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Pantheism, Ethics and Ecology

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ABSTRACT: Pantheism is a metaphysical and religious position. Broadly defined it is the view that (1) “God is everything and everything is God ... the world is either identical with God or in some way a self-expression of his nature” (H.P. Owen). Similarly, it is the view that (2) everything that exists constitutes a ‘unity’ and this all-inclusive unity is in some sense divine (A. MacIntyre).¹ I begin with an account of what the pantheist’s ethical position is formally likely to be (e.g. objectivist etc.). I then discuss the relationship between pantheism and ecology in the context of the search for the metaphysical and ethical foundations for an ecological ethic. It is claimed that it is no accident that pantheism is often looked to for such foundations.

KEYWORDS: Ecology, environment, ethics, pantheism, Spinoza

In a Word, every Thing in the Earth is organic ... this justifies my Answer to a German Inn-Keeper, who impertinently importuned me to tell him, what Countryman I was? The Sun is my Father, the Earth my Mother, the World’s my country, and all Men are my relations.² – John Toland

... the view that man in any sense rules over nature inevitably presumes that nature is not itself divine.³ – John Passmore

INTRODUCTION

There is a tendency to picture pantheists (other than Spinoza), outdoors and in pastoral settings. This has roots in the Stoics’ veneration of nature, and in the much later nature mysticism, and perhaps pantheism, of some of the nineteenth century poets such as Wordsworth and Whitman. It has been fostered in the twentieth century by pantheists such as John Muir, Robinson Jeffers, D.H. Lawrence and Gary Snyder who explicitly ‘identify’ with and extol nature, and claim people’s close association and identification with ‘nature’ and the ‘natu-

ral' is necessary to well-being. The belief in a divine Unity, and some kind of identification with that Unity, is seen as the basis for an ethical framework (and 'way of life') that extends beyond the human to non-human and non-living things. The divine Unity is, after all, 'all-inclusive'.⁴ It is, I shall argue, not accidental that pantheism is often taken to be inherently sympathetic to ecological concerns.

I. PANTHEIST ETHICS

Pantheists, like theists, tend to be 'moral realists'. They believe it is an objective fact that some kinds of actions are ethically right and others wrong, and what is right and wrong is independent of what any person thinks is right and wrong. With the exception of religious ethics, moral realism has not been a widely accepted philosophical position in recent times.

According to Geoffrey Sayre-McCord the reason moral realism has not been accepted is because of "the common (mistaken) assumption that the only realist positions available in ethics are those that embrace supernatural properties and special powers of moral intuition" (i.e. nonnaturalistic positions as explained below).⁵ Theists, of course, do not regard this assumption as mistaken; or at least they see no reason to reject moral realism because it does "embrace supernatural properties and special powers of moral intuition".⁶ According to the theist, even if Sayre-McCord is correct in claiming that moral realism need not rely on such properties and powers, (and it is unlikely that the theist would grant him this), it is not objectionable if it does. The pantheist, like the theist, is not troubled by the fact that her moral realism is based on metaphysical assumptions that some regard as otiose.⁷ 'Natural properties' are properties such as being a certain colour, shape, temperature or height, causing pain, 'producing the greatest good for the greatest number' etc. They are properties that one can, in principle, verify that an object or action has or lacks. Some ethical 'naturalists' (e.g., some Utilitarians) claim that moral properties are identical with natural properties. For example, a morally right action is sometimes equated with the action which 'produces the greatest good for the greatest number'. Others claim that moral properties are entailed by natural properties. Pantheists, however, generally believe that moral properties are both distinct from natural properties and are not entailed by them. Thus, they are usually 'nonnaturalists'.⁸ Paul Taylor describes nonnaturalism in ethics as follows:

In the view of the nonnaturalist ... a value judgement is not a factual assertion about people's attitudes, nor indeed is it an assertion about *any* empirical fact or set of facts ... value-predicates, such as 'good' and 'right', are names of special value-properties of things, and value properties cannot be reduced to empirical [natural] properties ... These properties (one might call them 'objective values') are ultimate and irreducible

... How do we *know* whether a given value judgment is true or false, according to nonnaturalism? ... by *intuition* and by *self-evidence*.⁹

Furthermore, pantheists, like theists, generally think that moral judgements, and value judgments generally, are not empirically verifiable – at least not in the way one verifies matters of fact generally.¹⁰

