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Thinking from Within the Calyx of Nature¹

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ABSTRACT

Is philosophy an appropriate means for inducing the ‘moral point of view’ with respect to nature? The moral point of view involves a feeling for the inner reality of others, a feeling which, it is argued, is induced more by processes of synergistic interaction than by the kind of rational deliberation that classically constituted philosophy. But how are we to engage synergistically with other-than-human life forms and systems? While synergy with animals presents no in-principle difficulty, synergy with larger life systems takes us into epistemological realms explored only in the margins of the Western tradition, such as in Goethe’s Romantic alternative to science. These ‘alternative’ epistemological realms are however the very province of the Daoist arts of China, and these arts accordingly furnish us with practices conducive to a moral consciousness of nature.

KEYWORDS

Conativity, environmental education, Daoism, Goethe, synergy

The question I shall be pondering in this paper is, how are we to induce the moral point of view with respect to the natural world? Working out how to induce this point of view is obviously relevant to, even if it is far from the whole substance of, environmental education, but I am not intending it as a question specifically about environmental education. I want to explore rather the kind of knowing or thinking that is involved in the attainment of a moral consciousness of nature. For some kind of *knowing* or *thinking* – something beyond mere unreflective experience of natural environments – does seem to be involved: rural people unreflectively immersed in nature are often, after all, amongst the most oblivious of its moral significance. And mere *conditioning* is hardly satisfactory: while children may simply be instructed to internalise certain moral values, adults normally cannot be inducted in this way, and it is clearly not desirable to attempt so to induct them: moral consciousness should be based on understanding rather than on external authority. But what kind of understanding will serve the purpose? *Scientific* understanding of life-systems is obviously not enough: science has traditionally been the prime tool for the wholesale instrumentalisation of nature. But what other kinds of understanding are there? Is it through *rational deliberation*, careful rational consideration of questions about the moral considerability of nature, that a moral viewpoint with respect to nature can be fostered? Is it, in other words, via *philosophical thinking*, specifically environmental ethics, that this moral viewpoint is attained? Many environmental philosophers evidently assume that thinking about nature in a philosophical way is a necessary step towards achieving moral reorientation vis à vis the environment. But is this so? As I am myself an environmental philosopher I would like to pause to consider this assumption. Is philosophy really an appropriate means to this moral end?

To approach this rather large question I'd like to offer some brief musings about the project of philosophy itself. There will be nothing definitive in my conclusions here or in the rest of the paper; I will be setting out a line of argument, no more; a *prima facie* defensible and illuminative line of argument, I hope to show, but far from any kind of demonstration. In posing the question about the project of philosophy, I am seeking to uncover its original purpose, specifically to discover whether inducing moral commitment was any part of that purpose.

In the West philosophy was, of course, an invention of the ancient Greeks. All human societies, as we know, ponder certain fundamental existential questions: why are things as they are, how did the world originate, what is the place of human beings in the greater scheme. The Greeks were the first to separate out a secular approach to these fundamental questions from the mythopoetic approach common to all cultures. Out of this secular approach, a notion of *truth* was distilled – a notion that there is, in addition to the world itself, the *truth* about the world, a truth that we can discover. The truth about reality, or some aspect of reality, is permanent. It is in fact eternal: the world changes, but the truth about the world

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does not change. Things arise and pass away, moment by moment, but the truth about things is timeless. The seeker after truth holds up a mirror to the world, and when he finds there an image which he regards as accurately reflecting the nature of things, he has found truth. The goal of thought is to grasp truth, and the grasping of truth is an end in itself, a form of epistemological satisfaction peculiar to the intellect, where the notion of intellect itself comes into existence with the advent of this kind of epistemological activity.²

Such a notion of truth had not crystallised in other ancient societies in quite the same way. For them thinking was still inextricable from agency: humans thought in order to act in some way. 'Knowing' the world, via cosmological stories, was inseparable from invoking its divinity or tapping into its agency. In thinking and knowing in these old ways one remained, first and foremost, an agent within the world negotiating one's way around it, rather than a spectator, a looker in the mirror that reflected reality.

Amongst the Greeks this new notion of truth as a kind of ghostly mirror to the world emerged gradually. With Plato, it came fully to fruition via the Theory of Forms: the Forms were the abstract, eternal, perfect and unchanging images to which any actual, concrete, perishable world must conform. The goal of thought was to access this abstract realm of Forms and apprehend reality under a timeless rather than an ever-changing aspect. To grasp the Forms was to transcend the merely empirical and attain Truth in an ultimate sense. In a multitude of different ways, this vast reification of thought, this extraction, from the fallible and temporal activity of thinking, of abstract and eternal mirror images of the world which then became the proper objects of the epistemological quest, resonates down through the Western tradition. Thinking, for the West, became a matter of looking at the world in this eternal mirror, where reality appeared under a peculiar disembodied, untouchable, abstract aspect, reflective of the actual world down to the last particular but inert, unable to act upon the observer or be acted upon by them. It was in this very subtle way, via this reification of imagery involved in the notion of truth, that nature first became an *object* for the human mind, an object for contemplation by a knower who sought merely to mirror reality, to reflect it, to re-present it, to form a picture, a *theory*, of it. (The very word, 'theory', is derived from the Greek, *theoria*, a looking at, thing looked at, or *theoros*, spectator.³) In making truth its goal, the human mind subtly removed itself from reality and became reality's spectator, a detached observer of the drama, an observer invisible from within the drama itself and in this sense invested with a status different from the elements of that drama, the elements of material reality.

Of course, much further down the track, when this initial objectification of nature for epistemic purposes had led to a more accurate, detailed and comprehensive form of theorisation – the body of knowledge known as science – humanity became able to exercise its agency, which had initially been bracketed in the search for truth, on an unprecedented scale. But this was a new form of

agency, the agency of a subject no longer negotiating the world from within but objectifying it in a theoretical 'mirror' and then premeditating and rehearsing action in this mirror before carrying it out on the actual world.

Philosophy then, according to the present account, was inaugurated by this subtle but epochal objectification of world through the separation of knower and known: the observer looks at the world in the mirror of knowledge but is not herself reflected in that mirror. If this was the orientation that inaugurated philosophy as a practice, is the philosophical standpoint, we might wonder, an appropriate one from which to seek the moral point of view? I shall return to what exactly I mean by the moral point of view in a moment, but first let us consider some other characteristics of the historical project of philosophy, specifically the *method* whereby philosophy sought to discover truth. This was the method of critical dialectics, well established by Plato's time: theories were developed, using the tools of reason, by claim and counter-claim, hypothesis and refutation. The tools of reason consisted of inference and the requirement of consistency: hypotheses were cross-examined to determine their consistency with other truth-claims. If a claim was inconsistent with another claim, one of the two would have to be excluded as false.

