non-human alike. And, to be sure, with the advent of the Internet our potential for connectedness may be the greatest it has ever been; but if the tool is seized in a spirit of anomie, nothing but further alienation and violence will ensue from its use, as is demonstrated in the comments section of any website chosen at random.

For as progressed as we may seem to have become, we are only now beginning to come to firm grips with an ancient intuition which is becoming a scientific fact, that one of the most inherent characteristics of diversity is resilience to disturbance;¹⁴ homogeneity, even if it builds skyscrapers and flies to the moon, is easily wiped away. Just as the strength of a spider's web increases with the intricacy of its interconnectedness, so also the strength of our human experiment will be defined by the extent to which we hold fast to our connections to our world and to each other; if we continue what has been our astronomically foolish project of recent history, to perpetuate a certain small subset of human experience at the cost of the experiences of a vast array of human cultures and non-human ecologies, we set ourselves up to be banished from the schoolyard. Nobody wants to play with a bully.

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On Free Will.

12 Creator of the noted critical short film *The Story of Stuff* (readily accessible for free on the internet).

13 Entertainment: the “between-having” of the consumer.

14 As noted for instance by the erudite and accomplished biologist E. O. Wilson in his work *The Diversity of Life*, but an exploration of this term “resilience” in ecological literature will bear much worthwhile fruit for the perseverant.

Within infinite boundaries causality may not necessarily run in the same direction as time; if we exist as spirits, that is, as experiencing and relational entities, this spiritual and relational consciousness may explain the history of the world just as much as that history might explain us. Aristotle also spoke of an ultimate cause, a prime mover which somehow instigated every process of our world; at infinite distance, with quantum uncertainty, any ultimate cause is also an ultimate purpose, the final cause unified with the material and the efficient; Hume's deconstruction of our concepts of cause and effect as not passing beyond inference into certainty also speak to this identity which is only obscure to those who do not easily or often contemplate reality extradimensionally, from the vantage point of Eternity above the perspective of time. The integral calculus even banished forever the pitfall of not perceiving this from the world of mathematics, although in so many centuries since its invention its practitioners have not been able to rid themselves of a self-perception as discrete units. For some reason, Eternity is not generally considered a typical part of the rational perspective, and any implications an encounter with it might reveal to a life are filed as suspicious, unprovable articles of faith, somehow indigestible to those who even self-designate as “consumers”¹⁵. But inasmuch as it is Eternity, it is in all things, and must be encountered by anything that so much as possesses movement – thus it calls to be understood and related to by anything that possess the capability of understanding and relation.

And when our understanding is present in eternity, and we recognize our homes and families in the silences of infinite spaces, our own presence as the single point of intersection of countless figures of divinity, fate and freedom are shown as such similar processes as to render any difference between them irrelevant; they are “promised to each other”, as Buber writes. Causality is a law only in a world of objects; in a world of relations causality becomes purpose. Our actions act out the will of God; our actions are themselves the will of God; our actions are the actions of our present universe; our actions are the creation of God. In a world of objects and functions, we are never free from the misery that comes with compulsion; in a world of beings, laws are the chosen tools of the artist.

The same thing can be both destiny and challenge just as the same thing can be both history and challenge. The Fall of Man – who is to say that it may have been avoided? As a species we managed to avoid it for some two hundred thousand years, and if temptation had not ensnared us, perhaps some other being would have chosen this path ages hence. Nevertheless, here we are, as fallen creatures, faced with the dawning awareness of some very forboding realities. Who is to say the Fall may not be reversed, be resisted against – that life may be lived in at least partial rejection of the idea that one's own existence should be a part of the same hubristic current – and that perhaps even for this struggle, and this possibility for victory, the Fall occurred in the first

¹⁵ Congregants at the shrine of Mammon, which is the only unholy shrine in existence, for it alone has laid its first foundation on objects rather than relations; its is the only lie that can never be beautiful.

place? Or that engagement in this struggle is not, at the very least, a mighty spiritual calling?