Despite their nonnaturalism, pantheists, like theists, reject G.E. Moore's contention that these properties (i.e. goodness and badness) are ultimate and irreducible. For the theist the fact that 'X is wrong' will be explained, and partially analysed, in terms of (even if not reducible to) nonnatural facts about God's will and nature. And, for the pantheist the fact that 'X is wrong' will be explained, and partially analysed, in terms of (even if not reducible to) nonnatural facts about the divine Unity.¹¹

Nonnaturalism is the position most congenial to pantheism, but a pantheist could make a case for being an ethical naturalist – just as Swinburne makes a case for a naturalistic theistic ethics.¹² Pantheism leaves the option between ethical naturalism and ethical nonnaturalism open. For the pantheist, though perhaps not for the theist, value-properties and predicates may be empirical or natural, or supervene upon natural properties, even if they are not entailed by such properties. So pantheists may be ethical naturalists. This may be the case even if assertions containing value predicates are not taken to be empirically verifiable in any straightforward way as they often are for naturalism. Such value-predicates are not 'empirical' in a narrow sense in which facts in the physical or even psychological sciences are empirical; but neither are they facts about some *transcendent* reality. Pantheism may, in a sense, deny the existence of any properties that are not 'natural'. It depends on how much one is willing to broaden one's notion of 'natural'. But if, as Adams claims, "a nonnatural fact is one which does not consist simply in any fact or complex of facts which can be stated entirely in the languages of physics, chemistry, biology and human psychology",¹³ then the pantheist, like the theist, maintains that ethical facts are nonnatural facts. Given Adams's account of 'nonnatural', the fact that 'X is wrong' is a nonnatural objective fact according to the pantheist. Of course, classifications such as 'objectivist' and 'nonnaturalist', are only a partial explanation of pantheists' ethical views.

II. PANTHEIST ETHICS AND ECOLOGY

Consider some examples of alleged connections between pantheism, ethics and ecology.

In his article on "The Apprehension of Divinity in the Self and Cosmos in Plotinus", Hilary Armstrong says,

... Plotinus may give us a lead to a better understanding of the world and may help

us to adjust our attitudes and evaluations in a way which may help us to deal with some of the most pressing problems of our time, and especially to do something towards closing the gap between man and non-human nature which has been widening through the Christian and rationalist centuries with, as we are now beginning to see, disastrous results.¹⁴

Armstrong sees in Plotinus a metaphysical basis for an environmental ethic. He suggests ways in which aspects of Plotinus's thought can serve to engender an adjustment in our "attitudes and evaluations" concerning non-human nature.

Grace Jantzen makes a claim similar to that of Armstrong's in regard to her own model of the world as God's body. She regards this model as pantheistic in important respects.

The model of the universe as God's body helps to do justice to the beauty and value of nature, the importance of conservation and ecological responsibility, the significance and dignity of the human body and human sexuality ... Those who have once seen themselves and the world about them, as the embodiment and self-manifestation of God are unlikely to continue to treat it in a cavalier way or feel it utterly alien or devoid of intrinsic significance and worth.¹⁵

Armstrong's view concerning Plotinus, and Jantzen's view concerning the implications of her model for ethics and ecology are, as I have said, sometimes taken to be true of pantheism in general. For religiously inclined non-theists, pantheism is supposed to have the resources capable of (in Armstrong's words about Plotinus), "closing the gap between man and non-human nature which has been widening".

Whatever critics allege the shortfalls of pantheism to be, there is a prominent, if not prevalent view, that its implications (if it were true) would be a good thing for ecology, and for aspects of ethics having to do with the non-human (and the human). Thus, Genevieve Lloyd points to "Some contemporary philosophers concerned with ethical issues related to the environment [who] are looking to Spinoza in the hope of finding a firm metaphysical basis for environmental ethics." And she goes on to say,

Such a hope is by no means entirely misplaced. Spinoza ... is concerned with the integration of metaphysics and ethics, and with the metaphysical bases of ethical positions. A very dominant theme in his thought, moreover, is the cultivation of what can only be described as an attitude of reverence for nature ... Despite all this, it would, I think, be quite misplaced to claim Spinoza as patron philosopher of the environmental movement ... Anyone who looks to the *Ethics* for a viable, coherent metaphysical system to ground belief in the rights of the non-human will look in vain.¹⁶

Yet despite this, she attempts to extract from Spinoza some metaphysical ground for environmental ethics, and argues this can be done even without assigning *rights to the non-human* on the basis of his system.