In his article, 'Did philosophers have to become fixated on Truth?'²⁴, Francois Jullien draws a useful contrast between the figure of the philosopher, in the ancient Greek sense, and that of the sage of ancient China. The Greek philosopher, as I have already remarked, sought truth, a kind of final solution to the riddle of existence, a theory that reflected the nature of things in a way that was eternal despite the perishability of things themselves. Truth in this sense was exclusive: if a theory were true it necessarily excluded all competing theories. The Chinese sage, by contrast, according to Jullien, set out not to explain the world but to adapt himself to it; he sought to identify the tendencies or dispositions at work in particular situations in order to harness those tendencies or dispositions to his own best advantage. His goal was not to remove himself from the world, rendered as mirror image (to revert to the terms of my earlier discussion), but to situate himself in it. To this end he remained open to all points of view instead of insisting on a single viewpoint exclusive of others ('truth'). I take Jullien to mean that the sage's wisdom did not so much refer back to eternal ideal models of reality as draw on whatever insights or metaphors might be illuminative of the situation at hand. In describing the sage as seeking 'congruence' with reality, Jullien seems to be implying that the thinking of the sage remained inextricable from agency rather than becoming, like the thinking of the Greeks, an end in itself.

Jullien makes the interesting point that these different cognitive enterprises took their coloration, their basic telos, from the political circumstances of their respective situations of origin. The concept of truth, as it emerged from the discipline of critical dialectics, was basically adversarial: truth is the prize awarded to whichever hypothesis *wins the argument*, 'comes out on top',

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defeats its opponents. Jullien argues that this adversarial dynamic reflected the political climate of contestation that prevailed in the world of the Greek city-state – particularly Athens – that was cradle to dialectical philosophy. The Athens in which dialectical method became fully articulated was also the Athens in which democracy became fully articulated, and both philosophy and democracy reflected a cultural climate in which individual citizens were expected to debate the polity and compete, on their merits, for distinction in public life. As Jullien says, ‘a Greek city functions on the basis of a clear-cut choice between two mutually exclusive opposites (one party opposes another; you vote either for the one or for the other). Similarly, philosophy adopts a position either for or against; its truth is exclusive (true or false).’⁵ In China, on the other hand, the authority of rulers was not open to contestation from below. Polity was not debated in the market-place but made behind closed doors in the prince’s court. The over-riding concern of individuals was to avoid confrontation with authority and to survive the arbitrary reversals of fortune occasioned by falling in and out of favour with overlords. The best chance for survival lay in trying to identify the political dispositions and tendencies at work in a given situation and turning them inconspicuously to one’s own advantage. This meant not adopting and openly declaring a fixed position and challenging all comers to contest it, but rather adopting whichever position was most expedient in the circumstances, and being prepared to adapt it as circumstances changed.

Jullien draws the contrast between ancient Greek and Chinese outlooks in military as well as political terms: the Greeks sought military confrontation in the service of a heroic vision, a vision of the individual as achieving self-realisation through triumphing, as champion, over his opponents or rivals. The Chinese prided themselves on not taking sides but being able to manage all factors at play in situations of conflict so that conflict would resolve itself.⁶ This contrast in military outlooks reflects the general contrast between the thinking styles of the two civilisations: Greeks sought contestation as a developmental condition for self-identity; the Chinese sought to ameliorate conflict through accommodation.

Jullien’s story about the origins of philosophy is suggestive. It identifies a particular modality of thought that is still present in contemporary philosophical practice. This heroic modality is by no means the exclusive tenor of contemporary philosophical thought, since many different models of philosophical practice are today available. Nor was it in fact the exclusive tenor of philosophical practice in the ancient world. Pierre Hadot, for example, presents a countervailing instance of ancient Greek thought in his representation of Stoic and Epicurean philosophies as not merely abstract discourses but life-encompassing practices, incorporating specifically spiritual exercises designed to enlighten and edify the practitioner practically and psychologically as well as intellectually. Philosophy was undertaken communally in these Schools rather than remaining the province

of the individual author: the preferred environment for the philosophical life was the colony of friends.⁷

Nonetheless, the dominant paradigm of philosophy, then and now, was and is significantly contestational: whether as disputants in a discussion or authors in a larger literary community, philosophers vie with one another, striving to reply to objections, prevail in argument, defeat their opponents and plant the flag of truth on their own hilltops, using the win-lose, disjunctive strategies of reason. True, in today's academic context many theorists decry adversarial and exclusionary models or styles of thinking and knowing, advocating dialogical models instead. These alternative models emanate from various quarters, including feminist philosophy, phenomenology, critical theory, hermeneutics, gestalt psychology and systems theory. But at the institutional meta-level the proponents of such alternatives are caught up like everyone else in academic structures that reinforce the exclusionary or competitive paradigm: they must defend their theory against critics and demonstrate to colleagues, editors, publishers and funding agencies why it qualifies, against its rivals, for the badge of truth.

To the extent that philosophy, whether today or in the time of Socrates, does reproduce in its critical dialectics the adversarial dynamics of a heroic Greek ego, it may unconsciously serve to perpetuate self-structures that are resistant to a deep and enduring commitment to morality. An individual philosopher, whether it be Socrates himself or a contemporary ethicist, may construct brilliant theories, including dialogical ones, in support of morality. Yet his motivation in doing so might still be the deeper competitive or contestational one. At the level of their own motivation, some philosophers might remain self-serving, engaging in philosophy basically to seek professional advancement, gain funding or enhance their own reputations. They might be psychologically untouched by the moral imperatives their own theories propose.

What I am suggesting then is that there can be a gap between the values that philosophical theories advocate and the values that are implicated in the philosophical theory-making process itself. The very notion of theory involves a subtle objectification of the thing theorised. I see the thing in question reflected in the theory, and I grasp it through that theory, at a remove, rather than grasping its reality immediately through its participation in my own agency – where the possibility of such participation will be explained shortly. Approaching the world via the route of truth then sets me at this remove from the world. Add to this the fact that the logical mechanics of theory-making are basically exclusionary, the successful theory rising victorious over a battlefield of slain theories, and we begin to see why philosophy may not in fact provide a royal road to the moral point of view. A particular theory may offer compelling arguments for the moral significance of others, whether human or nonhuman, but at an unconscious level the nature of argument itself may reinforce both a subtle externalisation of world from self and a self-structure that is basically egoic rather than integrally informed with the moral point of view.

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But what is meant here by the moral point of view? To be capable of the moral point of view, in the sense in which I am intending it here, is simply to have the capacity to see and feel the world from the point of view of others.⁸ It is the capacity to step into the shoes of another, understanding things as they understand them, feeling things as they feel them, organising the world around the interests, needs and desires that are theirs. To be capable of seeing the world as another sees it is already to feel the force of the other's perspective; it is to be moved by this perspective. It is thus already to have the basis of a moral commitment to that other. Moral commitment that emanates purely from rational deliberation, without being grounded in the moral point of view, may, as I have suggested, be overlaid on self-structures that are basically, if unconsciously, egoic. Rational deliberation can function all-too-well as the sword that slays the ego's rivals. Moral commitment based on rational deliberation may for this reason be lacking in emotional conviction.