* * *

On Moral Duties.

For if the Fall is a process connected inexorably to certain self-perpetuating traits of human nature, the keys of Redemption are already in the hands of those who recognize the process of the Fall, and who have the capacity and courage to live a life of opposing energy. Let me be clear: I most firmly assert the existence of morality, of right and wrong action, and of our spiritual duty to carry out that which is beneficial and to avoid that which is harmful. I am, on the other hand, extremely hesitant to outline any kind of moral code. Our unique relational position, in both our character as individuals and as groups guarantees that each of us has unique responsibilities to carry out in the unique capacity of the unique being he or she is. Thus Francisco Varela¹⁶ speaks of “ethical know-how”, how right behavior emerges as a product of wisdom, not of knowledge; how a successful ethics is instinctually guided, and only breaks down when processes of Ego and Reason present it the problems they have invented; thus Blake's devil speaks that “Jesus was all virtue, and acted from impulse, not rules.”

But the relational character of moral behavior can indeed provide a broad description of a similarity in character likely to inhere in the virtues required of each of us. Since, through our ecological and spiritual embeddedness, we are irrevocably set in relation to all beings and processes of life in this world, we all share a mutual moral responsibility towards each other and towards our ecological and spiritual collectivity. Dostoyevsky's Father Zosima took this even further by saying that we must think ourselves alone responsible for the sins of everything; that always we must overcome sin with love, and believe that if we are sinned against, it is perhaps because we have not given forth enough love.¹⁷ Whether or not it constitutes any kind of provable absolute, the fact is that the tendency of this particular organization of space and time in the Cosmos has been towards the generation of greater and greater complexity, diversity, and abundance of life. There has been a 5.5-billion year trend in this direction. And although absolute proofs of worth may lie beyond the reaches of logic (a system of epistemology we as a species have devised as a tool for analysis of the world) it is perhaps, considered in the relational light, not too impertinent a question to inquire why anyone might dare, if he is given the blessing of consciousness and awareness of his actions and their consequences, to act in any way counter to this trend. In short, if we are participants in Gaia, and somehow imbued with the possibility to feel a sense of duty, why should we not feel dutiful towards Gaia? If we are conscious and aware of each other, and truly believe that we share in Gaia's divinity, why should the Golden Rule not

16 *Ethical Know-how: Action, Wisdom, and Cognition* (1999).

17 *The Brothers Karamazov*, book VI, chapter 3.

have its place as a first approximation of a highest law?

For Good and Evil are judgements brought about by the traitorous claim to possess knowledge of them; they are brought into the world by their names being spoken, and being ever an imposed duality must always coexist, and so prolong forever the existence of Evil in the world. But right action and relational responsibility, conducted as the duty and purpose of the being charged with it, without judgement or the guilt and stupor that it brings, have existed as long as there have been spirits to have relation with each other, and will endure long after the greatly awaited day of the Last Judgement, which, contrary to common belief, will be great not because it is the end of the world, but because it is the end of judgement: a day of profoundest relief to the weary souls who have suffered the torments of duality since the entrance of judgement to the earth, a day of sweetly humbling joy at the realization that everybody, everywhere, has ceased to find use for judgement.

So, although absolute moral principles, codes interpreting and assigning goodness and badness to action, are very difficult to come by, but this is in great part because the pursuit of these is one that stems from a world that pursues absolutes; the many and profound difficulties in discovering and instituting such a set of principles indicates more the wrongheadedness of such an approach to life than the general absence of morality as such. When one's world pursues, for instance, direction or guidance rather than absolutes – dialectically engaging with and seeking within the set of relations that one's life is present in – then moral direction and moral guidance are sure to emerge from the encounter. For although the desire to do good is greatly stronger towards one's closest relations than to most other beings in the world, and even the capacity to do good is often impaired when the conviviality of togetherness is transformed into the alienation of ego-proximity, nevertheless any life does in fact and undeniably stand in relation to countless beings, relations that are worthy of respect and honor and the exercise of good will.

