



A Brief Primer to Ecstatic Naturalism and Deep Pantheism

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Abstract

This essay focuses on the categorial expression of the metaphysics of ecstatic naturalism and the theology of deep pantheism. Naturalism, the theory that nature is all that there is, becomes the ecstatic form by stressing the continual fissuring between nature naturing and its potencies and nature natured seen as the innumerable orders of the world. Deep pantheism critiques the dualism of supernatural theism as well as the half-way theology of panentheism. Further, deep pantheism is “deep” because it focuses on the churning abyss of the unconscious of nature and its archetypal potencies.

Keywords: Panentheism; Naturalism; Theology; Phenomenology

I started shaping my philosophical theology of ecstatic naturalism with my first book: *The Community of Interpreters*, (Mercer University Press, 1987 & 1995) followed by *Nature and Spirit: An Essay in Ecstatic Naturalism*, (Fordham University Press, 1992) and among others, *A Semiotic Theory of Theology and Philosophy*, (Cambridge University Press, 2000) [1-3]. As I unfolded the contours of the philosophy of ecstatic naturalism, I knew that there must be a theological dimension, what I call Deep Pantheism. My work in progress is *Mind's Travail*, that deals with the correlation between Darwinian mental emergentism and cosmic mind within the context of a shape-shifting nature.

Propositions

Some of my key ideas:

1. Nature is shriven into the modes of *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*.
2. *Nature naturing* is defined as “Nature perennially creating itself out of itself alone,” while *nature natured* is defined as: “The innumerable orders of the World with no overall contour or order of orders.”
3. Nature is all that there is and there is no such thing as

the supernatural, only numinous eruptions within the *one* nature that there is.

4. All gods and goddesses are projections of archetypes (instinct and objective symbolic forms).
5. There was no *creatio ex nihilo*.
6. The religious dimension responds to varying “sacred folds,” which have great semiotic density, numinosity, and are activated by the self through a deep unconscious transference, see my *Nature's Religion* [4].
7. The word “nature” has no referent.
8. Nature is not an order or order of orders, only the *allowing* of orders.
9. The ecstasy of nature is grounded in the ejections of potent archetypes and the endless emanations of orders.
10. The self is semiotic through and through, see my *Nature's Self: Our Journey From Origin to Spirit* [5].
11. Nature naturing goes by other names—unruly ground (*das Regellose*, Schelling), the Great Mother (Jung), the Will (*der Wille*, Schopenhauer), the Material Maternal (Kristeva), firstness (Peirce), the *Chora* (Plato), and the unending (*das Unendliche*, Schleiermacher).
12. There is no web of internal relations and no order connects with all other orders., that is, there are breaks

in continua.

13. A radically expanded and enriched psychoanalysis (ordinal psychoanalysis) can be a gateway to metaphysics (the theory of whatever is, in whatever way).
14. There are four types of naturalism, see my *Ecstatic Naturalism: Signs of the World* [6]—*descriptive* (Dewey, Santayana, and Buchler), *process* (Whitehead, Hartshorne, and Neville), *honorific* (Schelling and Emerson), and *ecstatic* (Jung, Tillich and Corrington).
15. The Encompassing (*das Umgreifende*—Karl Jaspers) surpasses all finite meaning horizons and can be seen as dynamic Nothingness.

Adumbrations

Ecstatic naturalism embeds all philosophical and theological query in the perennial nature that can put counter-pressure on any conceptual array. It requires precision to correctly correlate the manipulative side of living beings with their assimilative side. Glottocentrism (The privileging of human language) exaggerates the manipulative dimension (semiotic free play), while materialism exaggerates the assimilative dimension (sheer undergoing). In the self, the manipulation of orders in nature natured requires great adaptive skills, while the assimilative dimension requires skill in saying “ingress” or “not.” The self’s volatile relation to nature natured requires the manipulation of archetypal images and the assimilation of archetypes. In rejecting much of Whitehead’s process naturalism (see his *Process and Reality* 1929) [7], ecstatic naturalism elucidates the continual eruptions of the unruly ground and fully acknowledges the shadow (abjected craving for power) and the fury of communal psychosis as operating with awesome regularity. The shadow transgresses social norms and sustains the aggressive projections that seek and find some other to demonize.

