VISIONS OF PANTHEISM

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1. Introduction

Pantheism has in recent decades suddenly become a topic of interest and debate. Denounced, ridiculed and completely ignored for more than a century by philosophers and theologians alike, pantheism is coming to be increasingly recognised as an important eco-philosophy in its own right. There are perhaps two reasons for this. The first is the growing awareness of an ecological crisis and the emergence of an ecology movement that has often, especially among deep ecologists, turned to Taoism and Spinoza's philosophy as a conceptual resource in the development of an ecological world-view and an environmental ethic (Naess 1977; Devall and Sessions 1985; Lachapelle 1988).

The second is a general disenchantment with mainstream Christianity, and the emergence of a diverse and decentralised spiritual movement that has come to be described as neopaganism. This emergent "nature spirituality" has drawn eclectically from many sources, and reflects diverse religious ontologies—animism, polytheism, the worship of the "mother goddess"—but a crucial element of neopaganism has been a re-affirmation of pantheism (Adler 1986; Carpenter 1996).

Yet although pantheism has been a subject of discussion in many philosophical and theological journals—and even in popular magazines—as far as I am aware only two books on pantheism have been published this century. The first of these was a little book entitled *Pantheism: Its story and significance* written by J. Allanson Picton. Published in 1905 it suggested that true pantheism "takes the universe as it is, in its infinity; regards it as without beginning or end; and worships it" (1905: 32). Picton intimated that pantheism had been of marginal or esoteric significance in many religious contexts—in relation to Egyptian religion and the worship of Isis, among neoplatonists and early Greek philosophers such as Thales and Xenophanes, as well as among Vedic rishis and medieval mystics. But Picton emphasises that pantheism is the opposite to atheism, that it does not conceive of the finite world as a creation or an emanation of divinity, and that modern pantheism as a religion begins with Spinoza.

The second book is much more recent and much more substantial. This is the excellent and seminal text by Michael Levine on pantheism (1994), which is indeed the first comprehensive study of pantheism as a philosophical doctrine. But the book is written in the tradition of natural theology, and is centrally concerned with providing a philosophical examination of the concept of pantheism. Thus although it briefly mentions the many "versions" of pantheism—Taoism, the Pre-Socratics, the Stoics, Eriugena, Bruno, Boehme and Spinoza, as well as more

contemporary nature-mystics such as Jefferies, Whitman, Muir, Wordsworth and Robinson Jeffers—it offers little discussion on the individual pantheists themselves or on their philosophies.

This present essay is prompted by a rather hostile, unscholarly and quite simplistic interpretation of pantheism proffered by the Christian theist and philosopher Stephen Clark (1993, 1998). He not only erroneously equates pantheism with animism, polytheism, Shinto religion and Vedantin Hinduism, but also with scientific materialism, suggesting quite bizarrely that "Pantheism has been the dominant ideology of Western civilisation in the last few centuries" (1998: 54). As the Stoics and Spinoza sometimes expressed anthropocentric views (but much less so than most theists) he dismissed pantheism as an ecological perspective, and has the silly idea that pantheists (not theists) must applaud and welcome not only capitalism, but epidemics, deforestation, desertification, global warming the poisoning of habitats and other ecological disasters (1993: 68). The shallowness of his analogies is revealed when he implies that pantheism is a form of fascism. His attitude towards pantheism he reminiscent of medieval theology and the theistic inquisition.

This essay consists of three parts. In the first part I offer some general reflections on pantheism as a religious ontology, contrasting it with deism, theism, gnosticism, panentheism and paganism. In the second part I give a brief account of the various forms of classical pantheism, namely philosophical Taoism, the Pre-Socratics, Stoicism, Bruno's heretics, and the philosophy of Spinoza and his numerous followers—Goethe, Schelling, Hegel, Heine and Haeckel. In the final section I outline in summary fashion a number of common themes that characterise pantheism as a natural theology—an ecological perspective, a dialectical approach, ethical naturalism, and its radical politics. This should silence those who falsely equate pantheism with fascism.

2. Pantheism as a Religion Ontology

Pantheism as a metaphysic entails the view that everything that exists constitutes a "unity" and this all-inclusive unity is in some sense sacred or divine. It is the view that divinity and the natural world are inseparable. Pantheism is not however atheism. In the history of pantheism in Britain, David Berman, interpreting Spinoza writes: "Spinoza's *Ethics* is, in my opinion, an example of one such atheistic book, I would argue that the pantheism of the *Ethics* amounts to

atheism, even though Spinoza himself would have denied this. But since by 'god' he meant the whole universe rigidly determined, one might well regard such pantheism as a species of atheism" (1988: 111).

Many other scholars have interpreted pantheism as a form of atheism. A further example is that of H.P. Owen who writes: "If 'god' (*theos*) is identical with the universe (to *pan*) it is merely another name for the universe. It is therefore bereft of any distinctive meaning: so that pantheism is equivalent to atheism" (1971: 69-70).

But pantheism is not equivalent to atheism, for it entails a belief in divinity, and holds that the world itself is sacred. Nor does pantheism imply the literal identification of the divinity only with the manifest things of nature. Apart from Schopenhauer (who ridiculed it) and Starhawk (who embraces it in relation to the "mother goddess" (1989: 23)) nobody has ever equated divinity simply with natural phenomena, for divinity not only embraces and entails finite things but also the all-inclusive infinite unity. Both Bruno and Spinoza made a distinction between *natura naturans* (nature as active or creative) and *natura naturata* (nature as passive or created) and both aspects were considered divine (*Ethics* 1/Prop XXX Spinoza 1977: 24). Nobody has ever described rocks, trees or animals or such natural phenomena as literally god. In pantheism there is thus no simple identification of god with nature. As Levine writes: "For the pantheist, God and the world generally are not and should not be taken as intentionally equivalent. Something about the world namely the fact that it is taken to be an all-inclusive divine unity—is the reason for calling the world 'god'" (1994: 28).

