Environmental Thought as Cosmological Intervention

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ABSTRACT: An important tradition in popular and academic environmentalist thought concentrates on *cosmological* issues, to do with overarching (or underlying) views about the nature of reality and the place of humanity in nature. This tradition connects the environmental crisis with anthropocentric and mechanistic cosmologies, and tries to address this crisis through cosmological critique and reconstruction – a practice I call 'cosmological intervention'. This practice presupposes a link between 'world view' and 'ethos'. I argue that an environmentalist ethos does not necessarily or automatically follow from the world view elements propounded in cosmological interventions. Rather, world view symbolises ethos. Cosmologies favoured by environmentalists describe the abstract and necessary properties of the world in ways which reflect those concrete and contingent properties of the world that the ecology movement seeks to protect, extend and celebrate.

KEYWORDS: Cosmology, worldview, deep ecology, environmental thought

The project of cosmological critique and reconstruction – which I refer to here as 'cosmological intervention' – is central to a number of strands or traditions in environmental thought, both popular and academic. It is one of the hallmarks of thought associated with the 'deep ecology movement' and most fully explicated in the 'transpersonal' (extended Self) ecosophies of Arne Naess and Warwick Fox, but it is also an important aspect of several varieties of ecofeminism, various religious or theological approaches, aspects of phenomenological environmental thought and of social ecology, and so on. This paper questions a certain self-understanding of cosmological intervention which I take to be implicit in its practice, and suggests a different – and perhaps a more modest – understanding of the place of cosmological redescription in environmental thought. I should stress at the outset that this paper is not intended as a close philosophical critique of any particular theory, position or argument (though I take up particular theories, positions and arguments for illustrative purposes). It is, rather, a reflection on a general approach that has diverse manifestations – including more

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popular and more technical formulations – all of which express and resonate with the (sub)cultural currents associated with 'deep green' environmentalisms.

I.

Cosmological intervention, at least when it plays an important role in an environmentalist discourse, is premised on the view that the environmental crisis – so called – is, at bottom, cosmological. That is, ecologically destructive practices, attitudes, values, etc. are rooted in certain very general and fundamental beliefs about the nature of nature and of the human place in nature. This first premise is expressed by John Livingston (1981: 50) thus:

> [T]he issue is essentially cosmological....The problem is metaphysical – not ethical, not aesthetic. The problem is the traditional western humanistic vision of man and his cosmological role.

Elsewhere, Livingston (1984: 309) tells us, 'the environmental problem is not a technical, legal or moral problem, it is a metaphysical one'. The intended contrast is with the technical on the one hand, and the moral on the other. To see the environmental problem as a technical one is to remain locked within the ambit of anthropocentric calculation; to see it as a moral one is to rely on prescriptive intervention, exhortation about human obligations and the rights of nature. To see the environmental problem as a metaphysical one is to see 'attitudes' and behaviours as embedded in and oriented to an overarching *description* of the world and humanity's place within it.

Typically, the 'dominant worldview' is contrasted with an 'ecological' one. In the former, the world is a hierarchy of ends or a ladder of perfection with humans at the top, or else is an assemblage of discrete, externally related, essentially lifeless objects, manipulable and knowable by radically separate human subjects; in the latter, the world is an enchanted, vital organic whole, of which humans are integral but not superior parts (see, for example, Devall and Sessions 1985). An emphasis on cosmological holism, the view that 'we and other entities are aspects of a single unfolding realty' (Fox 1990: 252), is distinctive of the transpersonal ecology approach to environmental thought. Phenomenological, vitalistic and process approaches all, for somewhat different reasons, elaborate anti-mechanistic cosmologies.[1] Ontological egalitarianism – the view that beings, though unequal in particular respects, cannot be ranked in an overall hierarchy of perfection – is a recurrent theme in writings associated with the deep ecology movement, and plays a particularly central role in ecofeminist formulations (Gray 1979; Warren 1990).