The Encompassing can be understood to be nothingness, see my *Nature and Nothingness: An Essay in Ordinal Phenomenology* [8]. What does this mean? Neither nature nor the Encompassing can bear predicates or have any traits. The terms “nature” and the “Encompassing” have no referent and cannot be put into a genus/specific difference relationship. They are the *same* and empty of all categories and constantly clear away the semiotic projections that would attempt to capture ‘them.’ Either word will serve. Nothingness is a nihilating force that separates consciousness and its ego by surrounding the ego with its nihilating breath. Does consciousness have traits or content? Does consciousness need to keep the ego alive in its nihilating surroundings? Sartre would say “no” to the first question and I would answer the same way. The second question is more vexing and harder to answer. One could try to answer by imposing a telos onto the consciousness/ego relationship that would

assume that there is a built-in purpose to the swirling correlation of nothingness, consciousness, and the ego. How would one know if this is the case? One can argue that the emergence of a content-filled ego is a product of evolution and thus serves adaptation. But the ego only emerges in an I/ me relationship, where the I is content-free consciousness and the me is a multi-faceted ego that encircles itself with content.

The theology of deep pantheism is ensconced within the more capacious philosophy of ecstatic naturalism, see my *Deep Pantheism: Toward: Toward a New Transcendentalism* [9]. Both use a radicalized phenomenology that moves beyond classical Husserlian phenomenology, with its focus on a transcendental ego and the quest for essences. This ordinal phenomenology probes into as many of a complex’s ordinal locations as time and disciplined energy allow. What is an ordinal location? All complexes, and there are no simples, prevail in innumerable locations, each of which contributes to its overall contour. An example may help. Consider a nuclear submarine patrolling in the Atlantic Ocean. If we start with Husserl’s adumbrations, we can shadow-forth the submarine’s massive physical features, within and without. Already this requires a community of interpreters, each of whose members share their visual takes on the phenomenon. One ordinal phenomenologist can focus on the hull’s shape. Another can focus on the submarine’s wake on the water and its turbulence below water. Yet another can home in on the submarine’s noises and color codes. A small community of co-phenomenologists can correlate these sense-driven traits. Note that here we are talking about “traits,” not “essences” that would somehow emerge above and beyond multi-located traits.

But ordinal phenomenology takes us much further. The following are some orders (traits) that can and must receive phenomenological treatment of the submarine: velocity, materials, weapons systems, national affiliation, means of construction, economic factors for each component, the impact on various local and extended communities, labor unions, truck drivers, train engineers, airplane pilots, mineral pits, political decisions, and nuclear material. All of these and many more belong together to constitute the submarine’s multi-located phenomenon. If phenomenology is primarily and only a visual and sense-driven method, it cannot expand to non-visual traits thereby ignoring the overwhelming extent of different *kinds* of traits.

One can ask: is this still phenomenology? It seems so if phenomenology seeks the full range of traits that manifest the phenomenon. The play of unhiddenness and absence is deeply phenomenological, as are trait gestalts, changes across time, and human prospects. The submarine’s political enablement is no less real or less of a trait than the shape

of its hull. The anxiety of its crew is as real as its nuclear material, but real in different respects (a phenomenology of affect, foreshortened third dimension, along with mental gestalts of fissuring). Every one of these traits is an 'object' of phenomenological description and probing. This is an unending project for a community of interpreters working with the method of ordinal phenomenology.

What then is deep pantheism? It is a theological position that rejects theism and its supernatural deity. It rejects traditional pantheism and its flattened notion of a god/nature correlation. Finally, it rejects the half-way house of panentheism that posits a deity both within and beyond nature. Panentheism has a strong *aesthetic* appeal and seems to nicely wrap up a holistic vision, but it can only do so by covering over ontological disjuncts and the sheer unruliness of the depths of nature. It has no place for the wildness of nature naturing.

In contrast, deep pantheism rejects all notions of deity and renders such notions as animated archetypical projections. Nature is all that there is, and one key trait is its unconscious depths, which are not acknowledged by a pantheism like Spinoza's. To assume a god/nature identity relation makes the god term unnecessary and a tautology, as argued by Schopenhauer. As Peirce knew so well, the heart of nature is a churning chaos of firstness that has no discernable traits or structures. Note, that his "secondness" creates duality within a causal relation and his "thirdness" consists of slowly evolving generic traits, which are natural laws and the habits of nature—see my, *An Introduction to C.S. Peirce: Philosopher, Semiotician, and Ecstatic Naturalist* [10].

Deep pantheism sees the religious dimension as but a shadow of the aesthetic. Its focus is on sacred folds that pull out a transference relation that retains a grip on the self. The key thing that makes a semiotic/sacred fold *aesthetic* is its beauty (harmony, gestalt integrity, the joining of power and meaning, and fulfilled contrast) as it opens out the powerful numinous (the uncanny infinitizing that cracks into finite meaning horizons). Insofar as deep pantheism is religious, it is a religion of the potencies within sacred folds as they compel beauty to make a transition into the sublime.