The close identification of god with nature has of course always been deemed heretical by Christianity and Islam but the accusation that pantheists are in essence atheists usually implies that they are simply not theists.

Pantheism has been defined as "the belief that god and the universe are ultimately identical. It may equate the world with god, or deny the reality of the world, maintaining that only the divine is real and that sense experience is illusory" (Goring 1992: 390).

Another text suggests that pantheism: "Signifies the belief that every existing entity is in some sense divine. Pantheists are 'monists', they believe that there is only one Being, and that all other forms of reality are either modes (or appearances) of it or identical with it" (Owen 1971: 65).

Both these statements are somewhat misleading, pantheists are not necessarily monists like Spinoza, nor do they follow the spiritual monism of Parmenides and Advaita Vedanta and conceive of the world as maya or illusory. All pantheists—the Taoists, Pre-Socratics, Stoics and Spinoza affirm the materiality of the empirical world and the validity of sense impressions.

The term pantheism was used in the eighteenth century, ostensibly by the deist and free-thinker John Toland around 1720. In that year Toland published his book *Pantheisticon* and seems to have used pantheism as a synonym for Spinoza's philosophy. It was thus equated with naturalism and seen as a "species of atheism"—and at that period both atheism and pantheism were used as terms of abuse (McFarland 1969: 266-67; Daniel 1984: 211-25).

In simplest terms pantheism as a metaphysical doctrine, entails the view that "everything that exists constitutes a 'unity' and this all-inclusive unity is in some sense divine" (McIntyre 1967: 34). It affirms a "non-theistic concept of deity". But when pantheists claim that the world or god is an "all-inclusive divine unity" (expressed as *tao, pneuma, logos*) they generally mean something quite different by "god" then the way that this concept is used in other religious traditions. Thus, as Levine puts it: "Tao is not a deity, but it is taken to be divine unity that is immanent in the world" (1994: 38). The divine unity of the pantheists—Spinoza's God or Lao Tzu's Tao is thus quite different from the "one" of Plotinus, the Brahma of Advaita Vedanta, "Allah" of Islam or "god" of Christianity—for it is distinctly "non-personal" and is wholly immanent" in the world. But also the divine unity is not normally conceived by pantheists as some "in-dwelling spirit". Levine thus concludes that: "Pantheism is best understood as the view that there exists an all inclusive divine unity, where unity and divinity are regarded as distinct properties which are nevertheless inextricably connected in various ways" (1994: 49).

It is however, important to distinguish pantheism from other religious traditions or ontologies, and I will discuss, in turn, five contrasting traditions: deism, theism, gnosticism, panentheism and paganism.

i. Deism, as a religious metaphysic emerged in the seventeenth and eighteenth century in Europe. It is essentially the religion of Enlightenment, and held that knowledge of god was attainable by reason not by faith or revelation. God was seen as a supreme being who created the world, but no longer intervened in it. There was thus a radical separation of god and the created world. Tom Paine's *The Age of Reason* (1794) is a "passionate testament" to deism. For Paine god was the "great mechanic of creation" who reveals "himself" through the creation. As Paine put it: "the creation is the only true and real world of god" and is the "Bible of the

Deist" (Foner 1948: 492-603). But importantly, like John Ray and those who advocated "physio-theology", Paine stressed a close and reverential attitude to nature. He bewailed the fact that there was nothing in the Bible about nature—god's creation: it was a text, he thought, that appealed only to the isolated monk, in this gloomy cell. Paine also seemed to link deism with pantheism, and to have considered deism, with its advocacy of reason and science, as an important counter to atheism. In stressing god's transcendence, and emphasising that the creation is the "word" of God, Paine expressed sentiments that have affinities with those in the Koran and in the writings of Christian mystics like Eckhart and Boehme. But the essence of pantheism is that it denies the transcendence of god.

ii. Theism, like deism, also suggests that god is distinct and separate from the created world, which is seen as an emanation, a "flowing" from god, but as being created *ex nihilo*, out of nothing by god's free creative will. Unlike deism, the god of theism is conceived as a personal being who is revealed through divine revelation. The theological writings of St Augustine best express the theistic conception of a personal and transcendent deity. Pantheism rejects the idea both that god is ontologically distinct from the universe, and that it is a personal being who can be approached through prayer and ritual.

Many have regarded the image of god as outside of nature as providing the rationale for the destruction of nature, and the plundering of the earth's resources. This is the argument of Lynn White (1967) and Starhawk (1989: 25). Whether the present ecological crisis can be blamed on theism (or deism) in such a simplistic and idealist fashion is debatable (see Pepper 1996: 155-156). But such a critique has given rise to the greening of Christianity and the advocacy of a creation-based spirituality and an emphasis on the human "stewardship" of nature (Fox 1983, McDonagh 1990). The essence of pantheism, however, is that it is non-theistic.

iii. Gnosticism as an ontological doctrine conceives the deity as an absolutely transmudane spirit, while the material world, the creation of "darkness", "deception" and "wickedness". It thus presents a radical dualism between god and the world, and its world denying tone suggests what Jonas (1958) describes as an "anti-cosmic dualism". The essence of salvation (gnosis) for the Gnostic was therefore the release of the "divine spark" within the soul from the bonds of the world. The human person is an "alien" within the finite world. Such acosmism, as a religious orientation, is the complete antithesis of pantheism. It would indeed be difficult to think of a religious philosophy more anti-ecological than gnosticism.

iv. Panentheism has affinities, but they represent distinct ontologies. Pantheism (from the Greek *pan*, all; *Theos*, god) implies as we have noted a close identification between nature and god. Panentheism (*pan*, all; *en*, in; *Theos*, god), on the other hand, suggests that all things are imbued with god's being in the sense that all things are in god. As Fox interprets it: panentheism means "God is in everything and everything is in God". Thus there is the notion that the world should be seen as a sacrament or book, and, in the words of Eckhart: "We must learn to penetrate things and find God there" (Fox 1983: 89-90). While pantheism affirms and celebrates nature, seeing god (divinity) as an essential unity, logos or creative aspect, panentheism gives primacy to the deity. Thus nature tends to be conceived as an emanation, a "flowing out" of the divinity (one).