The premise that the environmental crisis is fundamentally cosmological has two corollaries. The first is that the historical emergence of the currently dominant cosmological beliefs is implicated in the rise of those practices (etc.)

that have resulted in the destruction of nature (White 1967; Merchant 1980). As the various strands of environmental thought differ about which cosmological beliefs are the most pernicious, so do they differ about which historical juncture or junctures were the most crucial in this regard.[2] The second corollary is that the replacement of those problematic cosmological beliefs by others more congruent with an ecological conscience is a necessary (if not a sufficient) condition for the overcoming of those practices and relations taken to constitute the 'environmental crisis'. Hence cosmological intervention.

II.

But just what is the link between cosmological beliefs on the one hand and practices (institutions, norms, etc.) on the other? Cosmological intervention, I suggest, necessarily must rely (if only implicitly) on some view about this relationship. The more adequate the understanding on which it relies, the sounder the self-understanding of this discursive practice.

Briefly, the link may be conceived as conceptual or as causal. The link is a conceptual or philosophical one to the extent that the truth of a cosmological belief is taken to *entail* certain practices (or certain norms governing practices): if the universe and the place of humanity is such, then one ought to behave so. The link is a causal one to the extent that, as a psychological or sociological fact, individuals or groups that subscribe to a particular cosmological belief will – because of that belief – tend to engage in certain practices. A link of the latter kind may, but need not, be based on one of the former. Weber (1958: 225n., 232n.) distinguished between the 'dogmatic' or 'logical' consequences of a doctrine on the one hand, and the 'practical psychological' consequences on the other. Weber was confronted by the paradox that the Calvinist doctrine of predestination – in terms of which he sought to understand the rational regimen of Puritan 'worldly asceticism' – would, if true, render such a regimen *irrational*. Analogously, one who would theorise cosmological environmentalism confronts the paradox that some of the familiar holisms, panvitalisms and pantheisms of the genre – if considered in terms of what they strictly entail – would, by redeeming and reenchanting even the strip mine, clearcut and parking lot, render the anti-Puritan worldly asceticism of radical ecologism otiose.[3]

Proponents of the transpersonal ecology tradition such as Arne Naess and Warwick Fox suggest that precisely insofar as the cosmological intervention is not technical, ethical or aesthetic, it is psychological; cosmological interventions work by invoking certain inclinations rather than by implying certain prescriptions. These thinkers resist the demand (presupposed in the mainstream environmental ethics literature) to justify prescriptions by means of moral reasoning; rather, they offer a (re)description of a broadly cosmological kind that '*invites* the reader's interest rather than … *demands* the reader's compliance' (Fox 1990:

243). Rather than propagate beliefs about how one ought to act, they aim to propagate beliefs about the way things are that will affect their audience's *inclinations*, eliciting (in Kantian terms) 'beautiful' rather than 'dutiful' actions on behalf of the natural environment (Fox 1990: 215-47).

This route has several putative advantages over the conventional ethics approach. The first is a pragmatic or hortatory one, based on the assumption that good behaviour is more effectively motivated by identification than by beliefs about value and obligation. There is evidence that this assumption is true regarding beneficence toward humans (Monroe 1998), and is most likely true regarding beneficence toward or protection of the nonhuman as well. But the cosmological-psychological approach promises substantive advantages too. It offers a way around the daunting, if not intractable, difficulties faced by those who would construct philosophically cogent answers to deontological questions (e.g., why, and when, *ought* I avoid harming nature?) and axiological questions (e.g., what environmental changes count as 'harming' nature anyway?) that bedevil environmental ethics. If we internalise a sound cosmology, the suggestion goes, we will be spontaneously inclined to act in ways consistent with the platform of the deep ecology movement (even though we cannot *infer* that we *ought* to do so: Fox 1990: 246f).[4]

This suggestion assumes the connections between cosmological beliefs and environmental inclinations to be self-evident and psychologically compelling, and no doubt they do so appear to the deep ecology movement intellectuals whose work Fox examines, as well as to many other people with broadly green sympathies. Environmentalists who find in cosmological revisions a compelling basis for their practice do not only share an internalised cosmology, however. They also share a set of internalised value orientations bound up with a constellation of shared psychological predispositions and socially constructed cultural meanings. The same cosmological description may invoke or 'invite' diametrically opposing attitudes and evaluations, depending on the set of dispositions or the system of symbolic associations within which the description is apprehended.