These remarks are made not to dismiss or disparage philosophy. They are made only to query the efficacy of philosophy in inducing the moral point of view. To come to the conclusion that philosophy in its major traditional forms may not be the best means for inducing the moral point of view is not to abandon those traditional forms: they have other vital cultural functions, such as challenging our assumptions and our certainties and demanding accountability for our belief systems. Philosophy in its traditional modes is the grand antidote to epistemological authoritarianism and therefore to all forms of dogmatism and fundamentalism. As such its role is incalculably emancipatory: ancient philosophy laid the ground-rules for the kind of reason that eventually defined the project of the Western Enlightenment and hence inaugurated modernity. From the perspective of philosophical reason, every claim to truth must be subjected to rational scrutiny – to the requirements of logical consistency and evidence. In consequence, the idea that there can be privileged forms of knowledge based on revelation or the social status of the knower, and that such privileged forms of knowledge provide the basis for moral, and ultimately political, authority, is ruled out. No-one can claim knowledge that is not in principle demonstrable to all persons with an equal capacity for reason. In this sense no-one can claim arbitrary moral authority over others. However, while philosophy in this sense liberates the rational individual from arbitrary authority, the self structure it helps to constitute is still in the heroic mould: each individual must be free to defend his ground against all comers and win the autonomy that constitutes his selfhood.

Such a position, in insisting on equality, thus does indirectly serve a moral end, but it does so without resting on the moral point of view. Individuals affirm equality as the condition for attaining their own selfhood rather than out of a felt appreciation for the inner reality of other beings. It is in this sense that philosophy may be said to be emancipatory without thereby implicating the moral point of view. In its traditional forms it represents a practice of thinking that implicitly

affirms equality as the condition for its own preferred form of identity but, despite possibly explicitly avowing all kinds of further, non-contractarian versions of moral theory, it may be psychologically uninvested in these: contractarianism is implicated in the dynamics of philosophy itself. The ‘contract’ that philosophy implicitly establishes amongst its contestants is that each is free to seek to demonstrate, against all rivals, the truth of his own theory.

It might be objected, in liberal vein, that contractarianism is a sufficient basis for morality – that an egalitarianism instituted in the identity-interests of the egoic self rather than in deference to the moral point of view indeed does the work of morality and hence qualifies as a basis for moral commitment. Whether or not this is the case need not be settled here, for it is immediately clear that even if philosophy delivers an egalitarianism amongst inquirers that is functionally equivalent to morality, it will not deliver that egalitarianism with respect to the natural environment, since the natural environment cannot join the inquiry. Nature cannot contest with us in the quest for truth, since nature does not make theories.⁹ In this instance then our reasons for affirming equality fail to apply: it makes no sense to seek to emancipate nature as a condition for our own epistemological emancipation.

Insofar as rational deliberation or philosophical reason in its traditional forms is neither intrinsically conducive to the moral point of view nor intrinsically emancipatory with respect to nature, it does not seem to be the most appropriate tool for inducing moral commitment to nature. This, again, is not to say that we should abandon environmental philosophy, but rather that it should be placed, alongside other forms of cognition such as science, within practices of thinking that do induce the moral point of view.

However, we are still no closer to having discovered what these purported practices of thinking are. To avoid further suspense, let me venture an hypothesis: the moral point of view can be induced, developmentally, via reflective participation in *creative co-action*, a form of co-action that might be termed *synergy*.¹⁰

By synergy I mean here any form of intentional interactivity between two or more parties who engage with each other in such a way that something new and larger than either of them, but true to the inner principle of each, is created. Each party to the collaboration spontaneously adapts or enlarges its ends or its mode of expression in response to its engagement with the other(s). The salient point about synergy is that it is conducive to a very immediate experience of intersubjectivity. In synergistic interactions, the impulse creatively to express myself is shaped, at the very moment of its arising, by your equivalent impulse. I find new possibilities of self-expression, possibilities I could never have found on my own, in creative co-action with you. These new forms of self-expression, spontaneously arising in me in response to you, are more uniquely mine than any soliloquy could have been; yet they are at the same time both mine and yours. Spontaneity is of the essence of synergy. Your self-expression is already

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modifying mine before I recognise what mine is; there is no time here for me to look for your reflection in the mirror of truth, and, grasping you as an objectified totality, calculate my response to you in mediated fashion. In synergy your subjectivity acts immediately upon mine. In the midst of this process, I cannot continue to experience you as externalised other, a mere object in a world of objects. I cannot fail in my epistemic access to your inner reality, the reality of your subjectivity. I accordingly now have a basis in experiential awareness for the moral point of view. All that is further required is reflection: through reflection I realise that your subjectivity, which I have experienced from within the very wellsprings of my own subjectivity, is, as it were, another *me*. You are not the circumscribed, fully consistent and resolved unity that I see before me, in the compact shape of an external body; rather you are, like myself, a dynamic, unbounded, uncertain field of dispersing, dissipating and resolving experience, lighting up with flashes of enthusiasm, excitement, anticipation, and darkening with clouds of doubt, fear, disappointment. In arriving at this awareness, I have already slipped beneath your skin, seeing past the illusion of your object-aspect, the compact and completed unity of the body you present. I am now aware of what it is like to be you. I have stepped into your shoes. I have assumed the moral point of view.

Many activities, including discussion, conversation, repartee, sex, music and dance, can be undertaken synergistically. (And all such activities can be – and frequently are – undertaken non-synergistically.) Consider the instance of dance: in forms such as tango and contact dancing, the subtlest movements of each partner shape the movements of the other in just the immediate and spontaneous way I have described. Each partner enlarges his or her own stylistic possibilities by creatively responding to the style of the other. In so-called ‘impulse work’ in theatre training, individuals in groups move in ever-unfolding, flowing patterns of movement by spontaneously adjusting their own movement minutely and continuously to the movements of others.

It might seem odd to cite tango and contact dancing as training grounds for moral awareness, but I think this is because in Western civilisation we have become accustomed to thinking of morality in terms of rules and restraints, and the curtailment of self-interest, rather than in terms of a larger, more fluid field of possibilities for agency, a field of intersubjectivity. Morality, from the present point of view, is a state of awareness rather than a definite principle or a specific disposition. It is a matter of acting always in a context of felt awareness of the subjectivity of others. I might possess this awareness and yet on occasion behave ‘poorly’ towards others: I will have neither a fixed rational principle nor a virtuous disposition to ensure that I invariably behave with respect or compassion. Like a tango dancer, I may turn towards or away from the other, I may be attracted or irritated or confused by them; what I will never be, however, is indifferent. I will never see them merely as an externalised object, either to be treated inhumanely, as the immoral person treats others, or to be

treated with in-principle deference, as the person acting merely from probity or moral principle treats them. It is not altogether inappropriate then to think of this as a kind of tango ethics, easy-going and fallible, sometimes reluctant and sometimes inconsistent, but never autistic, never anything but fully enmeshed in a field of adamantly present subjectivities.

Another, very different objection that might be addressed to the argument that synergy provides a basis for the moral point of view is that the synergistic process of spontaneous adaptation of self to other, as I have described it here, can occur even if the other party is not another self or subject. I can, after all, adjust my movements to the small variations in function of a bicycle or a car. In fact I make these kinds of spontaneous adjustments unconsciously all the time in daily life, and they are completely morally neutral: they do not bring me into contact with the living subjectivity of the bicycle or car because the bicycle and car lack any such subjectivity. How then are the adjustments I make in dancing the tango different from those I routinely make in driving my car? Would I be able to tell the difference if my dance school substituted a lifelike automaton for the usual genuine – human – tango partner?