This kind of metaphysic finds its expression in many religious traditions, all emphasising in some sense, the transcendence of the divinity. I will briefly mention two philosophical traditions that stand close to pantheism, though expressing a panentheistic ontology, neoplatonism and hermeticism.

The origins of the first tradition are specifically related to Plotinus in the 3rd century AD. In this tradition the divinity (one) is defined as the absolute, the "principle of emanation" from which derives intellect (*nous*), soul (*psyche*) and the universe of nature (*physis*). The transcendental "one" is spirit and the "source of all things" and from the one all existence "emanates", as light from the sun, or ripples from a stone thrown into a pool (the metaphors used by Plotinus). In the writings of Eriugena and Eckhart, neoplatonism was combined with Christianity to form a mystical theology. As divinity was seen as absolutely distinct from the natural world, which was conceived as a lower order of being, and as salvation, for the neoplatonist, implied the "ascent" or "return" of the soul (intellect) to the divinity, this tradition was not a "nature" religion. Indeed, although Plotinus was critical of gnosticism, he viewed the world of matter as "evil", and the tradition at times verges on acosmism. There are thus strong affinities between neoplatonism and both Advaita Vedanta (Gnostic Hinduism) and the Eleatic philosophy of Parmenides, for whom divinity is spiritual and the emphasis is put on the "unreality" of the material world. All are esoteric traditions, the human soul (intellect, divine spark, atman) being identified with god (one, Brahman). It is thus quite misleading to interpret Advaita Vedanta, as represented by Sankara, suggests an "absolute (spiritual) monism" which denies the reality of phenomenal existence. It is not therefore pantheism, for pantheism affirms the reality and pluralism of the world. Apart from Spinoza, pantheists, Levine suggests, are not usually monists (1994: 85-86).

Hermeticism, on the other hand, although also a form of panentheism, expressed a more positive attitude towards nature, and with Bruno it merges with pantheism. The central theme of hermeticism, otherwise know as "occult philosophy" (Agrippa) or "natural magic" (Ficino), is the idea that god has animated the whole of creation with a world soul (*Spiritus* or *Anima Mundi*) and that this spirit, though celestial bodies (particularly the planets) influenced all natural phenomena metals, stones, planets, signs, animals—within the earthy domain. Natural phenomena were thus believed to possess virtues, powers and occult influences. These could be harnessed by humans by means of chiromancy, astrology, alchemy, talismanic magic, the use of amulets, the invocation of spirits, sacred herb love or through the ceremonial magic of the Kabbalah.

The hermetic tradition has come to have an important influence on the "new-age" movements which have drawn eclectically on many religious traditions (York 1994).

Besides neoplatonism and hermeticism, panentheism, was also reflected in the Christian neoplatonism of Eriugena and Eckhart, the Christian mysticism or theosophy of Jacob Boehme, the transcendental idealism of Schelling, as well as to some degree, in the historical pantheism of Hegel.

Levine interprets panentheism as a form of theism (1994: 12). It has in recent decades been exemplified in many religious philosophies, including the following creation-based Christianity (Fox 1983), process theology (Cobb 1982), "dialectical theism" (MacQuarrie 1984), esotericism or perennial philosophy (Nasr 1996), as well as in the doctrine that the world is god's body (Jantzen 1984). But in closely identifying divinity with nature, pantheism is distinct from all forms of panentheism. (For a useful discussion of panentheism see Zimmerman 1995.)

v. Paganism is a rather loose concept derived from the Latin term *pagus* meaning the countryside. As a concept of paganism has been applied to Hinduism, Egyptian religion, Celtic shamanism and to the classical philosophy of Aristotle and Plato. It is thus a rather vague concept. It may be more precisely defined in terms of two religious ontologies, namely polytheism and animism. Polytheism is defined as a belief in the existence of a plurality of gods or deities. It may of course co-exist with a recognition of a divinity or other spiritual beings such as ancestral spirits. In her study of contemporary witches and neopagans, Margot Adler (1986) emphasises that these movements espouse a "radical polytheism" as well as embracing pantheism and animism. But polytheism is distinct from both pantheism and

animism. Polytheism entails a belief in plurality of gods which are ontologically distinct from spirits in representing the forces of the social order, the foci of more elaborate social institutions centred around priests, and, characteristically are more distant from sensuous experience (Mageo and Howard 1996: 14-15). Although such deities may be associated with natural phenomena, and be immanent in the world, rituals centred on the various deities seen as personalised entities, are less focused on people's relationship with nature than on the social world.

