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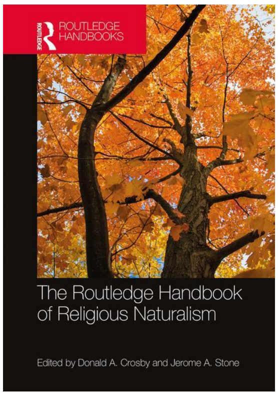
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9

DEUS SIVE NATURA

Pantheism as a variety of religious naturalism

Demian Wheeler

In his controversial bestseller, *The God Delusion*, evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins wryly observes that pantheism is just "sexed-up atheism" (Dawkins 2006: 40). The burden of the present essay is to demonstrate that pantheism can also be meaningfully construed as a variety of *religious naturalism*.

Defining religious naturalism

Simply defined, "religious naturalism" refers to a broad family of philosophical and theological perspectives that regards nature as both exhaustive of reality and worthy of deep reverence and devotion. Religious naturalism is, on the one hand, a form of naturalism, which stipulates that nature is "metaphysically ultimate" (Crosby 2002). What there is, and all there is, is nature; there is nothing above, behind, or beyond the natural. As monists, naturalists are polemically antisupernaturalistic and antisupranaturalistic (Stone 2008: 2; Wildman 2009: 20–25), excluding all extranatural realms and entities (including disembodied divine agents) from their "ontological inventory" (Wildman 2014a: 41–43).

On the other hand, religious naturalists venture that living a religiously fulfilling existence on a fully naturalistic basis—i.e., without supernaturalism or supranaturalism—is both possible and desirable (Stone 2018). Essentially, religious naturalism is a post-Enlightenment, but spiritually potent, worldview that enables one to respond—religiously, ethically, and theologically—to the perplexity, splendor, and power of *this* world. That is, religious naturalism recognizes not only the metaphysical ultimacy of nature but also the *religious* ultimacy of nature. To deem something religiously ultimate is to hold it *sacred*—i.e., vitally and centrally important and, therefore, deserving of our utmost loyalty and faith (Crosby 2002: 114; Rue 2011: 110–111). The religious naturalist speaks of the "sacred depths" of nature, which, according to Wildman, lies in nature's "self-transcendent potential" as well as "in its beauty, terror, scale, stochasticity, emergent complexity, and evolutionary development" (Wildman 2014a: 41). Clearly, then, the rejection of supernaturalism "does not entail the ... dismissal of the religious categories of the divine, sacred, or transcendence" (Hogue 2010: 203); such categories can rightly be applied to nature itself.

In a word, for the religious naturalist, *nature is enough*—enough to elicit our unwavering fidelity and commitment, enough to arouse spiritual affections of wonder and gratitude, awe and humility, enough to find meaning and value in our lives (Crosby 2002: 169; Rue 2011).

Pantheism and its place in the family of religious naturalism

Crosby, Rue, Stone, Hogue, and others tend to define religious naturalism *nontheistically*. In actuality, however, the choice to retain or repudiate God-language is one of two crucial issues that divide religious naturalists from each other. As we shall discover, certain classes of theism *are* compatible with naturalism, and many religious naturalists opt to reinterpret "God" naturalistically rather than jettison the symbol altogether. The other major area of division within religious naturalism has to do with whether the religious ultimate is *within* the world or *is* the world. That is, should the sacred be identified with a *particular aspect* of nature or with the *ambiguous totality* of nature?

Figure 9.1 pictures these dividing lines as bisecting axes; the vertical axis represents "the God question," while the horizontal axis represents "the religious ultimacy question." These axes form a grid, with each quadrant signifying one of four major groupings within the family of religious naturalism.

If the natural exhausts what is real, then the sacred must be identified either with a *part* or with the *whole* of nature. The religious naturalisms on the left side of the grid take the former option: although the ambiguous entirety of nature is *metaphysically* ultimate, only certain elements of it are *religiously* ultimate. To illustrate, the empirical theologians of the "Chicago School" of theology famously put forward variations of finite (or naturalistic) theism, which conceives of God as *one kind of process included within nature*. Shailer Mathews equated God specifically with "the personality evolving activities of the universe" (Mathews 1931: 192–234). A decade and a half later, Mathews' junior colleague at the University of Chicago, Henry Nelson Wieman, insisted that God is none other than the "creative event" in nature that augments "qualitative meaning" or, simply, "the good"—especially the human good (Wieman 1995: 7, 56).

The varieties of religious naturalism depicted in the lower left quadrant overlap with naturalistic/finite theism on the religious ultimacy question but part ways on the God question. To illustrate, for religious humanism, the primary focus of religious concern is *humanity and human ideals and values*—e.g., the demand on human beings to take responsibility for themselves and the planet (Murry 2007: 1–11). However, the vast majority of religious humanists, both historically and currently, are nontheists (see Reese 1927; Pinn 2012).