Any number of moral practica can be exhibited here to illustrate this, but the first example to mind is some words spoken by Winona LaDuke of the Ojibwe tribe of Native Americans. Her people have eaten and held sacred a certain kind of wild rice for millenia, culturally engaging in sense of relation to an entity pertaining to an archetype very often disregarded by Westerners – the sustaining power of food. In a speech in 2007¹⁸, she related the reaction of some elders of their tribe who were told about genetically modified food: “Who told them they had the right to do that?” To a human being whose way of engaging with their sustenance is radically different from, for instance, that embodied by periodically removing certain manifestations of it from supermarket shelves, a moral question is instantly obvious on relational grounds – we do not stand in such a relationship with any other being of the world that we are at liberty to alter its

18 At the “Bioneers” conference in San Rafael, California; video at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WEVg_KMPCmg.

genetics by such unholy measures – while the supermarket shopper, not so relationally engaged, might feel greatly discomfited by the thought of GMOs but not be so able to defend his feeling against the scientific arguments in favor of genetically modified food, some of which are quite plausible. In a similar way, consciousness of and communal action with the entities which one stands in relation to, which will more often than not involve a certain acuity of both ecological and spiritual awareness, can help indicate solutions to any number of moral conundrums, in appropriate proportion to one's individual experience of life.

* * *

Concerning the creations of humanity, inasmuch as they are emergent from their nature as a part of the repertoire of actions of a living species, they are equal part in the primal divine emanation; inasmuch as they themselves are beings, beings beyond objects, beings that mediate between beings in the great web of our connections, they also have a relational place in the world, imbued with all the responsibilities and duties of entities having place in the world. The words of Illich on technology¹⁹ are pertinent here, that a technology is worthwhile if it is convivial, bringing-together, expanding awareness and community – but it is to be opposed if it alienates, distracts, abstracts the consciousness, or puts itself in place of the relations it ought to mediate. And though every thing that lives is Holy, and within the nature of our relational spirit and embeddedness in the unique moral world given to us to live in, there is no technology we can utterly exclude from a creditable use in the day-to-day process of our lives, nevertheless even the humblest and most beautiful shoe is excluded from entry to temples, for it stands between the world around and the most essential delimitation of our bodies, in a moment which is given to the process of relation to be most corporeal, concentrated, and sanctified – while candles, even those made of animal fat or petroleum products, are permitted to stand beside the holiest of objects, for they are one of the most essential constructs of our species's desire to imitate the Light.

* * *

My use of religious language throughout this discussion requires, for completion, consideration of another aspect of the religious world, one which leads us to some very interesting conclusions indeed. What is the role of devotion and worship in this understanding of God and spirit? If all this denomination of assorted traits and tendencies with the word God and all that word entails to our understanding be a worthwhile undertaking, what is the *practice* of our relation to this particular God? For Buberian relationality, this is already fulfilled in our prior discussion of a moral life – all the reverence and awe of an encounter with the Most High inhering in every act

19 *Tools for Conviviality*, 1973, and other works.

of relation. For Buber, the religious notions of sacrifice and prayer exist as the relational correlates of what space and time are in the objective or objectified world. This is a most powerful alteration of perception. Our very extension in being can be envisioned as persisting to the extent of the amount we give as it proceeds through the amount we listen. When a self is thus utterly giving (emptied thereof of Ego) and profoundly listening (emptied thereof of Pride) it is utterly engaged in worshipful action in the relations it participates in; for giving and listening – purpose and gratefulness – are the flow of the water of life, which pools close to the Tao.