In contrast animism is more nature based. Animism is the notion that all things—from rocks, mountains, wind directions and stones to animals and plants (rarely fungi)—may be endowed with sacred powers and vitality, and as being the embodiment of spiritual forces. The term animism, derived from Tylor, is something of a misnomer, for this early anthropologist meant by this term "belief in spiritual beings", as a definition of religion generally. Thus Christianity was a form of animism. But he was reluctant to use the term "spiritualism" given its specific connotations in being applied to a modern sect (Morris 1987: 100). Animism, as the term is more often used, is thus the notion that certain natural phenomena are endowed with "spirit". With respect to the native American Indians, for example, these spirits are conceptualised as "our grandfathers" or as spirits of the ancestors. There is thus a close identification between humans and nature, aspects of the natural world are personified, and this implies that the world of nature is approached with reverence. There is no dualism between humans and nature, as all natural phenomena form part of a spiritual unity. But it is clear from the writings of Lame Deer, Irving Hallowell and more recently Richard Nelson, that native American people, as animists, did not see the whole world as animate. Nor did they ontologically equate humans and animals. Nor did they "worship" plants or animals, or equate the spirits with the world. And the spirits were not simply "super-persons" for they manifested themselves in natural phenomena such as winds, thunder and storm, and had a numinous quality. Hence they are best described as "spirits" (Latin *spiritus*) (Lame Deer 1973; Hallowell 1976; Nelson 1983).

But we can, with some justification, describe animism as a "natural religion" for the American Indians and other clan-based societies, saw natural phenomena not only as "personal" but as "enspirited", or as manifesting numinous powers. But as Bruno long ago emphasised with respect to Egyptian religion, which he embraced, the Egyptians did not reverence the ibis, baboon, or crocodile *per se*, but the spirit with which they were associated. These Bruno saw as aspects of a divine unity. To the degree that nature is celebrated and approached sacramentally, and there is an emphasis on the divine unity, there are close affinities between

animism and pantheism. As the Sioux Indian Lame Deer wrote "nothing is so small and unimportant but it has a spirit given to it by Wakan Takan". It is a part of the great spirit, Wakan Takan, which he describes as a grandfather. Certain stones, trees, animals, especially elk and bear, even insects such as the butterfly, have "power" and "spirit" and are sacred, for "all these myriad of things which make up the universe flowing back to their source, [are] united in one grandfather spirit" (Lame Deer 1973: 113-114). Callicott indeed refers to the Lakota Sioux beliefs, as "everything which is a splinter of the Great Spirit, facilitates a perception of the human and natural realms as unified and akin" (1995: 202). In emphasising the immanence of divinity, there are thus close affinities between panpsychism (*pan*, all; *psyche*, mind, consciousness)—the belief that divinity is immanent in the world as a psychic force or soul—and both animism and pantheism. As Levine writes with regard to panpsychism and animism.

> "Like pantheism, both of these express a kind of pervasive immanence 'mind' in the former case and 'living soul', 'spirit' or 'animal life' in the latter. But however consonant and combined with pantheism these may be, they should be distinguished from each other and from pantheism" (1994: 114).

Pantheism rejects the idea that the divine unity (*Tao*, *Arche, Apeiron, Logos*) is in any sense a personal deity. It also denies personal immortality, believing that there is no life after death. Its perspective on the world is thus essentially a realist naturalism. Historically, Levine writes, "the denial of personal immortality is one of pantheism's most distinctive features" (1994: 248).

With pantheism as a religion, there are no sacred scriptures, and although there may be scriptural resources—the writings of the Stoics, Lao Tzu and Spinoza are examples—these are not considered to be sacred scriptures, or to convey an established body of doctrine. Pantheism is thus not based on either revelation or scripture, nor is it founded on the teachings of charismatic figures of divine prophets. As Levine writes "natural" theology is the only kind acceptable to pantheists (1994: 349). Equally, although pantheism allows the possibility for a reverential attitude to nature, or even quasi-mystical union with nature qua divine, it has no place for any salvation, prayer, or any relationship with a personal divinity. As Levine again writes: "As forms of religious practice, worship and prayer are not consonant with pantheism. Like 'evil' and 'salvation' they are intrinsically connected to the theistic world view that pantheists reject" (op cit 314).

What therefore pantheism advocates is neither salvation, nor ritual, nor meditative states, but rather establishing a right kind of relationship with nature, and its underlying divine unity. This means cultivating a lifestyle that is in harmony with the processes of nature. The emphasis in pantheism as exemplified by Taoism, Stoic philosophy and Spinoza is "first on understanding nature, and then on living in accordance with it ... . The pantheist tries to achieve a kind of accord with unity, and integration with the cosmos, that results in well-being and happiness" (op cit 298: 352).

Control and manipulation are not principal pantheistic concerns: rather the emphasis is in living a life in harmony with nature. The pantheist, therefore, is not pre-occupied with the need for salvation or redemption, nor with religious rituals, nor with personal immortality, but rather, as with Aristotle, living the kind of life—the "good life"—that is conducive to well-being and happiness (*eudaimonia*). Wealth, power, status are not important, only virtue is acceptable as a regulative goal (*telos*) or ideal, and this implies living in harmony with nature. But pantheism does not imply an anthropocentric conception of human well-being, for humans are intrinsically connected to the wider cosmos. The goal of humans cannot, therefore, be explained by reference to humans alone (op cit 243). But important for pantheism, the natural and the moral are intrinsically connected. Equally important, and in contrast to almost every other religion, pantheism is antithetical to any power structure.

Given the pantheist stress on participation in nature, and its eco-centric rather than anthropocentric perspective, it is not surprising that there is an intimate connection between pantheism and ecology. Many have suggested that pantheism is a world view that is inherently sympathetic to ecological concerns, and the writings of Spinoza, Robinson Jeffers and John Muir have all been linked in the advocacy of an environmental ethic (see Devall and Sessions 1985: 236-242; Wood 1985; Mathews 1991).