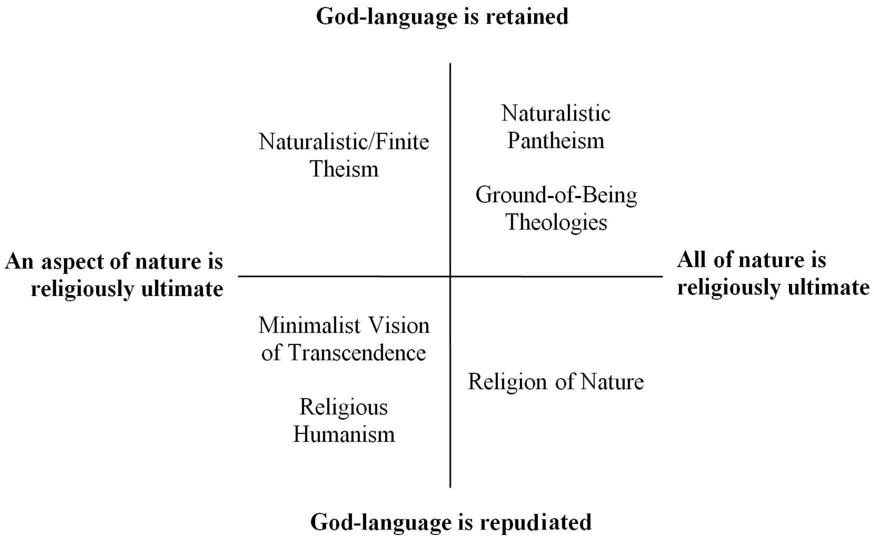
God-language is retained
Naturalistic/Finite Theism
Naturalistic Pantheism
Ground-of-Being Theologies
An aspect of nature is religiously ultimate
All of nature is religiously ultimate
Minimalist Vision of Transcendence
Religious Humanism
Religion of Nature
God-language is repudiated

Figure 9.1 Varieties of religious naturalism

Jerome Stone is also a nontheist who argues that the "object of religious orientation" is "axiologically determinate." In his variation of religious naturalism, the sacred is limited to those "norms" and "powers" of nature that are "creative of the good," so that only "*some* things, like justice and human dignity, and the creativity of the natural world, are sacred" (Stone 2008: 194–195). Here, Stone moves beyond the more narrow scope of religious humanism, exhibiting "a greater sense that we are not masters of our fate, that we need to recognize the worth of, to nurture and be nurtured by, this-worldly grace and judgment" (Stone 1993: 35). But Stone, as I noted above, shares religious humanism's nontheism. Actually, his religious naturalism is a middle path between naturalistic theism and religious humanism, affirming a "minimalist vision of transcendence" (see Stone 1992; 2008: 143–145) without reinstating God-language.

Crosby, whose "religion of nature" is portrayed in the lower right quadrant of the grid, also avoids God-talk. Echoing Stone and nontheistic humanists, Crosby argues that "spirituality is contained within nature and provided by nature quite apart from the existence of a deity of any kind" (Crosby 2014). However, even though it is not a theistic faith, a religion of nature is far from irreligious or non-religious. In Crosby's view, the whole of nature is *both* metaphysically and religiously ultimate; it is (1) uncreated, everlasting, and self-sustaining, *and* (2) deserving of the same kind of "reverence, awe, love, and devotion we in the West have formerly reserved for God" (Crosby 2002: xi). On this latter score, Crosby departs from finite theism as well as from religious humanism and Stone's minimalist vision. In Crosby's version of religious naturalism, the most appropriate focus of our ultimate concerns and commitments is the *totality* of nature in all its vastness, ambiguity, diversity, mystery, and creative-destructive power—not just those parts of the world that "conduce to human good" or serve the aspirations and needs of humankind (Crosby 2007: 490–491, 494).

Crosby, though, is quick to distinguish a religion of nature from *pantheism*, which also hails the ambiguous totality of nature as religiously ultimate (see the upper right quadrant of the grid). Etymologically, pantheism simply means the whole (*pan*) is divine (*theos*). A religion of nature, by contrast, is *a*theistic, not *pan*theistic, *replacing* rather than *equating* God with nature. For Crosby, there is no divine spirit that guides and supports the world, nor is there any satisfying rationale for referring to the world as God.