Indeed, many of these cosmological (re)descriptions are readily invoked by detractors as well as by supporters of the deep ecology movement. *On the one hand*, if humans are part of nature, then human activities that harm nature thereby harm our own (extended) selves; *on the other hand*, if humans are part of nature, then human activities are necessarily 'natural' – not destructive to, but constitutive of, the natural world. *On the one hand*, if humans are not above the rest of nature, then humans have no right to dominate and exploit the rest of nature (no special status); *on the other hand*, if humans are not above the rest of nature, then humans have no special obligations to sacrifice their interests to those of nonhumans or natural systems (no double standard). *On the one hand*, nature is organic, hence nature is complex, ordered, or vulnerable; *on the other hand*,

nature is organic, hence nature is monstrous, dirty, squalid, gooey, rank, bleeding, killing and dying. *On the one hand*, nature is sentient and alive, so nature can be creative, can be hurt, can be a victim or a friend; *on the other hand*, nature is sentient and alive, so nature can be cruel or evil or an adversary. *On the one hand*, if nature has no goal or purpose, then nature does not exist to serve human ends, and is beyond good and evil; *on the other hand*, if nature has no goal or purpose, then nature is indifferent and meaningless, so that human projects are the sole sources of value in the universe and cannot, in any case, be contrary to the *telos* of nature. *On the one hand*, nature is spontaneous, hence free and creative; *on the other hand*, nature is spontaneous, hence chaotic and disorderly. More such antinomies could be generated without much difficulty.

In order to explain why one interpretation rather than the opposing one is perceived as the 'natural' or 'obvious' one, we need a theory about the cultural relationship of cosmology and meaning. It is thus to cultural theory that we now turn.

III.

It so happens that there is a theory of culture that corresponds strikingly to that implicit in the environmentalist cosmological discourses I have been discussing. I am referring here to a particular understanding of religion in interpretive social science, specifically that articulated in American anthropologist Clifford Geertz's writings from the period of the mid-1960's. According to Geertz's (1973: 90) definition, religion is:

> a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.

Religion operates as a symbolic mediation of 'ethos' and 'world view'. 'A people's ethos', Geertz explains, 'is the tone, character and quality of their life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood... Their world view is their picture of the way things in sheer actuality are, their concept of nature, of self, of society.' Compare this account of 'world view' with Fox's (1984) gloss of cosmology as an 'underlying perception of the *way things are*'. By means of religion, ethos is 'shown to represent a way of life implied by the actual state of affairs which the world view describes' (Geertz 1973:127).

Cosmological intervention is *religious*, then, in a specific sense. I am not primarily concerned here with the fact that these interventions may avail themselves of 'conceptual resources' drawn from various religious traditions or may speak from various religious commitments. It is 'religious' in Geertz's

sense because it is premised on a certain relation between 'world view' and 'ethos'. The model for cosmological intervention can be plainly articulated in terms of this relation of ethos and world view. An ethos is rational and intelligible only relative to a given world view. If an ecologically destructive ethos is rooted in the dominant world view, there is no rational strategy within that world view to change the ethos to an ecologically sound one. The only strategy open is via the production and circulation of attractive, compelling descriptions of nature (including 'human nature') constitutive of a new world view congruent with an ecologically benign ethos.[5]

This account poses two problems, however. First, we have come no closer to answering the question of just what makes some world view particularly supportive of a given ethos. Second, we have no account of how or why a new world view would come to supplant an old one.