She suggests that Spinoza's metaphysical system can be the basis of a useful corrective not only to the environmentally unconcerned, but also to the approach of deep ecologists and others who think it important to assign rights to the non-human.¹⁷ She says, for example,

Spinoza cannot say: "Things (such as butterflies, whales, rainforests) are good, or have value, or have rights, independently of man." But he can say; "It is *good for man* to perceive things as independent of himself." It is good for man, that is, to perceive things as they really are [p. 307].

And, it is clear that "seeing things as independent of himself" is, in Lloyd's view, 'good' environmentally speaking – so much so that it is an attitude that we should engender in children.

Children educated to regard themselves as 'part of nature', would, for the most part, surely, orient themselves differently towards other species from those who are explicitly taught that man holds a privileged position in the universe. At least some of our exploitative responses to the non-human rest on the implicit belief that the rest of nature exists for us; and can be expected to wither away if this implicit belief is brought into the open and rejected [p. 308].

Why does Lloyd think that seeing non-human things as 'independent' can help ground an environmental ethic? According to Spinoza all things exist for their own sake and not for anything else's and they are all capable of their own form of self-realisation. But how can this be the basis for the kind of change in attitude that Lloyd rightly claims would be a good thing for the environment? A whale may be independent of me and I may recognise that I am part of nature and that the rest of nature does not exist for me etc. But why should I not use that whale 'to my advantage' – just as Spinoza says I should – and anything else I can if I so desire? Granted that Spinoza does stress the importance of "seeing things as independent of oneself" there is no logical, or even psychological, connection between such a perspective by itself and a rejection of an exploitative approach to nature as Lloyd claims.

George Sessions points out a different metaphysical basis for an environmental ethic in Spinoza and, like Lloyd's, it is one that has nothing to do with attributing rights to non-humans. It is in our self-interest to preserve the environment and Spinoza endorses that which is done for self-preservation. Sessions does not call it this but the basis he finds in Spinoza *seems to be* that of an ethical egoist. What is ethical is what is in my self-interest.¹⁸ Sessions says,

It is clearly to our 'advantage', as individuals and as a species, that the delicate equilibriums of ecosystem functioning, upon which our lives literally depend, remain viable. Thus, the very concept of what is involved in "seeking one's advantage" or "persevering in one's being in a rational way" [Spinoza's concept] is now seen to be open-ended and necessarily subject to revision in the light of new knowledge.¹⁹

Sessions does not mention ethical egoism and he certainly wants to base an environmental ethic in Spinoza's metaphysics in some other non-egotistical and non-anthropocentric way. Nevertheless, whatever Sessions' wider views, he has pointed out a basis in Spinoza for an approach to environmental ethics that does not rely on attributing rights to the non-human.

Ethical egoism is not an adequate basis for an environmental ethic however. Only given an unrealistically broad interpretation of what is in our 'self-interest', and what is 'good for persons', can these be supposed to be the basis for an adequate environmental ethic. Certainly Sessions, and probably Lloyd, does not regard self-interest as, by itself, a sound or adequate basis for environmental ethics. Only if one takes the definition of 'self-interest' to be that it is in our self-interest not to (generally) 'harm' living and non-living things, can self-interest be seen as providing such a basis. A more plausible understanding of self-interest can provide a basis for many, but clearly not all, principles that are arguably necessary for an ethical approach to the environment. It is in our interest that we do not poison the air, but not (necessarily) that some species of fish survives – as opposed say, to building the dam. Ethical egoism (like utilitarianism) may provide the 'right' answers to environmental moral questions much of the time, but it will not do so all of the time, and it will do so for the wrong reasons. It fails as a general normative principle and basis for environmental ethics for the same reasons it fails as a basis for ethics generally. Pantheists do not, however, rely on ethical egoism or consequentialist theories such as utilitarianism as the normative basis for either their ethics generally or their environmental ethics. They rely instead on a metaphysical basis that tries to connect what is morally right and wrong with their own natures, the nature of other things, and the nature of the divine Unity. Pantheists agree with Stuart Hampshire's claim that for Spinoza, "Ethics without metaphysics must be nonsense; we must first know what our potentialities are and what our situation is as parts of Nature."²⁰