That being said, the remainder of this essay will make a modest case for pantheism as a legitimate, distinctive, and compelling variety of religious naturalism. Crosby assumes that a materialist metaphysics rules out a pantheistic worldview, which (allegedly) sees nature as "suffused by a kind of divine presence" (Crosby 2018). What Crosby overlooks, however, is that there *are* thoroughly naturalistic varieties of pantheism; the pantheists canvassed below, for instance, do not view God as a disembodied or determinate entity and actually join Crosby in negating a divinely ensouled nature or any free-floating consciousness or being that presides over the universe (see Crosby 2002: 146). The chief difference is that Crosby rejects theistic imagery as "hopelessly anthropomorphic" (Crosby 2002: 9), whereas pantheists, much like finite theists, hazard that "God" is a complex, malleable, ever-evolving, and historically rich concept, capable of being (re)interpreted along non-anthropomorphic and naturalistic lines. After all, the idea of "God" is, as Gordon Kaufman persuasively demonstrates, a "human imaginative construction" that needs to continually undergo critical interrogation and reconstruction. A religious naturalist himself, Kaufman realizes that agential and supernaturalistic models of God are no longer intelligible in the modern era. Nevertheless, atheism is not the only alternative to classical theism, and by his late career, Kaufman began to reimagine the divine as the "creativity" manifest throughout the cosmos (see Kaufman 1993: 264–280; Kaufman 2004). Of course, Kaufman's attachment to God-language could easily be attributed to his self-interests as a Christian theologian. But, in actual fact, Kaufman held onto (and naturalized) the concept of God because he was convinced that it still conveys the utter mystery of things and continues to function, perhaps more powerfully than any other religious symbol in the West, as "an ultimate point of reference" that orients our lives and yet conditions everything human and finite (Kaufman 1993: ix–xv, 3–17, 32–44, 301–340).

I concur with Kaufman entirely, which is why I believe the pantheistic move is justified. Notwithstanding its conceptual limitations and historical baggage, "God" is a living metaphor in the Western imagination, one that has always expressly signified that which "relativizes" and "humanizes" our existence, that which humans take to be metaphysically and religiously ultimate. And if *nature* is truly ultimate in both of these senses, then the question becomes: why *not* speak of nature as God? Why *not* speak of "God or nature" (*deus sive natura*), as Benedict (Baruch) de Spinoza boldly did in the seventeenth century (see the following section)? My worry is that dispensing with God-talk risks losing one of the most potent and culturally recognizable concepts we have for symbolically engaging and worshipfully beholding the ultimacy and the sacred depths of nature. Thus, I would contend that pantheists are wise to retain the symbol "God," so long as it is duly de-anthropomorphized.

The fundamental theological instinct of pantheism is that the sacred is *coincidental with* nature in its mysterious, ambiguous, and infinite wholeness (Frankenberry 1993: 29). In this respect, pantheism runs counter both to finite theism, according to which the sacred is *less than* the whole of nature (e.g., the creative event), and to pan*en*theism, according to which the sacred is *more than* the whole of nature (i.e., a personal deity whose being contains and yet transcends the world). For the pantheist, God is not included within nature, nor is nature included within God. Rather, God *is* nature (although this statement will need to be nuanced and qualified below). As Milligan observes, the emphasis in pantheism is not on God as merely *in* nature, but on "God *as* nature, and Nature—in the richest, fullest, comprehensive sense—as God" (Milligan 1987: 584, emphasis added). By contrast, panentheistic perspectives (e.g., process theology), insofar as they posit a divine agent beyond natural processes, are not truly naturalistic. On the contrary, they are simply immanentalist iterations of supernatural theism—or to play on the title of Stone's text, *maximalist visions of immanence*.

Yet pantheism is (or at least can be) much more philosophically sophisticated than it appears at first glance; it need not be a simplistic conflation of God and the world. To be a pantheist is to be awakened to the holiness, indeed the divinity, of the entirety of reality. Be that as it may, pantheism does *not* mean that every single *part* of nature (e.g., nuclear weapons and student loan payments) is God or equally worthy of reverence and worship (Harrison 1999: 70–71). Citing the nineteenth-century pantheist, Allanson Picton, Milligan notes that more philosophically subtle variants of pantheism divinize "the all that is" not in "the sense of an aggregate," but in the sense of the "totality" and "oneness of things" as "phenomenal manifestation[s] of the energy of an infinite Life" (Milligan 1996: 237–238). The version of pantheism championed in the last section of this essay—which I dub "apophatic pantheism"—affirms just that. This model of pantheism even finds a completely naturalistic way of preserving the ancient monotheistic distinction between creator and creation, carefully distinguishing "nature naturing" from "nature natured." At this juncture pantheism interestingly intersects with certain modes of ground-of-being theology (see, again, the upper right quadrant of Figure 9.1)—a point to which we will return later.

Three naturalistic pantheists

Although the word "pantheism" was not coined until the early eighteenth century (by John Toland), pantheistic impulses and insights stretch back into antiquity. As Paul Harrison observes, pantheism is a "perennial heresy" that is present in nearly every religious and philosophical tradition of the world, both East and West, and is shared by a host of great thinkers throughout the ages (Harrison 1999: 13–38). For that reason, pantheism, as I intimated above, comes in many varieties, several of which are not congruent with naturalism.