Answering this latter question will take us a little deeper into the notion of synergy. Synergy was defined earlier as any form of *intentional* interactivity between two or more parties who engage with each other in such a way that something new and larger than either of them, but true to the *inner principle* of each, is created. Synergy then provides new and larger opportunities for the expression of the *inner principle* of both parties. But what is this inner principle? By inner principle, I mean the *conativity* of each party, its impulse to actualise and increase itself. (I am following Spinoza in defining conativity as the will whereby each living thing endeavours to persevere in, and increase, its own existence.¹¹) This conative impulse is operative in basic biological drives: to survive, reproduce and assert the self. But it is also operative in the impulse towards self-expression: through self-expression a conative being discovers and externalises its own unique ‘signature’, the distinctive pattern of its self-organisation. Only conative beings can enter into synergistic relations in the present sense.

But how can I know when a being is animated by conativity? In other words, how can I know when the behaviour of the other is the expression of an inner, conative principle, and not merely the mechanical outcome of cause and effect, as in the case of the ‘behaviour’ of a car?

The answer to this question is tied up with *meaning*. A conative entity is *meaningful* to itself in the sense that it matters to itself; it has an end, namely to survive and to actualise its own inherent potentials. However, its potentials, though determinate, can never be exhaustively actualised, because different aspects of its potential would require different environmental conditions for their actualisation. The manifest aspect of any conative entity is always only a partial articulation of its nature. Moreover, the various potentials of such

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an entity may not even be consistent with one another, in the sense that they may not be able to be co-actualised: different environmental conditions might elicit contrasting tendencies. Yet these contrary potentials may indeed belong to the identity of the entity. The fact of their contrariness need not negate that identity – the contrary potentials need not cancel each other out, as not-redness cancels out redness. This is because conative entities possess an inner, subjectival structure of meaning as well as an outer material structure. In this inner subjectival realm of meaning contradictory tendencies can coexist: I can experience myself as both big and small, tender and hostile, modest and ambitious, because feelings, and the meanings that inform them, are not subject to the law of excluded middle. Feelings, and the meanings that inform them, are diffuse and interpenetrating. Not being located in space and time, they are not subject to the rule that underpins the law of excluded middle, namely that two things cannot occupy the same place at the same time and that one thing cannot occupy two places at the same time. All my potentials, contrary and otherwise, can coexist in my subjectivity; they constitute the diffuse but indivisible meaning that unifies and shapes my subjectivity and hence my conativity. This diffuse but indivisible meaning gives my conativity its particular ‘style’, the inflection that is discernible in everything I do. It is, in other words, this inner meaning, a meaning that can never be fully actualised, that lends a distinctive rhythm to my conativity, a distinctive grain to my existence.

When I synergise with another conative entity then, I intuit, from its overt moves – the small moments of its self-expression – the larger, always implicate, never fully explicated meanings expressed in these small moves. I then allow my own small moves to be inflected by these larger implicate meanings. What two parties bring together in their moments of synergy are the larger meanings or patterns informing their respective conative cores; these larger meanings or patterns blend momentarily into new meanings or patterns that are explicated – always only momentarily and partially – in their joint moves.

If I am merely driving a car it is impossible for me so to intuit, from small variations in its movements, a larger unity of meaning, because no such larger unity exists. The car is the sum of its small movements. Its form is fixed. This form is not the emanation of an inner principle, the adaptation of a conative impulse to a particular set of environmental conditions. The variabilities of its automotive function are just the result of loose nuts and bolts; they are not encryptions of an implicate meaning or ‘signature’ which I can intuit and with which the patterns of meaning that inform my own subjectivity can engage. My adjustment to these variabilities thus remains, like the variabilities themselves, mechanical.

Many activities that are normally conducted in non-synergistic modes in Western societies can be reconfigured along synergistic lines. This is true, to a degree, even of philosophy itself. Although there are, as I mentioned earlier, a number of theoretical models for philosophy that point in the direction of

synergy, there is only one instance, so far as I am aware, of philosophy actually being routinely practised in the synergistic mode. This is the ‘community of inquiry’ model of philosophy developed within the philosophy-for-schools movement. I will pause very briefly to consider this community of inquiry model of philosophy because it furnishes, in my view, a paradigm instance of the kind of communicative intersubjectivity that induces the moral point of view.

The community of inquiry consists of a small group of students who are helped by a facilitator to discuss selected issues – whether issues of the schoolground, topical issues of the day or even perennial philosophical questions. The students discuss these issues at their own level, just as they see them. This gives them a chance to try out both new and received ideas and see how these ideas stand up under the scrutiny of their peers. More important than this first hand exploration of ideas however is the *protocol* that constitutes the community of inquiry. The essence of this protocol is that participants are expected to listen attentively and respectfully, rather than combatively, to their classmates. They are encouraged to enter the thought behind the spoken words of their classmates, and to give this thought full and sympathetic consideration before responding to it. The aim is for students to engage in a *process* rather than to author a theory. This process is one of intellectual collaboration, wherein the ideas of each student are continuously stimulated, enlarged and adapted to the ideas of the others.

When this simple activity is established as the context for all learning, profound developmental consequences follow. Students discover that it is through such active listening, and the surprising differences in perspective it reveals, that their own perspectives are activated, take shape and evolve.¹² At the same time, listening attentively to other members of the group reveals to them that others have perspectives as alive and complex and deeply felt as their own. They discover, in other words, the tentative, ever-forming, insubstantial quality of subjectivity in others, the inner terrain that is normally hidden by the relatively fixed and completed object-face that persons present to the world. When one *feels* this hidden terrain of others’ subjectivity, one cannot fail to be responsive to them. Practised in this community-of-inquiry way then, philosophy helps to impart the moral point of view in a most immediate fashion.

A community of inquiry calls participants into active thought, active self-hood, by implicating the evolving thought, the evolving subjectivity of others, in each participant’s own developmental process. Note that it is on account of its *synergistic* dynamics, rather than any particular *ideas about morality* it throws up, that philosophy practised in this way induces in participants the moral point of view.

My claim here is that it is synergy rather than rational deliberation per se that is most helpful in inducing the moral point of view, where the moral point of view is required to give psychological depth to moral commitment since moral conviction based on rational deliberation may be overlaid on basically egoic self-structures that undermine moral commitment. When our aim is to induce

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the moral point of view in relation to nonhuman as well as human others, we will clearly have to devise forms of synergistic co-action with the other-than-human realm. What forms might such synergistic co-action take?