I touched on the first problem already, when considering the contingency of the ethical implications of any cosmological description. In Geertz's theoretical formulation, no less than in the ecophilosophical accounts mentioned above, the relation of world view and ethos is treated as self-evident. Geertz (p. 130) writes:

> In itself, either side, the normative or the metaphysical, is arbitrary, but taken together they form a gestalt with a particular kind of inevitability....What all sacred symbols assert is that the good for man is to live realistically, where they differ is in the vision of reality they construct.

I began this discussion by entertaining the suggestion that not only are the 'normative' and the 'metaphysical' arbitrary in themselves, but that the 'gestalt' of the two is also in a certain sense arbitrary, or rather, conventional. It is thus possible for two cultural systems to share the same vision of reality while differing on what it is to live realistically, because they differ in the organisation of symbolic associations by way of which the metaphysical and the normative are connected. Granted, if we are speaking of cultural systems as wholes, this possibility may be a remote one; the different symbolic grammars would almost inevitably get played out somewhere in the respective world views, so that the cosmologies would differ in some important detail. Still, the point is not a purely hypothetical one in the context of cosmological intervention, which can only effect piecemeal changes in world view. It seems likely that particular world view elements can signify (code as 'realistic') divergent prescriptions (or 'invite' divergent 'inclinations') depending on how these elements are positioned in the symbolic order as a whole. One illustration will suffice.

As Fox (1990: 249-68) demonstrates, a distinctive feature of the transpersonal ecology approach is the cultivation of an expansive sense of self such that one's identity expands to encompass the natural world, so that what happens to nature is experienced as having happened to one's self. This is taken to be a realistic attitude in the context of the holistic cosmology upon which it is premised. The

ethos flowing from this attitude – expressed, for instance, in the 'platform principles' of the deep ecology movement (Devall and Sessions 1985: 70) – is thus taken to be linked, in the way Geertz suggests, to the cosmology in terms of which transpersonal ecology is realistic. However, the sort of environmental ethos that is 'realistic' in the context of a cosmological basis for extended identification depends not only on the implications of that cosmology itself but on an array of cultural prescriptions having to do with the treatment of the self.

Norbert Elias, Michel Foucault and others have shown how cultures and epochs have varied in their prescriptions regarding the care of the self. What in one culture is a barbaric mutilation of the self's natural form or inclination is in another the cultivation necessary for the realisation of the self's ideal state. In eighteenth century England, topiary, pollarding of trees and trimming of hedges all fell out of fashion coincidentally with men's wigs, women's corsets and swaddling for infants (Thomas 1983: 220-21); if the people of the seventeenth century expressed a will to carve, constrict and regiment vegetation, perhaps they did so to the extent that they *did*, rather than that they did not, identify with non-human nature.[6] Extended identification may issue in a defence of wildness or naturalness only when conjoined with some further set of beliefs and attitudes about how the self is to be treated.

The care of domestic vegetation furnishes further instances, in which the element of identification is more explicit. Consider the following pair of cases. The first is that of the eleventh century neo-Confucian philosopher Cheng Hao. Cheng was a proponent of extended self, who wrote that a benevolent person 'forms one body with all things without any differentiation' (Chan 1963: 523). He reports that his teacher, Zhou Dunyi 'did not cut the grass outside his window. When asked about it, he said that he felt toward the grass as he felt toward himself.' Cheng himself did not cut his grass because, he said, 'he wanted always to see the spirit of creation' (Chan 1963: 535). Here we have a case of identification and letting-be that is a model of 'transpersonal ecology'. Contrast this with the high school counsellor from Modesto, California, who according to an item in *USA Today* (Kelly 1994) 'keeps a good looking lawn'. This monoculture enthusiast is quoted as saying the following about his well-mown, weed-free lawn:

> For me, its just kind of an extension of self. Its where I begin. When you go to my house, I start at the front lawn. Its part of me. I think it makes a statement for me about how clean I am, how dignified I am. I don't want anyone to go by and say 'Oh look at that dirtbag.' Its dignity. It's cleanliness.