But some are, and in what follows, I will look at pantheisms that are *naturalistic* in their metaphysics. I will focus on the thought of three pantheists in particular: Spinoza (an early-modern Jewish thinker), Bernard Loomer (a mid-twentieth-century process theologian), and Robert Corrington (a contemporary philosopher). Their naturalistic iterations of pantheism obviously stand apart from idealistic and dualistic ones as well as from other non-naturalistic perspectives such as panentheism (Milligan 1996: 235–236; 1987: 583–584, 593–594).

Admittedly, many present-day religious naturalists would balk at some of the key components of Spinoza's philosophy (e.g., his pre-Darwinian conception of a fixed, static, and deterministic nature). Nonetheless, Stone (rightly) claims Spinoza as a "forerunner," and perhaps even the "grandfather," of contemporary religious naturalism (Stone 2008: 18).

For one thing, Spinoza was an unblinking naturalist. He held that nothing exists outside of nature; that the world is devoid of teleology; and that humans are wholly natural beings, differing from the rest of reality only in degree, not in kind (see Spinoza 1996: 10, 27–29, 114, 146). He also refused to attribute personality, intentionality, and conscious awareness to God (see Spinoza 1996: 10, 34)—one of the factors that earned him a reputation as a heretic and led to his excommunication from the synagogue in Amsterdam. In his masterwork, the *Ethics* (1677), as well as in other important writings, Spinoza made quick work of the supernatural, anthropomorphic God of orthodox Judaism and Christianity and posited, instead, a thoroughly naturalized, nonpersonal conception of divinity (Nadler 2006: x–xi, 113–115; Crosby 2002: 148–149; Donagan 1996: 343, 354–355; Bennett 1984: 35–37; Capetz 2003: 115; Scruton 2002: 1, 9).

Traditionally, Spinoza's naturalistic theology has been classified as a type of pantheism. Part One of the *Ethics* lays out a monistic metaphysics in which the universe is conceptualized as a single, infinite, eternal, necessarily existing substance. (In)famously, Spinoza described this *substantia* as "God or nature"—*deus sive natura* (see Spinoza 1996: 114, 118–119). The Latin conjunction *sive* clearly signifies equivalence (Nadler 2006: 81; Curley 1988: 36). That is, the terms "*deus*" and "*natura*" have the same referent; God is none other than the one and only reality/substance that there is—i.e., nature (Spinoza 1996: 9–10). As B.A. Gerrish clarifies: "For Spinoza, God is not a being but being itself; nature and God constitute an indivisible unity, *deus sive natura*" (Gerrish 1993: 115).

Spinoza's interpreters disagree over the precise meaning of *deus sive natura*. For some, Spinoza was espousing straightforward pantheism, equating God with the whole of reality (see Bennett 1984: 32–35). However, other scholars, such as Steven Nadler, Edwin Curley, and Paul Capetz, point out that Spinoza differentiated between active and passive aspects of nature, between *natura naturans* (nature naturing) and *natura naturata* (nature natured). *Natura naturans* connotes the generative power within nature by which all things come into being and are preserved in being, while *natura naturata* simply refers to whatever has been "natured" or brought into existence, namely, the empirical world. In Part One of the *Ethics*, Spinoza unmistakably identifies God solely with nature naturing, not with the entirety of nature (see Spinoza 1996: 20–21). On this reading, to say that "whatever is, is in God" (Spinoza 1996: 10) is to assert that the relationship between God and "whatever is" is one of causation and dependence; the things of this world are not so much properties of God as they are effects of God. As nature naturing, God is the ground or efficient cause of being, that which produces and sustains—in a word, "natures"—all things. Regardless—and this is a critical point—nature naturing is the *immanent*, not the *transitive*, cause of all things—i.e., a cause whose effects are a part of, not other than, itself (Spinoza 1996: 16, 18–19). Nature derives its existence *from itself*, not from something (or someone) beyond it (Donagan 1996: 343). Put differently, the universe and its furniture are not created *ex* *nihilo* by a supernaturally transcendent deity, but are generated from and perpetually dependent on the laws, activities, causal principles, and creative powers of nature itself. The laws, activities, causal principles, and creative powers of nature itself—i.e., nature naturing—are precisely what is meant by "God" in Spinoza's system (Nadler 2006: 52–53, 72–83, 108; Curley 1988: 36–39, 42–45; Capetz 2003: 116).