But yet I think the ancients spoke well who said that gods dwelt in the trees. Every being on earth derives energy from each other, but one who see a god in the other will derive such energy with reverence and respect. And though I do not in the least consider myself wise enough to suggest what forms an organized form or culture of devotion to the God I have spoken of might consist of – forms that as yet may arise, or even return, upon the Earth, as humanity's need for them grows more and more apparent – I do think that it is wise for every person to have a particular relation in the natural world in which the divine is particularly apparent to him or her – be it a tree or a mountain or a spot of coast or a bird at the bird-feeder in the back yard – and to come sometimes to this relation, in silence, to listen, to ask, to praise, and to give thanks. If relation is the locus of the divine in the world, then you in your world already know the surest place to seek God.

There indeed are some cultures which possess uniquely compelling practices of relation to the Divine. One very worthwhile example is, again, the spirituality found in many Native American tribes in both continents.²⁰ These are deeply earth-centered spiritualities, full of the sense of relation to the given and giving world, replete with spirits of plants and stars and winds and mountains. Indigenous communities on these continents now stand at the ideological forefront of the political battle against climate change, as some of the clearest exponents of what an appropriate human response, as and in being, should be. Worshipful ways of relating, in their vibrant forms, are not empty rituals or forgotten signifiers, but like a living religious spirit influence also the practical manifestations of collective ontology in the quality and character of actions taken in relation to their surroundings. Marisol de la Cadena describes the struggle of the Quechua people in Ecuador, contesting mining companies for the ownership of mountains on the mere grounds that the mountains are holy.²¹ The moral implications are again profound: by simply having present in their culture the entrance and presence of the existing world in their relational and spiritual conceptions, the Quechua strike a powerful ontological blow of resistance against the exploitative, extractivist logic that governs the political and economic systems of the modern day.

20 As described by Thomas Berry in e.g. *The Great Work* and other writings.

21 De la Cadena, (2010), “Indigenous Cosmopolitics in the Andes”, *Cultural Anthropology* 25:2.

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On the Prophetic Advent and the Apocalypse

What then is the voice of God? What role might prophecy play in a modern day that has in large removed Deity as a supervisor? That prophecy becomes an action of every enspirited being should be clear – but what is spoken? I see a powerful voice in the spontaneous proliferation of Gaia, the unaccountable beauty yet present in the natural world, the exuberance of unpreoccupied Life: Energy is Eternal Delight. And to a humanity deeply embroiled in its defining existential struggle, as the specter of a myriad ancient forests rises like ash to our skies, and climate change threatens to bring the great flood that will bring down civilization's house upon the sand, all to pose a single question: are you with us or against us? Do you choose Hubris or Unity? Do you indeed believe yourself in relation to all Life? And the terror of death is many, but unto the faithful a glad proclamation of faith, and hope, and love – that other beings could not forever suffer the arrogance of one who fancied himself the crown of creation, and yet ever in their bringing forth of vengeance they have continued to blossom and have beauty and grow, which speaks You to those who will hear it.

But yet this is the thing which is most often prophesied in great detail; it is manifested equally vividly through the seer's eyes both of science and religion: the End.

There is death, and there is eternal death; there is the grave, and there is Hades; there is the nothingness opposed to our present consciousness, and there is the nothingness opposed to nothing else in the eternal emptiness of that which was not, before Light was. Perhaps I can say that individuals are life-seeking entities, striving ever to differentiate and perpetuate themselves; at least many human individuals of the present day seem to practice this striving as a common element of their existence. Certainly many among us fear death, fear the grave, fear the winking out of our individual candle in the small sea of all our lights, fear the extinguishment of the selfhood that is, for many, all they know of the impingement of Spirit on Eternity. The fear that we – humanity as a collected kind, or perhaps civilization as a common practice – may cease to exist, seems somewhat less present, buried somewhere deeply beneath our collective self-assurance – yet it creeps ever through in every one of the apocalyptic cults, space programs, and political dodges over action on climate change that surface to the news headlines every so often.