Thus, although Spinoza is the best known pantheist, looking towards his metaphysics for a foundation for environmental ethics is, as Lloyd points out, not without its difficulties. After all, Spinoza rejected animal rights, and despite his view that man is part of nature (i.e. there is nothing else) this view is in "apparent tension" with "his treatment of morality as circumscribed by what is good for human beings ... [and his view] that other species can be ruthlessly exploited for human ends" (Lloyd).²¹

Whether or not Spinoza provides a suitable metaphysical basis for an environmental ethic depends, in part, on whether his metaphysics and ethics are acceptable. For that reason alone one might be suspicious of grounding an environmental ethic in Spinoza's philosophy. It is, by all accounts, obscure in many places and most certainly wrong in some of its fundamental contentions – e.g., its monism. But leaving Spinoza's particular system aside, it is often supposed that pantheism, *if it were 'true'*, could offer a more suitable basis for

an environmental ethic, and perhaps for ethics generally, than the Judaeo-Christian tradition, or some non-religious alternatives such as utilitarianism, contractarianism, Kantian views etc. Some Utilitarians etc. might disagree, but they might not. They could simply deny that pantheism is true. It is unlikely, however, that the committed theist, utilitarian etc. would, or can, agree that pantheism offers a better basis for an environmental ethic than their own ethical theory. This is because of metaethical considerations. The meaning of key ethical terms and the conditions governing their use in normative ethical theories are described in terms of normative principles characteristic of a particular system. The utilitarian cannot allow that a pantheist's ethical reasoning provides a sound basis for moral deliberation unless 'utility', defined in terms of 'happiness' or some other 'greatest good', is the pantheist's supreme normative principle – which it is not.

Harold W. Wood Jr., a founder of the Universal Pantheist Society, claims that pantheism provides the foundation for an environmental ethic that the Judaeo-Christian tradition fails to. He says:

Instead of a 'conquer the Earth' mentality, pantheism teaches that respect and reverence for the Earth demands continuing attempts to understand ecosystems. Therefore, among religious viewpoints, pantheism is uniquely qualified to support a foundation for environmental ethics ... by learning to celebrate and revere such natural events ... people would be less likely to permit unfettered pollution to take place ... acid rain would not be seen as merely an inconvenience, but as a travesty against a holy manifestation ... the pantheist view provides a rationale ... which makes environmental conservation tantamount to loving God ... an ethical pantheist does not practice conservation out of simple self-interest, but rather as a religious motivation ... Pantheism does not advocate an ethics derived *from* natural phenomena ... The source of pantheist environmental ethics is not the natural behaviour of other animals as role models. Pantheism confirms the uniqueness of humanity, and its ethics derives from ... human abilities for empathy, compassion, and a mystical oneness with the rest of the natural world. Pantheist ethics has as its goal a closeness with nature ... a relationship with nature equivalent to traditional religion's relationship with God. It is a closeness based not upon imitation, but upon reverential communion.²²

Wood takes pantheism to be the identification of deity with the forces and workings of nature – or simply with nature.²³

Whether or not the "Judaeo-Christian tradition is one which motivates arrogant dominance or humble stewardship on our part towards nature" is of course debatable. The issue has been discussed by John Passmore, Robin Attfield and others.²⁴ But regardless of what one's views are concerning the attitude engendered by the Judaeo-Christian tradition (e.g. *Genesis* I: 26-30) towards nature; it seems to be presupposed by pantheists, and not only by pantheists, that the 'attitude' pantheism engenders is metaphysically advantageous to the formulation of a much improved, and much needed, morally sound

ecological ethic. Whether pantheism is advantageous in these ways, and just what the ecologically advantageous ‘attitude’ that pantheism allegedly engenders is, needs to be critically examined. This is especially so given that it is, as we have seen, highly problematic to regard Spinoza’s pantheism as providing either a metaphysical basis for an environmental ethic, or as engendering an ‘attitude’ that might prove environmentally beneficial. Presumably, even if a pantheistic environmental ethic has an essential affective component, being objectivist it must be based on something more than an ‘attitude’.