Certain environmental educators seek to adapt something akin to the community of inquiry model to the other-than-human case: they explicitly seek to include nature in a prospective circle of communication by convening what is known as a Council of All Beings. In a Council of All Beings, (human) participants are asked to respond to the call of some (nonhuman) being or entity, then observe that being or entity closely in order to represent its views to the wider Council. Participants in this exercise try, as far as possible, to impersonate their chosen being or entity, exploring, for instance, the sensation of standing on one leg, heron-style, or bee-hopping from flower to flower, or following a scent-trail nose-to-ground like a dog, before representing to the Council the perspective that emanates from such a particular form of embodiment.¹³ Another strategy of such educators – generally of a deep ecology persuasion – is to take students on excursions into wild places, encouraging them to identify imaginatively with wider and wider circles of the landscape, until, hopefully, the students acquire an expanded sense of identity, described in deep ecology literature as the ‘ecological self’.¹⁴

These techniques, and the experiences to which they give rise, are undoubtedly valuable in initially opening up the tight little circle of human self-referentiality that constitutes the anthropocentric outlook. But because they emanate primarily from the imagination, students can never really know if these experiences are trustworthy. Was the student having a genuine insight when she imagined what it felt like to be a fruit bat, for instance, or was she making it up? After all, in the prototypical classroom experience of the community of inquiry, the student does not merely *imagine* the perspectives of others. Other members of the circle actively reveal their perspectives to her. It is on account of the fact that those perspectives are often new and surprising, and sometimes even previously *unimaginable* to her, that the student knows that she has actually encountered, rather than merely imagined, the inner reality of another. Moreover, these perspectives, acting on her, help to transform her own perspective. In the prototypical circle of inquiry then, the participant is not merely observing others as external realities and imagining their inner reality with the aid of inferences from her observations. Rather, her own inner reality is actively shaping and being shaped by theirs. She is engaged in a process of synergy. Relying on imagination to bring nature into the circle as they do, deep ecology educators overlook the key role that synergy can play in inducing the moral viewpoint.

So, again, what form might synergistic encounter between the human and other-than-human take? One of the readiest forms of encounter that springs to mind is that of cross-species musical improvisation. Eco-musician Jim Nollman has described and enacted many instances of musical ‘jamming’ with whales and dolphins, birds and other species of animal, in which the musician takes

his compositional cue from the animal, and the animal takes its cue from the musician. Between them, human and nonhuman musicians create a poetic pattern of sound that is different from anything either of them could have created independently but that nevertheless carries within it the musical signature of each. Describing his forays into interspecies communication, Nollman says, 'I've [played music] with ravens, dolphins, bellbirds, frogs, orcas, humpback whales, elk. I've worked for the Smithsonian Institute blowing harmonica among howler monkeys on an island in the middle of the Panama Canal. I've recorded flute music with wolves, produced ...radio shows singing Froggy Went a Courtin' with gobbling turkeys, appeared on [television] strumming an Indian raga with whales off Vancouver Island. Today I specialise in such musical communication with whales, several times inviting Tibetan lamas onto a boat to sing their prayers with orcas, playing reggae with pilot whales off Teneriffe.'¹⁵

Many *working* relationships between humans and animals also exhibit degrees of synergy, even when the animal partners are ultimately serving human ends. Philosopher-animal-trainer, Vickie Hearne, has written compellingly about the sensitivity to the psychophysical dynamics of horses and dogs required of trainers if the trainers are to enable the animals to realise their true potentials.¹⁶ She makes the point again and again in her various books that horses and dogs relish interaction with a suitably sensitised and responsive trainer, because the animals feel extended by the 'work' the trainer offers. This is not 'work' that they would have done if left to their own devices, but it is nevertheless work for which their natural aptitudes and inclinations suit them. The encounter with the trainer is thus an occasion for the animal to actualise itself in new ways, ways which would never have manifested in the absence of the encounter but which nevertheless tap into deep possibilities within the animal's own nature. The trainer in her turn learns to 'think like a dog, or a horse' in the course of the encounter, and to that degree her own subjectivity is also reshaped.

A whole culture has grown up in southern Thailand around the intimate synergies between working elephants and their life-long keepers, or mahouts, in indigenous communities which have worked in forestry sustainably for many generations.¹⁷ There are many examples of human-animal synergies in other indigenous societies as well. In south-eastern Australia members of the Yuin nation traditionally called up dolphins to herd fish into bays¹⁸ and in far north-western Australia the saltwater Bardi people hitched rides with tiger-sharks to assist in their constant to-ing and fro-ing between the tiny islands of their coastal 'country'.¹⁹

A key way then in which we might seek to induce in humans a moral point of view with respect to other-than-human life forms is to orchestrate synergistic interactions across the human/animal divide.

But are there any ways in which synergistic encounter with wider circles of nature – with plants and mountains and rocks, for instance – might be or-

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chestrated, so as to induce a moral point of view with respect to nature in its larger dimensions?

Jim Nollman claims to have discovered the musical communicativeness of certain rivers, and conjectures that ‘some of humanity’s most ancient tunes were learned by our distant ancestors while camped on the slopes above musical streams. Music they heard rising from the falling waters, they attributed to fairies – water sprites – who hid in the rock cavities by day and emerged at dusk to start their all-night songfests. No doubt someone in the tribe of listeners learned the tune and taught it to the rest of his people. The people may have named certain streams after individual fairies. And when their progeny revisited the same stream a hundred years hence, the tribe’s songline map of the mountains cued them to listen to the same fairy singing a tune they now knew by heart.’²⁰ However, such an experience of musical rapport, though utterly enchanting, is not exactly one of synergy, not only because it is not one of immediate interactivity but more importantly because it is not clear whether the music of streams is really an instance of conative self-expression.

There is however, I think, a very profound way in which we as humans can enter into synergy with nature, indeed synergy with the universe, and this form of synergistic attunement, once attained, is an abiding state rather than a mere moment of performative encounter.

This is a speculative claim, and it will take me some time fully to spell it out. I will begin by sketching in some background material, which is as follows. In Western societies there is evidence that individuals who have been strongly sensitised to the inner dynamics of nature in childhood become creative thinkers, often artists or poets, in adulthood. In her classic work, *The Ecology of Imagination in Childhood*, Edith Cobb examined the biographies of many highly creative thinkers and artists and observed that most referred to early formative experiences in nature.²¹ In these – generally aesthetic, sometimes mystical – experiences, the child found himself ‘inside’ the world around him. He was no longer looking at the trees and skies and grass (grass figured prominently in many of these experiences) as though they were objects outside himself, but was rather experiencing them as if he were *inside* the subjectivity of the world. These experiences typically occurred when the child was alone in nature, and was perhaps, for this reason, already in a somewhat open and meditative state of consciousness.

Why should such experiences in childhood trigger creativity in adulthood? The answer I would like to offer to this question – and I confess it is at this stage sheer speculation – is as follows.²² Human beings have the capacity to become psychically imprinted, in early life, with the inner organisational dynamics of nature. This is perhaps what is happening in that exceptional ‘mystical’ moment – recalled later in life – when the child ‘enters’ the natural world around her. In this heightened moment, experienced as the ‘outer becoming inner’, the child’s psyche may in fact be absorbing the inner organisational principle of nature.

In other words, the child might be internalising the inner, conative principle of nature as the organising pattern of her own thought and experience. She may be coming to ‘think like nature’, in the sense that she may be starting to organise the elements of her experience in the same kind of way that the elements of the environment are organised in nature.