Is it possible that we could cease to be – we, who have settled every corner of our planet, turned every piece of its land in service of us, who have constructed at the very least some of the most intrepid complications in our corner of the galaxy – who have studied the history of the rocks of our world, and declared that the now present age must be named after us? Yet countless

traditions, even (and especially) the most ancient, point forward to the End Times. When the wickedness of mankind grows so great that the gods could no longer tolerate his presence – or when the forces of Chaos strengthen themselves anew, and descend upon the hapless, again infinitesimal Cosmos to devour it – then the Earth is split by fire, and drowned in water; then the soils cease to give fruit; then the animals hide in caves from the wrath of the Primordial Mother and Father, while all that we have held precious among us is consumed, and we vanish into the oblivion whence we came – our Fall succeeded inexorably by our Winter.

* * *

If I may be permitted to indulge in a personal anecdote which I believe will illustrate much of what I have been saying till now: when I was young, I subscribed to a certain school of religious thought which conceived of a certain God of certain fetishes who was very keen on creating our present world in six days exactly as long as we ourselves perceive them, thus tragically scrawling its personal, rather egoistic theological graffiti – alongside those of many many others – over the sublime mythopoetic work of art painstaking detailed for aeons by countless forces of life all over the world. This particular school of religious thought found it difficult to comprehend the conjunction of two rather vital tools of scientific understanding: if Entropy is a fundamental law (so they conjectured), and, since the Light of the Beginning, everything runs slowly down towards greater and greater chaos, disorganization, and the eventual eternal stillness and dark, how then could Evolution have built Life here, since for this task it must have needed to violate Entropy time after time as it swallowed the energy of an emerging Cosmos to nurture yet greater and greater complexity in its womb?

At this point, with God Herself staring them in the face, this school of thought, like so many others have done on points far sillier than cosmology, chooses to rather to distract themselves by reaching into their own fears and prejudices, and concocting a depiction of the Supreme of their own devising – negating the greatest miracle of all in favor of a few minor miracles which, for whatever reason, seem to be of utmost importance to their sense of the world. But it is not my purpose to too much criticize these gentle spirits here, or single out their blindness for special refutation. Rather, the paradigmatic incompatibility they run up against and formulate their essential ontology atop of is at the cusp of a fascinating question about our nature as a species. For it is completely true that these fundamental laws are in an opposition – even just as the dualities of Good and Evil are in opposition in our existence, and the dualities of life and death are in opposition within the mechanism of Gaia.

Evolution, and Life itself, are *negentropic* processes. They operate in time in the opposite direction from Entropy, from the direction of the vast majority of the universe. They are, in this

sense, blessed and sacred processes, spirit-guides and guardians of the holy flame for all the creatures under their care, as they shepherd Cosmos unremittingly through Chaos, slowly, through incalculable complications, feeding it yet more and more energy, causing it to grow ever more and more complex, diverse, and radiant.

And so, the question becomes inevitable: in a negentropic world, who are we? What do we accept as our identity? More specifically, are the actions of our species over the past few centuries collaborate with Gaia's billion-year battle against entropy? I think there is a somewhat damning case to be made that, at some point in recent history, we have become traitors to the cause of life. At some point, when the rates by which species became extinct on this planet rose above natural, average background rates – or when first one of those underground reposes of an ancient fern-forest's joy in its era's sunlight was tapped for petroleum and burnt, beginning these days in which we burden our atmosphere in a few decades with the energy of a process meant to take millions of years – or when, in some blind madness of desire, the inhabitants of the very smallest of the continents set out in ships to subdue all the peoples of the other five, and abolish their cultures and their creeds and their relations, and seize the riches of their lands for their own. The question is very real: is humanity now more homogenous, or more diverse, at seven billions than we were at one? And the place, the planet on which we live? Is it more homogenous or more diverse? Are we creators or are we destroyers? Angels or imps?

I do not mean to single out humanity for special criticism in all this; there have been many great levelers in the history of our world, both living and non-living.²² The question remains, though – how do *we*, ourselves, feel to be one of the levelers? Is this the destiny we would have chosen? And what do we do, if there is anything to be done about it?