Since the word "God" is reserved for the "naturing" dimension of nature, Curley questions whether Spinoza is a bona fide pantheist (Curley 1988: 149–150, n. 152). My own position is that Spinoza's theology is *philosophically* pantheistic, even if not *etymologically* pantheistic. Curley, Nadler, and Capetz are correct: the Spinozist God is not everything—i.e., is not identical with the totality of finite things. Even so, God literally *is* nature naturing, according to Spinoza, and the *totality* of finite things exists within—i.e., emanates from, depends on, and belongs to—God or nature. More significantly, *pace* Jewish and Christian theism, where God the Creator is wholly other than the creation, Spinoza's monism regards that which natures and that which is natured as ontologically inseparable aspects of the one nature that there is (Nadler 2006: 79, 83, 108, 113). This is pantheism, in my view, albeit a much subtler form of pantheism. It certainly is not pan*en*theism, given that the God-nature relation is not one of containment. As Nadler explains, "God is not 'in' Nature in such a way that nature contains, in addition to its natural contents, a distinct divine and supernatural content" (Nadler 2006: 118).

According to Nadler's analysis, however, Spinoza was effectively an *atheist*. After all, Spinoza renounced the existence of anything beyond the natural realm, including the personal God of the Judeo-Christian tradition, and reduced the divine to nature. The only reason he spoke of "*deus sive natura*" to begin with was because the basic characteristics of nature—eternity, necessity, infinity—are those historically ascribed to God (Nadler 2006: 112–121).

Ironically, Spinoza was accused of atheism by his own contemporaries—*an accusation that he resented and denied*! Bennett keenly observes that Spinoza "apparently did not think of himself as an atheist ... [H]e thought of himself as discovering things about God rather than as revealing that there is no God" (Bennett 1984: 35). Of course, as we have already seen, Spinoza *was* atheistic with respect to the supernatural, determinate-entity God of classical theism. Still, he proceeded to give nature the name "God." The question is *why*? Bennett concurs with Nadler that Spinoza divinized nature because nature was the most "Godlike" reality he knew—it is infinite, eternal, and self-caused, the ultimate source and explanation of everything that exists (Bennett 1984: 32–35). But Bennett believes that Spinoza also spoke of *deus sive natura* for another reason: "namely his view of Nature as a fit object for reverence, awe, and humble love, i.e., for the attitude traditionally reserved for God" (Bennett 1984: 34).

Spinoza was, in brief, a *religious* naturalist, a *pantheistic* religious naturalist! To quote Bennett again: "Spinoza did accept pantheism as a kind of religion" (Bennett 1984: 35). Spinoza was not exactly "drunk with God," as the German Romantic poet Novalis once effused. But nor was he a crass atheist. Rather, he was a proponent of the most radical kind of natural theology, naturalizing divinity and divinizing nature (see Donagan 1996: 343–357).

Loomer's brand of pantheism was much more philosophically clear-cut than Spinoza's, although no less naturalistic. Like Mathews and Wieman, Loomer was associated with the Chicago School of theology. More particularly, he belonged to a later generation of Chicago Schoolers who stood within the "empirical tradition" of Whiteheadian thought. One of the distinguishing characteristics of the empirical process theologians was their outright denial of the panentheistic God of conventional Whiteheadian theism. As naturalists, Wieman, Loomer, and the other process empiricists maintained that nature is the only reality there is, and if there is nothing in addition to or even slightly transcendent of nature, then "God" or "the sacred" must be either included within or identified with the natural world itself (Loomer 1987: 22–23).

Wieman, for example, completely blurred the Whiteheadian contrast between God and creativity. As Nancy Frankenberry helpfully explains, Wieman argued not "that wherever God is manifest, there is creative transformation, but precisely the opposite—wherever one finds creative transformation, *there* one finds what has been meant by 'God'" (Frankenberry 1987: 124). With Wieman, Loomer associated God not with a personal being that is distinct from nature but with the processes of nature itself. But against Wieman, the later Loomer even divinized nature's less-than-creative processes. The concrete world, Loomer contended, is utterly *ambiguous*. Becoming is metaphysically ultimate, but "the creative advance" is not so much an "adventure toward perfection" as it is a "struggle toward greater stature" or what he later dubbed "size," namely, the capacity to take in and sustain intense relationships, contrasts, tensions, and ambiguities (Loomer 1974; 1987: 42, 51). Moreover, the interrelated web of life comprises "a diversity of forces, many of which are either noncreative or destructive" (Loomer 1987: 40).

Loomer's God was commensurate with his realist cosmology. In the twilight of his career, he began to experiment with a kind of *process pantheism*, equating God with the *ambiguous totality* of the natural realm. God is none other than "the organic restlessness of the whole body of creation." As such, God must embody all the ambiguity actually found therein, "all the evil, wastes, destructiveness, regressions, ugliness, horror, disorder, complacency, dullness, and meaninglessness, as well as their opposites" (Loomer 1987: 40–43).