In speaking of these inner organisational dynamics of nature, I am not intending to refer to the ‘laws of nature’ in the usual sense – the laws of cause and effect encoded in physics. I am alluding rather to the conative impulse at the heart of nature. As I remarked earlier, conativity is an inner impulse towards self-realisation and self-increase. The conativity of each being has its own unique grain, its own felt texture of flow, its own rhythm of dynamism. It actualises itself in a self-organising fashion in the sense that it does not rely on external laws, like those of physics, for its actualisation, but is rather gestaltic: conative entities take shape in accordance with their own internal rhythms, yes, but also in accordance with environmental conditions – the particular conditions prevailing in whatever niche they happen to occupy. Conativity generates, from within the subjective interiority of nature, an order of patterning in which elements are arranged into gestalts, and these gestalts fit into larger gestalts, and so on up the scale. Like pods to peas, the higher-level gestalts both constrain and create opportunities for the elements of the lower-level, even while the latter are also helping to shape the higher-level gestalts. This order of gestaltic patterning is, as I remarked, self-generating rather than externally imposed, as the laws of physics are. It is an order of endless unfolding, patterns forming not in obedience to external laws but in attuned response to one another. Such an order cannot be exhausted or anticipated by any formula, but is real for all that. It is more like the order of Dao than the causal order of physics, though it can coexist quite happily with the causal order.

When the organisational principle that manifests as this gestaltic patterning is internalised by the self it becomes the force of ‘intuition’: intuition is that faculty which arranges elements of thought or experience into meaningful patterns. These patterns often spring into resolution – and hence into consciousness – quite suddenly (‘in a flash’), though they might have been constellating gradually at an unconscious level for a longer time. This kind of gestaltic intuition, informed with the inner organisational dynamics of nature, will, once it is operating, provide a relatively reliable source of understanding. That is to say, the insights thrown up by intuition in this sense are likely to be veridical. This is because – unlike science, which works from the singular to the totality, trying to arrive at the totality by logical chains of inference from the singular – intuition starts with the totality and organises it via gestaltic principles that have been absorbed unconsciously from the organisational processes of reality itself.

The present suggestion then is that creative individuals are creative because they have been imprinted with the very organisational dynamics which are the source of the inexhaustible creativity of nature itself. I won’t try to defend this

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suggestion here. I am putting it up only as an hypothesis for which there is some prima facie evidence. If it is accepted however, then I think an implication with striking significance for environmentalism follows. The implication is this: when a person has been imprinted with the inner dynamics of nature, and has thereby become *creative*, i.e. capable of creating new syntheses of thought and experience via gestaltic intuition, they will in fact feel an affinity for Creation itself. This is because they will be aware, subconsciously, that they themselves are animated, psychically, by the selfsame dynamics that animate Creation. A felt affinity for Creation is likely to express itself in a custodial attitude towards nature. This may also explain why creative people have, in the West, been particularly drawn to the arts, since the arts have often taken their inspiration from nature, and have offered a sanctuary of nature-values in an otherwise instrumental civilisation.

So the (twofold) hypothesis I want to put forward for consideration here is that:

- (i) creativity is a consequence of the self opening to the inner dynamics of nature and becoming psychically (and hence cognitively) imprinted with these dynamics. Creativity in this sense can express itself in any field of cognitive or expressive endeavour. Although it is probably over-represented in the arts, there is no reason why it cannot also express itself in other areas of thought, including philosophy, insofar as philosophical ideas can be intuitively organised into meaningful patterns that follow the gestaltic dynamics of nature.
- (ii) creativity implies an affinity with Creation, since it just *is* the cognitive recapitulation, within the psyche of the self, of the organisational dynamics of Creation. This affinity for Creation will ensure that creative thinkers will incline towards a custodial attitude towards nature, at least where nature is perceived as under threat by society.

From this twofold hypothesis an important conclusion follows: if people could be exposed in childhood to the kind of experiences that would result in their becoming imprinted with the inner organisational dynamics of nature, then this would produce a society of creative individuals whose activities in every field of praxis would be consistent with, and tributary to, the unfolding of nature. There would be no need for 'environmentalism' in such a society, because there would be no 'environment' distinct from humankind – no 'nature' 'out there' – but a pattern of Creation animating human agency as reliably as it animates nonhuman agency. We would not need to 'protect' or 'preserve' nature in such a society, because we would be co-creating it in everything we did.

If my (twofold) hypothesis were to be taken seriously then, it would open 'environmental education' out into something vastly larger than the mere study of the moral significance of the externality we currently call 'nature'. It would instead call on us to restructure education generally, at school level as well as at

university level, so that all students would be routinely afforded opportunities for the kinds of experiences in nature that would result in their becoming imprinted with the inner organisational patterns of the cosmos. Sadly, education is clearly currently heading in precisely the opposite direction. The organisational principles that students are cognitively internalising at earlier and earlier ages are the organisational and operational principles of computers and other communication technologies. These principles are mechanical and computational rather than organic and gestaltic, and individuals profoundly imprinted with such principles, as the youth of contemporary modern societies are, are likely to be lost to the organic and gestaltic outlook, and the affinities for Creation that flow from it. In this sense the task for environmental education is becoming progressively more difficult.

One might accept this general line of argument and yet wonder whether there is anything that those who are not lucky enough to have been imprinted with the inner organisational dynamics of nature in childhood can do later in life to foster their inner alignment with nature. Is there anything one can do, that is, other than perhaps engaging in the kind of synergistic interactions with animals that I detailed earlier?

It is perhaps pertinent to return to ancient Chinese thought at this juncture. For I think we are now in a position more fully to understand the project of the Chinese sage, the project contrasted so dramatically by Francois Jullien with the project of the ancient Greek philosopher. Jullien pointed out that the Chinese sage, unlike the Greek philosopher, did not seek *theory*. He did not seek to hold up a mirror to the world, to provide an abstract representation of the outer structure of reality. We might now say, in light of our preceding reflections, that the goal of the sage was to internalise the inner dynamics of the cosmos, to become informed, in his person, with the same organisational dynamics that animate the larger reality. The normative wisdom of the sage consisted in the recognition that we cannot reform the world without at the same time reconfiguring our own psychophysical selves as a microcosm of the universe.²³ Until we accomplish this, everything we do, including our attempts to fix the world, will be out of kilter with the cosmos; on the other hand, were this transformation of self to be collectively accomplished, there would be no need for us to try to fix the world, since we would never have broken it in the first place – all our activities would already have contributed to the world's ongoing integrity.