On the whole, Gaia remains negentropic, and will almost certainly continue to remain so into the distant future; its 5.5 billion year history includes no force that has been able to counter this trend, and none is easily foreseeable in the aeons to come before the eventual extinguishment of the sun's energy. If her negentropic directionality is taken as a certainty, however, one of two things must happen to balance out an entropically obsessed humanity. Either yet more wonders of creation must come to pass to counteract our deadly exterminating force (only last month, for instance, it was reported that certain fish, threatened with extinction, have resorted to asexual reproduction – virgin births – as a means of propagation²³). Otherwise, we, as entropic forces,

22 The end-Cretaceous meteorite impact being the most famous, of course, but the end-Permian flood volcanism being an even more spectacular exemplar of a catastrophic challenge to Gaian proliferation, and startlingly relevant to the challenges of the present day in presenting a clear geo-historical example of the results of the lethal results of combinatorial disturbances in the chemical composition of the atmosphere and oceans. Besides this there is of course the dramatic holocaust of obligate anaerobic organisms brought about by the nascent kingdom of photosynthetic cyanobacteria's oxygenation of the planetary atmosphere, in addition to countless major and minor extinctions brought about by ice ages, climatic fluctuations, abrupt sea level disturbances, and so forth.

23 The case of the smalltooth sawfish (*Pristis pectinata*), reported at the beginning of June 2015.

must be either removed or transformed.

And it is not too much to say that the beginnings of these processes can already be glimpsed – if only because it is by our very own actions that these processes are being instigated. Climate change will have a profound effect on countless creatures, and many will not live – Gaia's sacrifices perhaps; but we modern humans, who quite often seem to require an elaborate system of heating and cooling in our habitations, and cooking of our food, only to survive (let alone remain comfortable) – we will be one of the most poorly adapted species in a climatically changed world of the Apocalypse, especially if we find we have already squandered on our present decadence all the most easily available energy we could have utilized to shelter ourselves from the Days of Wrath. Simply put, we will not be able to remain entropic creatures forever; our very own entropy will destroy us, for after all we are the ones standing closest to it. The question remaining is who, and how soon, will form and organize the negentropic bands of creators, who will yet roam in a changed world – and how much say they will have had in the nature of those changes.

The best Science can offer in a careful estimation of our Future is a gloomy uncertainty, with most the uncertainty lying in the extent of the gloominess – exactly how much will global warming and the consequences of a massive accumulation of pollution alter the physical face of this planet in the coming centuries, and how will a humanity addicted to greed, mistrust, and violence cope with what is sure to be a world of shortages? Christianity is more optimistic, albeit in a divided way – there will come to pass a radical destruction of everything present, humanity and world alike – but with the subsequent enactment of the beginning of a new Creation free from the flaws of the old, for the benefit and pleasure of the faithful. This account of the fate of the physical world is often overshadowed in popular tellings (because of their appeal to popular fears) by the judgments to be passed on every soul to have entered into existence, which is sure to be at most a minor concern to any Supreme Unity conducting a dissolution – with the result that ecological futures are glossed over by a few brief brushstrokes of fire and brimstone – but even the most cursory examination of the Book of Revelations will reveal that the scriptural imagination is as if not far more concerned with the appearance of eternal bliss, and with the defining declaration that some few will be given the chance to start over again, an ontology indicating world-reincarnation as cyclical as that of the Vedas, the Mayans, the stories of Ragnarök and of the Big Crunch, and of ecological succession.