In the selving process (human individuation) a sacred fold, largely due to its intrinsic qualities, activates an unconscious transference to its archetypal core, while also providing an *interval* that acts to cool down the fold's numinosity so that it can be assimilated with less overwhelming force. For example, a massive oak tree (symbol of the tree of life) as the carrier of a sacred fold for Neo-pagans, could overwhelm the participant and consume the attending psyche, whereas its co-equal interval provides the more attenuated 'space' that stabilizes the numinous within its enabling and allowing

context. This existential 'space' is provided by the less intense environment that allows for the emergence of the numinous sacred fold. A haunting question: is there some kind of countertransference coming from the sacred fold that responds to the initial transference coming from the unconscious of the human process?

From Revelation to the Sublime

Religion often has two competing *teloi*: 1) the creation and justification of violence, or 2) the transition from liturgical beauty to the overwhelming sublime in art and nature, see my *Nature's Sublime: An Essay in Aesthetic Naturalism* [11]. The former is far more prevalent than the latter, yet the latter (experience of the sublime) needs the depth theonomy of religion in order to transfigure beauty—the gateway to the sublime. Yet, any sacred fold can sustain beauty and couch the experience of beauty into the depth earthquake of the sublime. My attempt is to work through the narcissistic idea/experience of revelation, as usually having pure private reference as projected onto a dubious content and transform it into the recurrent transition from harmonic beauty to the unending potency of the sublime.

How does the sublime transcend a given revelation? Revelations are content-specific and are the introjected projection of unresolved complexes in the psyche. By projecting divine intent and intentionality onto an extra-human source, the resultant 'revelation' is a magnified reiteration of unconscious intent and desire. It is not subject to critical common sense or self-conscious probing and analysis. It is a semiotic lump of private longing with little of the divine in it. The god that is envisioned is close to a 100% projection. Hegel would call this a "bad infinite."

The sublime shatters and transfigures such private unconscious projections with their underlying narcissistic core. There is no specific content in the encounter with the sublime. It could be called the "good infinite" insofar as 'it' is a constant momentum of luminosity. While the experience of beauty, its necessary but not sufficient condition, is the gateway to the sublime, it has its own unique ontological sway. We are reminded of Schleiermacher's wonderful phase for the infinite—the unending. The realms of revelation have finite termini that have the audacity to claim that they spin off to the infinite, whereas the unendingness of the sublime is both stasis and motion as the movement of the "not yet" (*noch nicht Sein*—Ernst Bloch).

Finite beauties, as emergent from nature natured (the complexes of the world) become transfigured by the infinitizing lure of the sublime as it enshrines nothingness and the Encompassing. Each trait of a beautiful complex feels the natural grace of the sublime as it pulls beauty into the

numinous per se.

Hence the sublime is the moving outer edge of nature naturing and is what Schelling would call “a potency.” The sublime unveils the numinous core of nature natured through the epiphanies of the beautiful. It works as natural grace, i.e., a grace that is not a gift of a supernatural source. This marks the inner telos of the selving process.

Proleptic Queries

What is the relation between so-called “free will” and the selving process? Does the absorption by the infinitizing sublime make a modicum of free will possible? Is the artist the paradigmatic expression of the selving process? Is there a sublime transition of the ugly as envisioned by James Joyce? Can the sublime overcome the finite cultural projections that shape the experience of beauty? Can beauties be ranked without violating the principle of ontological parity (that everything is equally real in the way that it is real)?

Is there a depth-dialectic operating in the perennial relations between nature naturing and nature natured? Can the emergent orders of the world (nature natured) exert back pressure on the potencies of nature naturing? Is the dialectic between the unconscious and the attending consciousness of the selving process a direct analogy with the unconscious of nature (nature naturing) and the innumerable orders of the world (nature natured)? What of key differences? How much consciousness does the human unconscious have verses the proto consciousness of nature’s unconscious? And what type of consciousness is it in either case? That is, is the proto consciousness of the unconscious of nature identical to the fitful consciousness of the momenta of the human unconscious?

In the travail of mind in nature can Darwinian emergentism (from less to more finite consciousness) be part of an ingress of cosmic consciousness as it lures us to the infinite? Or is this a eulogistic and romanticized overlay? Does cosmic consciousness have intentionality in Husserl’s sense? This is Aristotle’s question. He answers “no.” Is there a different type of intentionality operating in cosmic

mind that stands between the intention of objects and total self-reference (Aristotle’s *de Anima*)? If so, do we have phenomenological access to this type?

Finally, what is the relationship between the experience of the sublime and non-violence? If finite narcissistic revelations often lead to violence, is the generic experience of the sublime a way out of the endless spiral of this violence?

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