Importantly, the pantheist relationship to nature and the immanent divine unity, does not entail detachment from nature and obliteration of the self as in Buddhism, nor identification with the deity as in neoplatonism and Advaita Vedanta, nor in a union with god, as with the mystics of the theistic traditions. For pantheists, especially the Stoics and Spinoza, living a life in accordance with the divine-unity that is nature, implies the development of a contemplative reason, which is common to all humans. Hence the Stoics looked upon themselves as citizens of the world—cosmopolitans. With regard to the practice of pantheists, Levine writes that it usually:

> "Becomes an expression of a love of nature usually be 'communing' with it. It is no wonder pantheism is often regarded as little more than a type of natural mysticism. But for the pantheists, 'love' of nature is expressed primarily in ethical rather than in mystical or quasi-mystical terms" (1994: 356).

The main problems with pantheism as a theology, were succinctly summarised by Owen who wrote:

> "Taken strictly it is equivalent to atheism, it involves a self-contradiction in [the] claim that the same being is both one and many, both infinite and finite; it violates our pervasive sense of individuality or personal distinctiveness; it denies the full reality of evil, and it excludes some of the most important elements of religious experience" (1971: 74).

All these "fatal objections" were countered by Levine in his philosophical analysis of pantheism. Pantheism is not atheism, there is no contradiction involved in emphasising both the (infinite) unity of and the (finite) manifold diversity of nature, that pantheism (especially as reflected in the philosophical writings of the Stoics and Spinoza) does in fact emphasise the concrete individuality of all things in the universe, that "evil" is a metaphysical problem only for theists, and finally, the disavowal of ritual sacraments and prayer addressed to an anthropomorphic deity does not entail a denial of religious experience and sentiment—which for the pantheist is expressed in a sense of mystery with regard to the world, and a reverence for natural phenomena.

3. The Classical Forms of Pantheism

Levine described Philosophical Taoism as "one of the best articulated and thoroughly pantheistic positions there is" (1994: 25). A distinction, however, needs to be drawn between philosophical Taoism (*Tao Chia*) as expressed in the writings of Lao Tzu, Chuang Tzu and Lieh Tzu, and Taoism as a popular folk religion (*Tao Chiao*). Although Taoism may have had its roots in ancient shamanism, Taoism as a philosophy expresses a very different ontology to the animistic worldview of shamanism, which postulates a world of diverse spirits. The central metaphysical notion of Taoism, the concept of Tao, essentially refers to the underlying or hidden order or process of nature and that is akin to Spinoza's *natura naturans* (nature creating). Tao refers to a metaphysical reality and has a mysterious or divine quality, it is a

naturalistic notion. It is thus misleading to conceive of Tao as a deity. I am therefore critical of those scholars who equate Tao with the "ultimate realities" of other religious traditions god, Allah, Brahma, one, Nirvana.

Tao as a way of life or as a meditative practice relates to the concept of *wu-wei*, usually translated as "non-action" but essentially focused on the motifs of simplicity, spontaneity, longevity and living in harmony with the Tao, the way of nature. This entails a form of nature-mysticism and suggests that the Taoist repudiates the striving for wealth, fame, pleasure, power and status as ends in themselves. It also implies an emphasis on receptivity, equanimity, detachment (though not asceticism) and on practical skills rather than on formal knowledge. Through each detachment and the empirical knowledge derived from sense perception and practical skills, the Taoists aimed to cultivate what has been described as "unifying vision". But this was a this-worldly orientation, for the Taoisists expressed little interest in immortality. As a social philosophy, Taoism suggests an ethical naturalism that entails both a repudiation of religious ritual, and an opposition to war, militarism, and state-power: Thus, in political terms, Taoism is a form of anarchism. (Morris 1996: 37-52).

Within the Greek philosophical tradition, pantheism was expressed by the Pre-Socratics and the Stoics. Like the Taoists, the Greek pantheists relied on an ordering principle (*Arche*) or force to explain the operations of nature and its divine unity. The metaphysical ideas of the three early Milesian philosophers whom Aristotle described as naturalists (*physiologi*)—Thales, Anaximander and Anaximenes—all expressed a form of pantheism. Each of these philosophers, though not denying the existence of gods, sought to discover, as Aristotle put it, "the material principle" from which all existing things derive their being. The underlying first principle was for Thales water, for Anaximander, the "unlimited" (*Apeiron*), for Anaximenes air. The diversity of natural things in the world and their constant transformation were seen by the Milesian naturalists as manifestations of an underlying "principle" (*Arche*) that was immanent in the world, constituting a divine unity.

Two other important Pre-Socratic philosophers expressed a form of pantheism—Xenophanes and Heraclitus. As a critical rationalist honoured by Popper, Xenophanes was critical of popular Greek religions, an acute observer of nature, as well as being a pantheist. Heraclitus, in contrast, was of a more mystical temperament, and as a pantheist, emphasised three themes, namely, that all things are in flux, that a "conflict of opposites" is an inherent aspect of the world and that the divine principle (*logos*), the underlying unity and dynamic of the cosmos, is fire.

The importance of fire as the underlying principle or *logos* was taken up by the Stoics. The basic ideas of the leading Stoics begin with the founder of the Stoic school, Zeno of Citium, who lived in the third century BC, and conclude with the Roman Stoic and emperor Marcus Aurelius who as "philosopher-king" lived in the second century AD. Stoic philosophy, though consisting of three divisions, relating to epistemology, physics and ethics, formed an essential unity. The reason for this was that the rational understanding (*logos*) of the nature of the physical world (*physis*) was, for the Stoics, intrinsically related to practical life (*ethics*). For they saw philosophy—the love of wisdom—as a way of life. As with the earlier Pre-Socratics, there were two important aspects of the Stoic worldview: one is that everything in the world is in flux and has a transitory existence: the other is that the world has an inherent order and unity, and that everything is inter-related and inter-dependent. In essence, for the Stoics, the order that is immanent in the universe is identified with divinity, with fire as dynamic process, with breath (*pneuma*) and with reason (*logos*). This pneuma gives both coherence and unity as well as dynamism to the world.