Loomer took issue with Whiteheadian efforts to circumvent the ambiguity that characterizes nature and to dissociate the divine from evil. Whitehead himself did this by "ontologically separating God and creativity" and imagining "an aesthetic form of persuasiveness that is pitted against the coercive and inertial powers of the world." Loomer harshly judged that this "unambiguous structure or character can be derived only by a complex abstractive process, the end result of which has no counterpart in reality" (Loomer 1987: 50, 38). Wieman improved upon Whitehead by urging that "the being of God is not other than the being of the world." But Wieman identified God with only "one aspect of the world or one kind of process," namely, the part of nature that is generative of good (Wieman 1995: 54–83). Thus, no less than Whitehead's deity, Wieman's deity is defined by pure goodness and is too clean and perfect to be concretely real; it is a bloodless, unempirical abstraction from a cosmos that is inescapably ambiguous (Loomer 1987: 21, 40, 48–50). Loomer, by contrast, held that God's activities are "not wholly or even primarily identified with the persuasive and permissive lure of a final cause or a relevant and novel idea ... God is also a physical, efficient cause that may be either creative or inertial in its effects." If "the size of God" embraces nothing less than nature in its ambiguous wholeness, then the divine lure "may exemplify itself as an expansive urge toward greater good" *or* a "passion for greater evil" (Loomer 1987: 41).

Corrington shares quite a bit in common with Loomer and other American religious empiricists (see Wheeler 2014). However, the metaphysical cornerstone of Corrington's philosophy of "ecstatic naturalism" is the Spinozist distinction between *natura naturans* and *natura naturata* (Corrington 2016: 7). This most primal of distinctions, according to Corrington, "is as old as thought itself" (Corrington 1997: 4). But Spinoza provided the "initial categorial framework" in which to probe the cleft *within* the natural sphere between the sheer generative power of nature naturing and its "natured" products—or to use Corrington's preferred terminology, between "nature perennially creating itself out of itself alone" and "the innumerable orders of the world" (Corrington 2014: 141–142; 2016: x, 1, 7–9).

Corrington, though, puts an *ecstatic* spin on Spinoza's distinction, portraying the natural difference as the "primal abyss" that is perpetually fissuring within the one nature that there is. From Corrington's point of view, Spinoza failed to discern "the uncanny underside" of *natura naturans*. What Corrington is alluding to here is nature's "underconscious"—i.e., the "unruly ground" or the "unconscious depths" from whence all natural complexes arise and the mysterious void to which they shall return. Corrington gestures toward the "fulsome" but "dark heart" of nature naturing, namely, the potencies that manically and indifferently churn away in the bosom of *natura naturans* and give birth to the innumerable orders of the world—including, as we will see, divinities and other "sacred folds" (Corrington 2016: ix–x, 1–18, 95).

"Deep pantheism," Corrington declares, is the theological perspective that is harbored within ecstatic naturalism. Akin to Spinoza, Loomer, and every naturalistic pantheist, Corrington repudiates determinate-entity theism: "we have providingness but no provider, natural grace but no bestower of grace, sheer availability but no intentionality, and a seed bed for consciousness with no consciousness in the seed bed" (Corrington 1997: 103). Corrington takes aim at "classical asymmetrical theism," which postulates a divine creator that is *other* to what has been created, as well as the "halfway house" of panentheism, which envisions an "in and above" relationship between God and the world. For panentheists (e.g., process theologians), "the divine retains its ontological perch" by living both within and beyond nature. Put differently, panentheism's nature is too small, while its deity is too big (Corrington 2016: xi, 1–2; 2007: 505; 1998: 169–171). Deep pantheism asserts the exact opposite: "Nature is the genus of which the sacred is a species" (Corrington 1997: 2). In other words, nature transcends and eclipses the sacred rather than vice versa. Baldly put, sacred folds are "natural complexes." Similar to all natural complexes, gods, goddesses, spirits, etc. are emergent from the underconscious of nature and are "ordinally located" within the orders of the world.

What makes Corrington's pantheism "deep" is its openness to the chaotic, ambiguous, hidden, and sometimes demonic underside of nature out of which the actualities and possibilities of the world emerge. With a nod to Spinoza, Corrington distances himself from a more "philosophically lazy" sort of pantheism in which God is casually equated with the universe. For one thing, the sacred is one natural complex among countless others, as is the universe itself; they are both "in and of" nature (Corrington 1997: 10; 2016: 53). From the standpoint of Corrington's "ordinal phenomenology," *no* natural complex is preeminently real or universally related to all other orders. Thus, as natural complexes, God and gods are not more relevant, encompassing, or ultimate than any other complex. Indeed, "there are innumerable nonsacred orders that lie outside of the holy" (Corrington 1997: 10). This is why deifying the whole of reality is problematic, for Corrington. Nor does Corrington identify the divine with nature naturing (contra Spinoza). "God-ing energies" are certainly vast in scope, manifest in the gap between *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*. Even so, the divine is a product, not a synonym, of nature naturing, an order, not the creator, of the cosmos (Corrington 2014: 151–152; 2016: xi, xxii, 1–18, 42, 44, 79–87).