This in turn is almost an identical eschatology with that prevalent among the growing class of people in the modern day who feel the breath of Spirit, yet no need to align themselves with any religious movement. Groups such as the Dark Mountain Society²⁴ would be very loath to admit

24 Whose *Manifesto* is one of the most coherent and damning indictments of civilization written in the modern age.

any similarity to Christianity in their ontological positions, yet their position, wistful yet hopeful in its tragic reconciliation, is most similar – let civilization burn in the traps it has created, and let what is holy in humanity – art, poesis, the very seeds of Creation itself – to the next stage of its eternal life; the world will continue to be beautiful, and if we are beautiful, we may continue along with the world. For the presence of Spirit, engendered by relation, must initiate and nurture faith, and hope, and love, and therefore the greatest duty and privilege and joy of humanity is creation, is poesis, is You-saying, for by this we give ourselves the strength to overcome the rising tides and growing storms of our fallen natures.

This is, I believe, also the same thing as the Theophany spoken of on the final page of Buber, who could not induce anything but the deepest optimism from his inference of Divinity from the fact of pure relation: *“The path is not a circle. It is the way. Doom becomes more oppressive in every new eon, and the return more explosive. And the theophany comes ever closer, it comes ever closer to the sphere between beings – comes closer to the realm that hides in our midst, in the between. History is a mysterious approach to closeness. Every spiral of its path leads us into deeper corruption and at the same time into more fundamental return. But the God-side of the event whose world-side is called return is called Redemption.”* The spiritual destiny of the universe is certain: God will be made apparent as You is said ever more and more profoundly against the dying and doomed voice of It, for if God is in the world, nothing will be able to keep Her from blooming and sprouting, from bringing forth ever greater and greater relation. Thus it is spoken by St Paul in the first letter to the Corinthians that love is greater than faith and hope: for it is their object, and being their object is their reason for existence and cause of manifestation in the emotional experience of humanity. For another name for divine poesis is Primal Love, as Dante saith in the *Inferno*; through Love creation and relation are one, and thus through Love will always a world continue to be.

*Set forth in the city of Utrecht
at the end of the month of June
in the 2015th year of the Western calendar.
S D G*

Sophrosune: A Hymn

I

Who walked between the nightshade and the lavender
Who walked between
Whose flowerseeds scattering light was love unseen

Who filled a limpet-house with grains of sand
In longing reverence for fallen trees
Stepping, humble, slow, to greet the ocean

Gentle tendrils of Queen-Anne's-lace
Descend curiously from her mouth
As she balances
Deeper than anyone knows

II

To say, eternally, You
You are
You are as I am
You are radiant
You are holy
And I cannot let You be to me
As my mental summary
Of what I guess I know
Of You, your habits, dispositions, tendencies, appearances
(And whatever I bethink to fill the gaps) no –
You are
You live
You are Life
In You am I, and I in You,
And we in us living
Are lost and are found
Create and are created
Love and are beloved
Die and are born
Saying we
We are
We are joy
We are the beautiful changing
We are the point of intersection of the timeless, and
We are the music and the winter lightning
We are Life
As we say, skin to skin,
Breath to breath
Eyelash to eyelash,
Eternally, You.

III

Life present and life past
Are both surely present in life future
And life future contained in life past
So let life arise
The song of creation – that embrace – let it be sung:
Let the whirling shrubs and facéd bushes sing it
Let the orange cloud and breathing leaf unfold it
Let the purple cloud and fragrant sky proclaim it
Let Life arise and let it dance
(for why should we not dance?)
Let dance the churchspires and the rolling rock
Let praise the grassblades and the spiderstrands
Let shout the dewdrops and the snowdrops and the mountaintops
Let everywhere rejoice the Mother and her children
And let those who will not sing be struck with awe.

IV

Grace to the Mother,
The giver of Life
Who is all and is in all
Who together with her children
We worship and glorify today.
Holy Mother, Giver of Life
Teach us the pain of too much tenderness
Teach us to sing creation song
Teach us eternal whirling dance
Teach us to sit still.
It is your desire in us that desires
Your silence in us that is heard
Your seedling in us that is nurtured
Your fire in us that flames.
Grace to the Mother
And her Garden of Light
Peace on Earth.

T. Merkel