In Chinese culture the practices whereby the organisational dynamics of the cosmos are internalised by the self are known as the practices of *cultivation*. It is perhaps through such cultivation – especially Daoist cultivation – that we can still today foster our alignment with the inner organisational principles of nature. Through practices such as those involved in martial arts, qigong, internal alchemy, feng shui, calligraphy and the techniques of Chinese medicine, Daoism teaches its practitioners to find the conative 'grain' in things and to follow that grain so that it shapes what the practitioner does. The Daoist 'sculptor' thus

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allows the form that already dwells inside the ‘uncarved block’ to guide his chisel.²⁴ The cabinet-maker allows the contours and grain of wood to determine the shape of the furniture she makes. The cook allows the flavours and textures of herbs and seeds and vegetables to dictate his recipes. The architect allows the lay of the land to dictate siting and design of buildings. The traveller allows the journey to appoint the destination. There is in principle a specifically Daoist way of comporting oneself in any action upon the world: the agent pays close attention to the relevant ‘material’ and tries to intuit the pattern of its conativity in order to allow that inner pattern to dictate the form of the action. This is not to say that the material simply co-opts the agency of the human agent, because neither the uncarved block nor wood nor plants nor land would have expressed its conativity as sculpture, furniture, cuisine or architecture without its interaction with a human agent. These interactions are thus indeed instances of synergy, but this is now a deeper kind of synergy, synergy with matter itself.

Training in Daoist practices then may be one way in which individuals today could re-align with the internal patterning of world.²⁵ From this point of view, environmental education would properly involve such practices, which would enable the force of the world’s conativity and the pattern of its internal organisation to be manifested in the persons of the practitioners themselves. Stepping inside the skin of nature in this way and absorbing its internal principle would ensure that practitioners assume the moral point of view with respect to it.

Although the approach I have sketched here, according to which the moral point of view with respect to nature is induced by practices of synergy, has much more affinity with ancient Chinese than with traditional Western thought, there are nevertheless of course intimations of the synergistic approach within the history of Western ideas as well, particularly in the period of Romanticism. I would like very briefly to review just one of these antecedents before closing.

The antecedent in question is found in an approach to epistemology devised by Goethe in the late eighteenth, early nineteenth century. Goethe famously eschewed both rationalist metaphysics and the methods of classical or Newtonian science while yet being an ardent student of nature, devoting himself throughout his life to detailed empirical studies of natural, particularly botanical, phenomena. The whole object of his long life was to come to know nature, but this knowing, for him, was much more a matter of becoming, in his knowing, a further elaboration of nature than of reflecting nature in the mirror of theory. In this sense his goal was more akin to that of the Chinese sage than to that of the Greek philosopher or the modern scientist.

For Goethe, science was misguided. (This was not to say it was untrue: science could be *true*, as leading Goethe commentator, Henri Bortoft, points out, while failing to be *fundamental*.²⁶) One of the principal respects in which science was misled in its approach to nature, according to Goethe, was by its reliance on *analytical* method. Working from an analytical perspective, the scientist seeks to explain phenomena by reducing them to their elements, to

the logically discrete units out of which they are made. Insofar as these units are logically discrete, they are external to one another: the resulting order is an order of externality. Two consequences of viewing nature as such an order of externality troubled Goethe. The first was that to break phenomena down into discrete elements or units is to drain them of life. Life resides in wholes: when organisms are taken apart they are no longer alive. In order to understand, and hence engage with, the aliveness of nature, we have to understand it in terms of its wholeness. Secondly, when nature is conceptually taken apart into discrete elements, it becomes necessary to postulate causal laws to stick the elements back together again. Causal laws are logically arbitrary 'add-ons', discovered a posteriori rather than through any inherent intelligibility: we can never see *why* the causal regularities that we find in nature are as they are. Nature as revealed by analytical science thus lacks *intelligibility*. Goethe found this situation unsatisfactory: we do not truly understand nature, he thought, unless we grasp *why* things are as they are.

To the analytical method, Goethe developed an holistic alternative that was uniquely his own. When studying natural phenomena – and it is his botanical studies which are best known – he looked for the inner principle that was manifested in the phenomenon. He called this inner principle, mysteriously and numinously, the *Urphanomën*, or Ur-phenomenon. (As Theodore Roszak asks, 'how could we use an English equivalent of that dark, throaty German *Ur-* ... meaning ancient, primordial, basic, elemental, archetypal.' Roszak opts in the end to translate it as the 'deep down phenomenon.'²⁷) The *Urphanomën* was the implicated whole that was manifest, though never exhaustively so, in any explicated particular. When studying the morphology of plants, it was the *Urpfanze*, or Ur-plant, that Goethe sought. The Ur-plant was to be understood not as a primitive ancestor-plant from which all later plants were descended, such as Darwin would propose. Nor was it a kind of Platonic Form of the plant, an abstract universal which all particular plants instantiate. Rather, the Ur-plant was to be interpreted – according to Bortoft, at any rate – as plant-life as a whole, considered as a single greater planetary life-form that propagates vegetatively into whatever niches are available, adapting to those niches in ways that result in the manifold variations of plant-form observable on earth.

To illustrate this idea of a global life-form (a One) propagating itself via local individuals (its Many), Bortoft cites the case of a species of bamboo (*Phyllostachys bambusoides*) that propagates vegetatively yet occurs all over the world. It flowers only once in every one hundred and twenty years, yet when it does so all the individual plants that make up the global plant-form flower at the same time. (The last flowering was in the late 1960s, when plants were observed to bloom simultaneously in China, Japan, England, Russia and the USA.) By way of this example, Bortoft illustrates the idea that many individual plants, widely separated in space, may nevertheless also remain in a sense One plant. This is a

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One which is immanent in its Many: it propagates itself through the Many but is never exhausted by them – it is an ever-unfinished One.

To make sense of this interpretation, at least in relation to botany, we might consider the Ur-plant not simply as the manifest totality of the plant kingdom but as the determining but inexhaustible impulse that articulates itself in that totality. This impulse may perhaps be understood – reverting to my earlier terms of reference – as the conativity of the plant kingdom, its impulse to seek self-actualisation, together with the meanings that inform and constitute that impulse. (Admittedly I am here giving Bortoft's interpretation of Goethe a distinct twist. I will not try to defend this interpretation against others. It is part of the power and fertility of the Ur-phenomenon hypothesis that is amenable to a wide range of interpretations. My aim here is only to show that there are profound resonances, in Goethe's work, with the project of knowing nature from the inside that I have outlined in this paper.) This conativity, existing 'deep down' within plant-life, is an inner impulse to exist that has its own felt vegetative rhythms or patterns of flow, its own large-scale grain or texture of becoming. Within each individual plant, moreover, this rhythm is uniquely inflected. Each plant, in other words, has its own inner vegetative 'signature', a particular style of vegetative being which is discernible in every aspect of its self-expression. A given plant assumes its distinctive morphology as a result of the unique pattern of its conativity adapting to the contingent environmental context of its existence.