Toward an apophatic pantheism

I want to conclude by laying out (in a preliminary fashion) my own pantheistic variety of religious naturalism, a position I will term "apophatic pantheism." Apophatic pantheism appreciatively (yet critically) draws on the three naturalistic pantheists analyzed in the previous section and also finds striking affinities with ground-of-being theologians such as Paul Tillich and Wesley Wildman.

Apophatic pantheism is *pantheistic* inasmuch as it is religiously and theologically oriented to "the all"—i.e., to reality in its entirety. The adjective *apophatic*, however, is intended to qualify pantheism in two important senses.

First, an apophatic pantheism is a naturalistic form of *mysticism*, pointing to the *absolute mystery* of nature or God. A truly *pan*theistic vision implies that there is, to borrow a lovely phrase from Michael Hogue, "no 'outside' of revelation—the whole cosmos rings with it, from the subatomic to the interstellar, from the unicellular to the civilizational" (Hogue 2014: 3). Yet Gordon Kaufman is right: "it is ultimately mystery within which we live" (Kaufman 1993: xii). Of course, apophatic pantheism *naturalizes* mystery; it is *nature* that is largely hidden behind a cloud of unknowing. Be that as it may, apophatic pantheists stand alongside contemplative mystics and negative theologians in every tradition, whose primary intuition is that whatever is divine or ultimate is inscrutable, incomprehensible, and ineffable. *Deus sive natura* discloses itself to us through multiple modes of inquiry but, in the end, finally surpasses human understanding. Its mysterious ways—its emergent properties and axiological possibilities, its exuding creativity and mindless destruction, its ordered regularity and unpredictable contingencies, its plural particulars and relational webs, its unimaginable vastness and sheer isness—evoke fascination, terror, wonderment, silence.

Indeed, the utter mysteriousness of existence is what invites a pantheistic interpretation of reality in the first place. Loomer realized that one of the principal justifications for divinizing the natural world is that nature contains yet enshrouds "a transcendent and inexhaustible meaning that forever eludes our grasp," while the word "God" adequately "symbolizes this incredible mystery" (Loomer 1987: 42). Corrington takes it a step further, suggesting that we can only speak of innumerable natural complexes; "nature *per se*" or "*the* nature" does not exist. And if there is no "what" to which the term corresponds, then "nature" can only be addressed "through a kind of unrelenting via negativa"—in a word, *apophasis*. This is why Corrington often insists on crossing out ~~nature~~. Such a tactic signifies that ~~God or nature~~ is of an entirely different order, defying easy description and transcending all genera. As such, it should only be used "elliptically and under erasure" (Corrington 2016: 4–5, 29; 2014: 142, 152).

Second, and perhaps less obviously, an apophatic pantheism is a naturalistic form of *ground-of-being theology*, underscoring the *infinite self-transcendence* of nature. It is here that the distinction both Spinoza and Corrington make between *natura naturans* and *natura naturata* becomes absolutely critical. Above all, the "natural difference" reveals that "nature" refers not only to the empirical world and everything therein (i.e., nature natured) but also to the ground and source of all existence, that is, to the creative-destructive processes that everlastingly bring new realities (even new universes) into and out of being (i.e., nature naturing). As naturalists, apophatic pantheists deny the existence of the *super*natural, of domains or entities that transcend nature. But they do stand with Corrington in affirming a kind of "intra-natural transcendence," a transcendent dimension *within* the one nature that there is (Corrington 2016: 80, xiii.). Put differently, nature is *self-transcendent*, infinitely transcending (and hence relativizing) whatever is natured, including the present "cosmic epoch." In that sense, apophatic pantheism is completely compatible with the various multiverse theories currently on offer within physics as well as with contemporary cosmology and its picture of a finite, historically contingent universe. Far from exhausting nature, the cosmos is a part of creation, generated and sustained—created—by the relentless powers of *natura naturans*. This world, the world subsequent to the Big Bang, is what Corrington terms "a subaltern world," one order among others within the innumerable orders of *natura naturata* (Corrington 2002: 142; 2016: 53).

Yet apophatic pantheism is consistent not only with contemporary science but also with the "radical monotheism" that lies at the heart of the Western faiths. The differentiation of nature naturing from nature natured is a naturalization of the distinction in classical theology between creator (or, less anthropomorphically, creativity) and creation. This is precisely where apophatic pantheism and ground-of-being theology converge, in my estimation.