Although Stoics emphasised the inter-dependency and unity of all things, they also recognised different levels of being, in relation to stones and rocks (*hexis*, condition), plants (*physis*, growth), animals and humans (*psyche*, soul or animal life), and with humans, the additional attribute of reason (*logos*). This inter-relationship of all things through a "dynamic continuum" (*pneuma*), was acknowledged through the concept of *oikeon*, meaning affinity or belonging. Humans thus belonged to nature, and were not alien to it. But reason, for the Stoics, did not imply the instrumental control of nature but the faculty of contemplation and choice. The key ethical concept for the Stoics was thus virtue (*arete*) and like the Taoists, they stressed that the aim of human life was wisdom, and the promotion of an ethical life living in "accordance with nature". The love and pursuit of wealth, power, pleasure, fame and status for their own sakes was deprecated by the Stoics, and they emphasised human fellowship, self-sufficiency (*autarkeia*), moderation and the greatness of spirit. The ideal person for the Stoic was not an ascetic, nor one who lived in solitude, nor a person of power and influence but a "cosmopolitan". The Stoics expressed various political attitudes but the founder of Stoic philosophy, Zeno of Citium, was perhaps the best exponent of anarchism in ancient Greece.

During the medieval period in Europe two scholars, John Scotus Eriugena and Johannes Eckhart, were accused of being pantheists and their writings do indeed often express pantheistic leanings. But both these Christian scholar-mystics were in essence not pantheists, but Christian neoplatonists, and thus panentheists. Jacob Boehme too, though described by Levine as a

pantheist in that he spoke of the divinity as "external nature" was in essence a Christian theosophist and acclaimed a panentheistic ontology. Giordano Bruno, on the other hand, was a true renaissance figure, and, as an "hermetic magician" of the most extreme kind (as Yates described him (1964: 261)), can correctly be interpreted as a "true pantheist". For Bruno divinity was immanent in the world, "latent within self", and while Eckhart expressed an esoteric mysticism, Bruno advocated a nature mysticism, suggesting that it was through the study of nature and the universe that divinity is revealed. Bruno was thus a direct ancestor of Spinoza.

Benedict Spinoza is widely recognised as the philosopher who perhaps best expressed the pantheistic vision, for his metaphysics identifies God with nature as a unique divine substance. And it was Spinoza's philosophy that provided the inspiration for a number of German scholars who were later to express a form of pantheism—Goethe, the early Schelling, Hegel, the poet Heine and the biologist Haeckel who attempted to combine Spinoza's pantheism with Darwin's evolutionary biology. Haeckel thus helped to lay the foundation of an ecological world view and an environmental ethic based on Spinoza's pantheistic philosophy. This ecological perspective was also expressed in the pantheism of such naturalists as Richard Jeffries, John Burroughs and Ernest Thompson Seton. Heinrich Heine also reaffirmed the pantheism of Spinoza, to provide, as he put it "a new version of Spinoza's naturalism, enriched with contemporary concerns and marked by a socialist tendency" (1986 [1882]: 65).

4. Conclusion

As a theology pantheism is characterised by a number of common themes, and to conclude this essay, these we may briefly summarise.

i. An Ecological Perspective

All the pantheists expressed a metaphysic which emphasised the unity of all things in nature. Everything is connected with every other in a causal network and thus all beings in the world are inter-linked and inter-dependent. But nature for the pantheist is not an inert mechanism but rather a dynamic, all-inclusive, infinitely diverse unity or whole. Nature, for Spinoza, was conceived as a divine substance, *deus sive natura*, divinity was therefore neither transcendent nor separate from the world but identified with it—with the phenomenal world of "ten thousand things", as the Taoists expressed it (*natura naturata*) as well as with the all-inclusive unity or

dynamic principle (*arche, Tao, pneuma, logos, natura naturans*) that was immanent in all things. The pantheists thus disavowed the idea of a personal deity. Nature was thus "alive" in the broad sense of "pan-psychism" although pantheists, like the Stoics, also recognised different and distinct levels of beings, rocks and stones (*hexis*, condition), plants (*physis*, growth), animals and with humans the additional attribute of reason (*logos*). Humans were thus an intrinsic part of nature, for like all other things, humans belonged to the world. The world for pantheists was not an alien world, for as the Stoics expressed it in the concept of *Oikeion*, humans "belonged" in the universe. Pantheists thus rejected the anthropocentric, Promethean attitude to nature of the Christian mystics and the mechanistic philosophers.

The pantheists, though affirming the materiality of the world, repudiated reductive materialism, as well as opposing all forms of idealism and spiritualism. The pantheist attitude to the world was therefore neither one of egocentric possessiveness and dominion (as with Augustine and the mechanistic philosophers), nor one of rejection (as in the acosmism of the Gnostics), nor, again, one of contemplative detachment, nature being perceived only as a metaphor or manifestation of divinity (as with Christian neoplatonists and advocates of esotericism) or as a domain of suffering (*dukkha*) (as with Buddhists). In contrast, it was rather an attitude which celebrated nature, and emphasised relationship, belonging and reciprocity. It followed from this that pantheists adopted a realistic attitude towards the world, recognised that the notion of evil was largely a function of a lack of knowledge, and acknowledged the transitory nature of human life, thus repudiating the idea of "spiritual immortality".