What is true for plants is true for all the other entities in nature. In any manifest entity there dwells, 'deep down', the Ur-phenomenon, the conative impulse which finds partial expression in that entity. That expression is always partial because the Ur-phenomenon itself can never be fully articulated; it is a potential for form rather than form itself. The aim of Goethe's nature studies was to discover the Ur-phenomenon in any given context of investigation. From close observation of the style or signature of an entity, one can sense the informing unity of potential, the indwelling meaning, that patterns its conativity. Goethe's method was a form of intuitive perception that focused on particulars: through a practice of patient attentiveness to the particularity of entities the inquirer could gain a feeling for their inner grain or rhythm, an inner grain or rhythm that was discernible through the style inflecting every aspect of their actualisation, including their actions.²⁸ As soon as the Ur-phenomenon is intuited in this way, the form the entity takes in a particular environmental niche becomes intelligible: *this* is the way that an entity with *that* style of becoming would actualise itself under *those* conditions. We can see *why* the 'Ur' of the plant world, for instance, introduced into a particular niche, develops the leaf and flower shapes, the hues and scents, the dimensions and habit, of the particular plants that occupy this niche. These shapes and hues are just the result of a particular vegetative tendency being placed in a particular jigsaw context of insect-life, light and shade, moisture, wind, soil, animals and other plants, and, like a pea to a pod, adapting its form to the contours of this slot.

In sum, to understand nature is, for Goethe, to intuit the generative, organisational impulse of the Ur-phenomenon – whether this be the Ur-plant or the Ur-animal of the Ur-planetary system. The Ur-phenomenon is the One, which is, according to the present interpretation, the diffused but unified field of felt conative potential that informs the entity but is never fully articulated in it. In light of this it is clear why a Goethean intuiting of the Ur-phenomenon in no way results in a *representation* of nature in its actual, present dimensions, as science does; it in no way provides a *mirroring* of nature. Rather, our intuiting of the Ur-phenomenon is tantamount, from a Goethean point of view, to our *completing* nature, or rather, to nature completing itself through us. By this, I take Goethe to mean that when we intuit the Ur-phenomenon – where this is comparable to a child in a meditative state absorbing the inner organisational dynamics of nature – then our understanding becomes a further expression of the Ur-phenomenon. The organisational dynamics of nature which find expression in the efflorescence of the plant kingdom are actualised again at the level of thought in the mind that intuitively grasps the Ur-phenomenon. The thoughts of that mind are like ghostly tendrils arising from the very calyx of the Ur-plant, following the same organisational pathways already traced by leaf and flower and all the other phenomena of the natural world. Our thought, following the inner patterns of nature, is as much an emanation of the Ur-phenomenon as is the rest of nature. Nature can reproduce its organisational dynamics through the far-reaching tendrils of our understanding just as much as it can through the never-ending metamorphosis of leaf into stem into sepal into petal into seed-pod within the vegetative domain. Thought, properly channeled through Goethe's method of understanding, is leaf, in the sense that it is merely another emanation of the same inner organisational dynamics that are expressed as leaf.

For Goethe, as for the Daoist sage then, the aim is not to reflect nature but to become, in our knowing, a further elaboration of nature, a tendril escaping from the calyx of the Ur-plant and discovering a whole new plane of self-actualisation. Whilst for Goethe this is a possibility confined to epistemology, for the Daoist sage the possibility of the human expressing the organisational dynamics of nature extends to the whole of life: in all our activities we can follow the conative rhythms that animate the rest of reality. In doing so we shall find that we are already inside nature, and thereby automatically occupy the moral point of view with respect to it. But the moral point of view no longer defines a distinct terrain: the terrain it reveals is now also already the terrain of our own conative inclination.

NOTES

¹ I would like to thank Isis Brook, Peter Scherer and an anonymous referee for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

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² See Snell 1982.

³ Barnhart 1963.

⁴ Jullien 2002.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Jullien 1999, pp. 34–5.

⁷ See Hadot 1995. (Hadot has further elaborated this line of argument in his recent book, *What is Ancient Philosophy?* Hadot 2002).

However, Hadot would not deny that truth provided the foundation for the ‘arts of living’ furnished by different philosophies. The Stoic and Epicurean Schools, for instance, derived their norms from particular theorisations of the nature of the universe, and in this sense from truth.

⁸ The expression, ‘the moral point of view’, gained technical standing in moral philosophy by way of Kurt Baier’s *The Moral Point of View* (1958). Baier characterised the moral point of view in terms of its contrast with egoism, its equal consideration for all and its commitment to the universalisability of choices. As I have explained in the text, I am using the expression somewhat differently: one who assumes the moral point of view is simply one who is capable of putting himself in the position of others and perceiving situations as they perceive them. Ultimately the moral point of view in this sense depends upon a capacity for the immediate awareness of the subjectivity of others.

⁹ This picks up a point made compellingly by Steven Vogel (2006). Vogel argues that the idea that ‘nature speaks’, familiar from ecophilosophy literature, is inaccurate and morally misleading. Although I would normally want to defend this idea against Vogel’s excellent argument, there is no need for me to do so here, as I am relying on synergy with nature rather than a literal dialogue with nature to provide the basis for the moral point of view.

¹⁰ I have explored the notion of synergy in several other contexts. See, for instance, Mathews 2003; 2004; 2005; 2006a.

¹¹ Spinoza defines conatus in Part III of the *Ethics*. Prop VI

¹² I have explored the idea of the community of inquiry at greater length in Mathews 2006b.

A helpful summary of the community of inquiry concept is offered at ltag.education.tas.gov.au/proflearn/pedagogy/communityofinquiry/.

¹³ See, for instance, Seed et al. 1988.

¹⁴ The experience of such an ‘ecological self’ is of course the goal of Arne Naess’s ‘ecosophy’. See, for instance, Naess 1995; 1985.

¹⁵ Nollman 2000a. Nollman gives details about his interactions with cetaceans in his book, *The Charged Border: Where Whales and Humans Meet* (1999). Another philosopher-musician, David Rothenberg, has written about his musical improvisation with birds in his book, *Why Birds Sing* (2005).

¹⁶ Hearne 1987. Thanks to Deborah Rose for bringing Vicki Hearne’s books to my attention.

¹⁷ The villages in which this elephant culture has evolved are in Surin province.

¹⁸ I have heard this directly from a Yuin person. Jim Nollman (2000a) also happens to mention it, though he is talking about the northern coasts of Australia (the Yuin are in

the south) and he stipulates that the dolphins were called by means of ‘dolphin sticks’ being struck under water.

¹⁹ This was communicated to me personally by members of the Bardi community, One Arm Point, on the Kimberley coast.

²⁰ Nollman 2000b.

²¹ Cobb 1977.

²² This speculation owes a lot both to Edith Cobb herself and to Gregory Bateson (the mature Bateson of *Mind and Nature*, 1979) though it ventures well beyond the base provided by either of these thinkers.

²³ See, for instance, Schipper 2001.

²⁴ The ‘un-carved block’, and by implication, the sculptor, are of course tropes within the Daoist literature, and I am using them both literally and figuratively here.

²⁵ One deep ecology educator who specifically adopted Daoist practices in her teaching was Dolores La Chappelle, at her Way of the Mountain Learning Centre. See La Chappelle 1987 and 1988 for pioneering linkages between some of the ideas that I am drawing together here: deep ecology, Daoism, Gregory Bateson and even Edith Cobb.

²⁶ See Bortoft 1996. (I am heavily indebted to Bortoft here for my basic grounding in Goethe’s epistemology.)

²⁷ Roszak 1972, p. 331.

²⁸ For a full and vivid account of Goethe’s scientific method in action, see Brook 1998.

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