This person shaves, poisons and otherwise assiduously reduces the biodiversity of his property not (it would appear) because he fails to identify with it, but precisely because, on his own account, he regards it as part of his extended self. He does so because of his interpretation of what the values of dignity, cleanliness

and self-control demand in terms of the treatment of that self.[7] The defence of wildness is a realistic consequence of extended identification only to the extent that one values the 'wildness' of the self.

The second problem, that of world view change, arises particularly if we try to apply Geertz's account in the context of intervention, as opposed to a situation of relative stasis. What is it about the new world view, the proffered redescription, that is supposed to recommend it to its intended public? Geertz allows that world view and ethos are mutually reinforcing – the world view acquires credence by providing a commodious symbolic setting for a people's ethos (this is the functionalist aspect of his theory). In the case of descriptive intervention, however, this effect obtains only to the extent that the ethos corresponding to the proffered description is *already* current. If world view and ethos form a closed circle, there is no point at which the descriptive intervention could break in, nor any place whence it could emerge. Of course, if an ethos is tied to certain practices and if ethos and world view form a 'gestalt', then forces 'external' to the culture might cause a shift in practices and thereby create conditions for a change in world view. In a Marxist account, for example, a change in relations of production occasioned by technological development, conquest or revolution might have this effect. On such a view, though, cosmological intervention would be ineffectual, save at the stage of ideological consolidation.

IV.

Stephen Karatheodoris's (1988) reworking of Geertz's theory may provide the basis for a more subtle articulation of the relation between world view and ethos. Geertz, he notes, distinguishes

> between depictions that operate as 'models of' reality and those that operate as 'models for' reality. The 'model of' is supposed to correspond with a pre-existing physical arrangement or practice, while a 'model for' is supposed to guide the organisation of a physical arrangement or practice. A sketch of an existing building is an example of a 'model of'; an architect's rendering or a blueprint is a 'model for'.

Geertz provides that the religious symbolic order serves both as 'model of' (i.e., as description) and 'model for' (i.e., prescription), but, as we have seen, he is unhelpful on the nature of the relationship between these two functions. Karatheodoris suggests that an idealised or mythologised model-for intervenes in the social process insofar as it is treated as, and believed to be, a model-of (Karatheodoris 1988: 85):

> Plato's and Lacan's symbols function properly as 'models for' reality only when they are mistaken for 'models of' reality. This delusion, in fact, is a necessary condition of their proper functioning.

'Delusion' here, I would submit, does not imply that the descriptions in question are necessarily 'false' (whatever that might mean in this context) but that their truth-value is irrelevant.

This formulation marks an advance in our understanding of a puzzling aspect of the role of metaphysics or cosmology in environmental thought. From one point of view, it is odd that such descriptions should ever have a bearing on conduct, since metaphysical and cosmological aspects of reality are precisely those that remain *unaffected* by human conduct. What then is the significance of environmentalist assertions to the effect that nature fundamentally (not contingently) is an organic whole, is vital, is complex, is spontaneous, does not exist for human purposes but embraces humans as 'plain members', and so on? Consider the sorts of landscapes that those involved in ecology movements struggle to protect and establish: old-growth forests rather than strip-mines, clear-cuts and plantations, 'organic' rather than industrial farms, marshes rather than parking lots or golf courses, etc. Concretely, empirically, contingently, the former sorts of landscapes can be described as complex, vital, integrated, spontaneously organised, relatively less dominated by human projects or engineered to human specifications. Such attributes comprise a model *for* the empirical world, a set of qualities that may or may not be realised in a particular concrete state of affairs but which constitute a prescriptive and evaluative ideal within the ethos of the deep ecology movement. As such, they remain merely preferences. They acquire the force of symbolic intervention only when sublimated and projected into the metaphysical plane, that is, by being taken as an aspect of a model *of* how nature necessarily *is, even though if nature were like that, human 'destruction' would make no difference in respect of it.*