It follows from this that pantheists rejected all forms of dualism. Though respecting distinctions, especially those between the finite and infinite, thought and extension, activity and receptivity, all these were held to be merely aspects of an all-embracing reality that had no purpose or aim (teleology). All pantheists thus consistently expressed an ecological world-view.

ii. A Dialectical Approach

All the pantheists put an important emphasis on reason, and repudiated the pre-occupation with faith, revelation, and religious ritual. With the Taoists this included also a disavowal of book-learning and formal knowledge, and an emphasis on spontaneity, receptivity, empirical knowledge and practical skills. But unlike Plato and Descartes, the pantheists did not repudiate knowledge based on sense-impressions but recognised that this formed the basis or starting point of all knowledge; nor did they equate reason with logic, or instrumental reason. Rather

they looked upon knowledge as consisting of several levels. Three levels were reflected in the imagery offered by the Stoic, Zeno of Citium, namely, the open hand (sensation), closed fist (cognition or grasping) and the holding of the fist (reason). Bruno seems to have distinguished five degrees of knowledge: sense impressions (*sensus*), discursive reason (*ratio*), logic (*intellectus*), intuitive understanding (*mens*) and imagination or vision (*imaginatio*). Through intuition and imagination, Bruno argued, we are able to apprehend the "divine unity in all things". The highest form of knowledge is described by Spinoza as *scientia intuitiva*. It essentially implied a form of contemplative reason or intuition which grasped the essence of things, the all-inclusive divine unity. As Spinoza wrote: "the more we understand singular things, the more we understand god" (*Ethics* 5/p24). The pantheists thus combined empiricism and rationalism, and saw true knowledge (wisdom) as implying the intellectual love (*amor intellectualis*) of god or nature (Naess 1977: 422). All pantheists thus stressed the need to develop a "unifying vision".

Pantheists emphasised the dynamic nature of the universe, namely that all finite things were in a state of flux and change. As Heraclitus expressed it: you do not step into the same river twice. Bruno likewise agreed with the Pre-Socratics and the Stoics that motion is co-eternal with matter, and that everything in the universe is a changing or mobile thing (*ens mobile*). Change is ubiquitous, and such change is inherently linked to a "conflict of opposites". The Taoists, Heraclitus and the Stoics all put a fundamental emphasis on binary oppositions, which expressed not a dualism but a dialectical opposition. Thus all things in their make-up involved an inherent tension or "strife", even the notion of balance or harmony. Heraclitus used the image of the lyre, a Greek stringed instrument, to express the unity and dynamic tension within the whole cosmos. The universe for the pantheists entailed an inherent dynamic continuum, which they described as a divine unity.

But although pantheists stressed the unity and inter-dependence of all things expressed in the Stoic concepts of sympathy (*sympatheia*) and belonging (*oikeion*) thus putting an emphasis on "relations" as well as on the conditioned, relative and transitory nature of all existents, they were dialectical thinkers not holists. For they put an equal emphasis on the individuality of all things, for all things in the world are seen as striving to maintain their own existence and well-being. This perspective is particularly well expressed by Spinoza whose concept of *conatus* specifically relates to the striving of every being to preserve and develop its specific essence or nature, which is a manifestation of god/nature. There are many ways in which the divine unity manifests itself, reflected in the various modes of being. As Spinoza wrote: "Whatever

exists expresses the nature or essence of god in a certain and determinate way, that is whatever exists expresses in a certain and determinate way the power of God, which is the cause of all things" (*Ethics* 1, p36; Curley 1994: 109). All beings thus strive to maintain and gain power (*potenta*), which is seen as distinct from power in the sense of domination or the coercive power of kings (ibid 2/p3, p117).

Thus pantheism entails an equal emphasis on both symbiosis and relationship and on the individuality and self realisation of all being or things, which are a manifestation of god's power. Pantheists thus advocate neither individualism (or atomism) nor holism, but a dialectical approach to the world.

iii. Ethical Naturalism

Emphasising that humans are an intrinsic part of nature, the ethical stance of the pantheist is succinctly captured by the phrase to live "in accordance with nature" (or the Tao). This was particularly well expressed by the Stoics. The supreme good, for pantheists, is virtue (*arete*), and all pantheists repudiate the narrow striving for wealth, power, status, fame, or pleasure as ends in themselves. This did not entail a mindless asceticism, nor a denial of sensual pleasure, nor the glorification of poverty as in the Christian anchorite tradition, still less did it imply a solitary life. For pantheists emphasised both the individuality and the sociality of humans. But the ideal life for them was one suggesting that we live in harmony with the rhythms of nature, a life that was essentially one of simplicity, equanimity and moderation. All pantheists—Taoists, the Stoics and Spinoza—though not denying or wishing to suppress the emotions, all sought to limit the power of the human passions—anger, violence, hatred. A certain engaged tranquillity was thus advocated. But pantheism affirmed engagement with both the human and natural world, and with respect to Taoism, the sage was always depicted not as a religious recluse, or as an intellectual, but as a practical person, spontaneously engaged in worldly pursuits, such as fishing, carpentry, or out hunting insects (cicadas). As the Chinese folk song puts it:

> "When the sun rises I go to work
>
> when the sun sets, I rest
>
> I dig a well for my drink
>
> I plough the fields for my food

the power of the ruler cannot influence me

I follow the rule of nature."

(Da Liu 1981: 13)

Philosophy for pantheists was not an intellectual pursuit, but a way of living.