To be sure, Tillich, the leading advocate of ground-of-being theology in the twentieth century, resisted pantheistic varieties of naturalism on account of their facile (and idolatrous) equation of God with the totality of the world. That is, pantheists, in Tillich's mind, discount the infinite distance between the whole of finite things and their divine ground, "with the consequence that the term 'God' becomes interchangeable with the term 'universe' and therefore is semantically superfluous" (Tillich 1957: 7).

Tillich's concerns are certainly not without warrant. Even Loomer, while helpfully collapsing the false Whiteheadian dichotomy between *creativity and God*, failed to make a sharp enough distinction between *creativity and the world*. Still, this essay has identified and elucidated trajectories of naturalistic pantheism that not only eschew the reductionistic tendencies that alarmed Tillich but also embrace the central convictions of his ground-of-being theology. Tillich himself seemed to acknowledge this with respect to Spinoza: "The phrase *deus sive natura*, used by people like ... Spinoza, does not say that God is identical with nature but that he is identical with the *natura naturans*, the creative nature, the creative ground of all natural objects" (Tillich 1957: 6). Tillich is spot-on here. But his point, which has been recently endorsed by Wildman (see Wildman 2014b: 14), is that Spinoza was not really a pantheist.

My reading differs from theirs. I would argue that there *is* a type of pantheism—call it apophatic pantheism—that recognizes the infinite self-transcendence of nature itself. I would further argue that Spinoza's theological naturalism, along with the ecstatic naturalism of Corrington and ground-of-being varieties of religious naturalism—are expressions of this non-superficial, non-reductive sort of pantheism, whether they employ the label or not (even Loomer's process naturalism, with the appropriate clarifications and qualifications, could be pushed in this direction). First and foremost, all of these perspectives *maintain yet naturalize* the infinite qualitative distinction between the world and its ontological ground. As Corrington explains, the ontological difference prevails *within and as* the one nature that there is; it does not comprise two separate realities. Again, nature is *self*-transcending; it perennially transcends itself, recreating itself from out of its own resources (Corrington 2016: x, 1–2, 8–12).

Wildman comes to a similar conclusion. He references Corrington's contention that nature *can* and *does* include "infinite transcendence of Tillich's sort," which makes Tillich a religious/ecstatic naturalist—in substance, if not in name (Wildman 2014a: 40). If there is a "God" in this type of naturalistic worldview, "it is the deep principles of nature understood as the conditions for the possibility of the natural world" (Wildman 2014b: 14). As a Tillichian, Wildman speaks of these conditions and deep principles as the "abysmal ground of being," which he associates with "the creative and fecund power source in the depths of nature" (Wildman 2010: 216–217). But Wildman allows that there are other apt theological symbols for the ground of all determinate things, including "Spinoza's *natura naturans*" (see Wildman 2014b: 14, 17)—and I would add Corrington's "underconscious of nature" and Loomer's "creative advance."

Yet the question remains: *is this pantheism*? After all, instead of divinizing everything (the literal meaning of "pantheism"), Spinoza (reasonably, in my view) reserved the word "God" for *natura naturans* (i.e., the ground of being). I want to venture that apophatic pantheism—or, perhaps, *self-transcendent* pantheism—*is* pantheistic by virtue of the fact that it attributes religious/theological ultimacy to the whole of nature rather than an aspect of nature (as with finite/naturalistic theism) or a person-like, benevolent divine agent that is somehow in addition to and better than nature (as with panentheism). To repeat, *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*—process and product, ground and consequent—are not dualistically other or ontologically bifurcated. Rather, they "belong together in the fullness that is nature in its encompassing" (Corrington 2016: x). Or to make the same point in Spinozist terms, nature naturing is the *immanent*, not the *transitive*, cause of nature natured—i.e., a cause whose effects are inseparable from itself. As

Corrington, commenting on Spinoza, astutely observes, there is, in the end, only one infinite divine substance: *deus sive natura.* Insofar as they are emanations from the one infinite divine substance, the orders of *natura naturata* are, necessarily, "part of the very being of god" (Corrington 2016: 9). To quote Tillich: "God ... is nearer to them than they are to themselves" (Tillich 1957: 7). Thus, when all is said and done, the apophatic pantheist *is* able to affirm the sacredness, even the divinity, of nature in its ambiguous entirety, even while retaining the distinction between the whole of finite objects and their infinite ground, creatures and creativity-destructivity itself. For apophatic pantheism, the ambiguous totality of existence—the all—is sacred by virtue of its emergence from and participation in *deus sive natura*—i.e., nature naturing, being itself, the ground of becoming, the mysterious power source in the depths of reality that natures all things and infinitely transcends whatever has been natured, whether gods or worlds. Undoubtedly, apophatic pantheism resembles panentheism in its retention of transcendence. However, it is pantheistic rather than panentheistic because the transcendent is a depth dimension in and of nature—not a divine being in and beyond nature.

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