An apparent contradiction in radical environmentalist discourse (which detractors are quick to decry) is that between – on the one hand – the overwhelming centrality in its cosmology of the image of humans as unbounded parts of nature, and – on the other hand – the implication in its practical prescriptions of the unnaturalness, alienation and contaminating foreignness of humans and their works. The image of wholeness serves as a sacred symbol, and in Karatheodoris's terms signifies not an existing (much less a necessary) reality but a *lack* – as he put it (in a social rather than an ecological context):

> the image of wholeness that the symbol projects does not reflect a pre-existing 'real' We but instead visualizes an ideal-We that inspires passion. (p. 82)

His reading of the symbolic invites us to reformulate description as desire. On this reading, the depiction of reality as a 'single unfolding process' is central to environmentalist discourse not because of its considerable scientific and metaphysical merits as description of what *is* (and what will be whatever we do), but because of its even greater power as a symbol of what is *not*, of that desired connection with organic cycles which is felt to be lacking in modern life. It is a 'model for' that works by being taken as a 'model of'.

It is not that the dominant (pre)modern cosmology makes 'realistic' the dominant modern ecological ethos while the perennial/postmodern transpersonal cosmology makes 'realistic' a radical 'green' ecological ethos. Rather, the aesthetic difference between the former and latter cosmologies – as they are represented in environmentalist discourse – is in some way isomorphic with the aesthetic difference between the ecological real and the ecological ideal as represented in that same discourse. What I am suggesting, in other words, is that the cosmological descriptions favoured by supporters of the deep ecology movement tend to emphasise, among the abstract and necessary properties of the world, those which bear a formal or quasi-aesthetic resemblance to the concrete and contingent properties of the world that the ecology movement seeks to protect, extend and celebrate. Cosmology works to symbolise ecological desire.

V.

Whatever may be the case in relatively static and homogeneous societies, cosmological intervention necessarily involves the production and circulation of descriptions which must make their way among other, better established, competing descriptions; these descriptions, *qua* sacred symbols, exist to reflect desires in conflict with other, better established, competing desires. If, as I am suggesting, environmentalist cosmology is the sublimation of a set of aesthetic dispositions, is cosmological intervention not always a 'preaching to the converted' – less an intervention in the symbolic order than an ideological consolidation of an ethos, a form of life, assembled by other forces? If so, I do not think that it is thereby rendered pointless, although the point may not be what it thinks it is. It does the indispensable work of articulating a mythology for a discursive community. It also advances a set of propositions that can be evaluated on their own terms. There is a connection between these two aspects. The success of a particular account as mythology enhances its appeal as cosmology and vice versa. This is why the 'truth value', the cognitive merit, of these cosmologies is not irrelevant.

Although scientific and philosophical considerations often play an important role, aesthetic considerations above all shape eco-cosmologies. Of course, aesthetic preferences (such as for theoretic 'elegance') always guide cognitive choices in abstract matters. But not only are the cosmologies mobilised by environmental thought selected on the basis of aesthetic preferences, and not only do those aesthetic preferences in the realm of cosmology arise from the same dispositions that give rise to aesthetic preferences regarding ecological matters: that common origin is precisely what connects cosmological speculation and environmental thought. How such dispositions themselves arise, and how they can be encouraged (if, as I have argued, cosmological intervention can play only a consolidating role) are topics for another discussion.

NOTES

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[1] For the phenomenological environmentalist critique of mechanistic cosmology, see Evernden (1985, 1992). For process cosmology environmentalisms, see eg. Birch and Cobb (1981), McDaniel (1983), Griffin (1988).