But living according to the necessity of nature did not imply a denial of human agency, subjectivity or creativity. To the contrary humans were viewed by pantheists as beings with intrinsic individuality and power. As one Stoic described the human task. "To make the best of what is in our power, and to take the rest as it naturally happens" (Epictetus 1995: 6). Emphasising that all things, including humans, have inherent capacities and power (*potestas*), and strive to maintain themselves in being, meant for the pantheists that humans should strive for their own freedom and self-realisation. Autonomy was a key concept for pantheists. But living in accordance with nature was less of a nature mysticism, implying a kind of *unio mystica* with "nature" as a totality, but rather an ethical doctrine, for pantheists, as we have noted, stressed the singularity of all things (*res singulares*) noting that the more we understand things, the more we understand nature (god).

For Ken Wilber (1983) and other religious idealists, for whom the only true reality is "spirit", pantheism has been described as "dangerous because it defines freedom as an affirmation of natural necessity and as reabsorption of the individual into the cosmic whole. Such a view is not only psychologically regressive and spiritually misguided, but disturbingly consistent with aspects of fascist ideology" (Zimmerman 1994: 211-212). This paragraph shows a wilful misreading or misunderstanding of pantheism. Wilber, however, shows no evidence at all in his book *Up from Eden* (1983) (which Zimmerman cites) of having read any work by pantheists. There is no discussion at all of Taoism, the Stoics, Bruno, Spinoza or Goethe, and "pantheism" is only briefly mentioned in a footnote, which suggests an adherence to the doctrine of acosmic panentheism—"creation" being relatively "illusory" (*maya*) (1983: 300). Wilber, in his writings simply offers a version of esotericism. There is little correlation, it may be noted, between the advocacy of particular ontologies (whether pantheism or Christian theism) and specific political doctrines. But the denial of the reality of the world, the anthropocentric identity of the immortal soul (*atma*) of humans with a spiritual absolute (*brahma*), as proposed by Wilber and the esoterics, is much more psychologically misguided than any form of pantheism. And there is no intrinsic connection between pantheism and fascism, whatever Zimmerman and Clark may think. Indeed, fascism only makes sense as a

twentieth century political doctrine. The truth is, as Levine argued, that pantheism, as an ontology, has always been antithetical to any power structure (1994: 360).

iv. Radical Politics

All pantheists tended to express radical political views, were critical of popular religion and the rituals focused on anthropomorphic deities and spirits, and were equally critical of militarism, social inequality and coercive power. Lao Tzu and Zeno of Citium (the founder of the Stoic school) have long been considered among the first anarchist theorists, and even republicans like Bruno, Spinoza and Goethe always put an emphasis on democracy, human justice and liberty, the freedom of thought and expression and religious tolerance. Pantheists like Bruno and Spinoza were not critical of religion *per se*, for it often had an important ethical significance, but only with regard to religion being used to bolster social inequalities and unjust rule.

What is clearly evident from the summary just presented, is that pantheism provides some of the basic conceptual resources for the development of an ecological worldview or environmental philosophy. This is reflected in the fact that naturalists and poets of the nineteenth century—John Clare, Walt Whitman, Richard Jefferies, David Henry Thoreau, John Burroughs, Emest Thompson Seton and John Muir are examples—not only expressed in their writings a pantheistic vision, but also laid the foundations along with Haeckel—for a new ecological perspective. In a thoughtful and seminal paper on modern pantheism. Harold W Wood Jr (1985) argues that at a time when humankind needs a renewed sense of reverence for the natural world, pantheism is the only viable religious ontology that truly provides a basis for a "humanity valid environmental ethics". As a form of "nature mysticism"—though not a mysticism that entails withdrawal from the world—pantheism, he writes, is a way of knowledge, devotion and action. As a way of knowledge, pantheism is focused on the study of nature:

> "Whether bird watching, studying wild flowers, or plumbing the great mysteries of life, the pantheist gains a closer relationship with deity as he understands it. The 'study of god'—theology—in pantheism is ecology in its broadest sense the science which attempts to comprehend the complex interrelationships of living organisms and their environments. In distinction from religions based on revelation, the quest for knowledge understood from a pantheist perspective is a never-ending quest. Knowing

> that one will never find the ultimate explanation for the universe should enhance our sense of awe and mystery for it" (Wood 1985: 156).

As a way of devotion, pantheism involves:

> "artistic expression, nature observation, or various forms of outdoor activities. Wonder, reverence, and awe are promoted by the single practice of sensory awareness. A sense of the miraculous is hardly difficult to achieve when contemplating the wonders of the universe, who can doubt that communion with nature is an authentic religious experience" (ibid 158).

Finally, as a way of action, pantheism involves expanding the subject of ethical awareness from humans to the environment, thus providing a rationale for engaging in environmental conservation which, Wood writes, is tantamount to the love of god:

> "In working to preserve the biosphere, a pantheist is not merely seeking social survival. An affirmation of wildness and natural diversity from a pantheist viewpoint preserves a covenant with the earth. An ethical pantheist does not practice conservation out of simple self-interest, but rather as a religious motivation, inspired by reverence for the world." (ibid 160).

Finally, Wood writes:

> "as a religion, rather than merely a philosophical system, pantheism holds forth but the hope of an environmental ethic (*hu*) which appeals to man's innate need for wonder, reverence and celebration, as well as to the need for enlightened reason and empirical understanding." (ibid 163)

All the pantheists—the Taoists, the Pre-Socratic philosophers, the Stoics, the philosophers Bruno, Spinoza and Schelling, the poet Goethe and Heine, and the biologist Haeckel—all attempted in various ways to combine religion (the need for wonder and reverence), science (the need for empirical knowledge), and philosophy (the need to fashion an ethical and political system that was conducive to both human and environmental well-being). But most importantly they emphasised that the natural world, in its infinity, was the ultimate context for human existence, and that our relationship with this world was fundamentally a religious experience.

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