[2] Cosmological interventionists can be said to fall into two broad camps on this issue. The 'Enlightenment' camp (which includes Livingston, Naess and Fox) targets those elements of Western thought having their roots in Greek and Hebrew antiquity, which set humanity above, apart from, or at the centre of the natural order – as having dominion over nature or being the apex of a graded hierarchy of perfection. For this first camp, the ecological world view is the culmination and synthesis of a series of scientific and philosophical revolutions (of which the Copernican and Darwinian stand out) which have overthrown the old anthropocentric paradigm. The 'counter-Enlightenment' camp blames the environmental crisis on the cosmological fruit of the Scientific Revolution itself (e.g. Merchant 1980; Berman 1981; Evernden 1985). For the (internally diverse) latter group, the reductionistic, atomistic, mechanistic aspects of modern thought have disenchanted nature and encouraged a view of nature as mere lifeless matter in motion, devoid of purpose, consciousness or even sensuous qualities, a pure object.

[3] Freya Mathews (1994) makes this point well. Warwick Fox suggests that the point is more applicable to 'ontological' approaches (those which draw attention to the wonder *that* the world is) than to cosmological approaches proper (those premised on specific accounts of *how* the world is) (cf. Fox 1990: 249-56). I have in mind efforts, for example, to draw environmentalist implications from the premise that matter as such is creative and sentient (McDaniel 1983). They are cosmological, as are most treatments of the 'green' implications of quantum physics (or pantheism for that matter). If views about the nature of everything have any direct relevance to struggles over the arrangement of particulars, it is a *symbolic* relevance.

[4] Although Fox favourably contrasts transpersonal ecology with axiological approaches in environmental ethics (which focus on the instrumental and/or intrinsic value of the nonhuman world), he more successfully avoids deontological issues (those of obligation) than axiological ones (those of value). For Fox, Naess and others who make the transpersonal ecology move, cosmology is important mainly in providing a cognitive framework for extended identification. I needn't be persuaded by some theory of environmental ethics that clearcutting the forest is bad, they suggest, if I can be persuaded on the basis of an adequate cosmology to regard the forest is part of my extended Self. But the value issue cannot be sidestepped so easily. If clearcutting the forest is not bad (i.e., the change in the forest ecosystem occasioned by clearcutting is not a change for the worse), then I might not mind the forest being clearcut even if I regarded the forest as part of myself. And if clearcutting the forest is bad, then I might mind – indeed I ought to mind – even if I did not identify with the forest. What Fox and Naess really want to avoid is the part about 'ought', not the part about 'bad'. If I think clearcutting is bad *and* I identify with the forest, then my motivation to stop clearcutting will not depend on a sense of (altruistic) duty. Thus the move to cosmology *does* avoid the issue of deontology, but it does not avoid – it presupposes – the issue of axiology.

[5] I should stress I am not arguing here that Geertz's account is necessarily the most useful or accurate way of theorising either religion or environmentalist cosmological intervention. I am suggesting, rather, that his model of religion corresponds to the implicit model of cosmological intervention within the discourse of cosmological intervention itself. Put another way, Geertz's world view coincides with that of the cosmological ecosophers as regards world views and their function.

[6] As Cate Sandilands has pointed out to me, the parallels between their treatment of their trees and of their bodies may mean not that they identified with both but that they identified with neither. By extension, one might argue that 'technologies of the self' (including spiritual and psychological disciplines) which aim to encourage, change or eliminate certain kinds of thoughts or feelings involve a non-identification with those psychic elements. In that case, the field of identification shrinks to the bare will, extreme case of what Fox (1990: 246) calls an 'atomistic or particle-like sense of self'. To insist, however, that any relation other than that of letting-go or leaving-be is *ipso facto* not one of identification – that 'self-cultivation' or 'self-discipline' strictly speaking involves a contradiction – is to beg the question. It would also be paradoxical inasmuch as cosmological intervention may itself involve a kind of self-cultivation.

[7] Admittedly, the implication of this contrast in the context of my argument – that dignity and self-control are more important norms in the ethos of the contemporary Californian new middle classes than in that of the Song dynasty Confucian literati – is rather counter-intuitive!

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