Wood says, “The modern pantheist views the opportunity to interact with God-as-nature as an ethical religious pursuit compatible with a sound understanding and respect for the *natural* world as opposed to *supernatural* fiction” (p. 161). He claims, therefore, that pantheists should not take the following view of Reinhold Niebuhr as a criticism. Niebuhr says, “Pantheism inevitably strengthens those forces in religion which tend to sanctify the real rather than to inspire the ideal” (p. 161). But Wood is mistaken if he thinks pantheists would not take issue with Niebuhr. If Niebuhr is taken to mean that theism inspires the ideal at the expense of (i.e. by demeaning) the ‘real’, then it *is more likely* that some theists (though only some) would take Niebuhr’s view as a criticism. However, pantheists will also object to Niebuhr and claim that their emphasis on the ‘real’ engenders more rather than less ideal inspiration. Both the theist and pantheist reject Niebuhr’s dichotomy as a false one. The character of what a religion (or anyone) takes to be ‘ideal’ is always determined by what is taken to be ‘real’. Even in Vedanta where only Brahman is regarded as ‘real’, ‘ideal’ behaviour and goals are explained in terms of Brahman.

Wood is also mistaken in characterising pantheism as avoiding the speculative metaphysics he associates with what he terms theistic ‘*supernatural* fiction’. He himself describes a pantheistic “relationship with nature [as] equivalent to traditional religion’s relationship with God ... based ... upon reverential communion”. The pantheist may deny that there is a ‘supernatural’, if this means something outside of, or other than, the divine Unity. But positing a divine Unity and speculating about its nature is no different in type from theistic speculation. Even if the pantheist identifies Unity with nature (and this not the usual case), she is not thereby avoiding metaphysics or necessarily refusing to postulate something transcendent. Surely what Wood understands by ‘nature’, its value etc., is vastly different from ‘nature’ as seen by the natural sciences.

III. WHY REJECT A ‘RELIGIOUS’ FRAMEWORK?

Of course, for some, any alleged grounding of an environmental ethic in a pantheistic metaphysic is as pointless as a reliance on a theistic one. It is mysticism and religion – once again. I take it this is Andrew Brennan’s view in *Thinking About Nature*. He argues that a variety of ‘frameworks’ and perspec-

tives are necessary for resolving ecological problems, but there is no room in that interdisciplinary approach for the religious. New attitudes and practices towards nature must depend on what 'scientific ecology' tells us about humans, rather than on 'ecological holism', or the speculations of other kinds of 'metaphysical (non-biological) ecology'.²⁵

Brennan draws on an important distinction between 'having moral rights' and having 'moral considerability or standing'. Thus, following Joel Feinberg, Michael Tooley and others, Brennan says that *perhaps*, "only items with interests can be possessors of rights, and thus be represented as suffering benefits and harms as a result of my behaviour". But he denies "that anything like the point about rights holds for moral considerability". Brennan says, "What is the nature of moral standing? It is the *value* that something has by virtue of the fact that concern for it enters, in a certain constraining way, into the deliberations of a moral agent" (pp. 139-140).²⁶ Thus, natural things (i.e. non-human and non-living things) may have moral claims in virtue of their moral standing even if they do not have rights.

Brennan argues that the foundation for a proper environmental ethic (i.e. 'ecological humanism') is what he calls 'ethical or moral holism'.²⁷

[Ethical or moral holism]... involves a perspective on human nature. It takes seriously the idea that humans are social beings, finding their fulfilment in social living. Human beings are autonomous ... they are ... lacking in intrinsic functions. Who they are is then to some extent a matter of the commitments they take, the groups to which they attach themselves ... Unlike the crow, humans have a choice over which identifications they will make ... In terms of ecological humanism, our alienation from nature is also a kind of alienation from ourselves, a failure to recognise ourselves in our real location in the world ... any ethic by which we are to live has to recognise our location in natural and social systems, and take account of our place in history ... Objects, systems, even the land forms around me deserve my respect, deserve ethical consideration simply by being what they are, where they are and interacting with other items in the way they do [pp. 194-195, 197, cf. pp. 192-193].

Brennan alleges his 'ecological humanism' takes account of what he sees as the principal deficiency in utilitarian, contractarian, and deontological ethical theories. "In each case, the trouble is that the theories try to give an account of persons who live in a society in a way that ignores the force of the claim that what I am is a function of where I am" (p. 179). But defenders of the theories Brennan criticises as inadequate – both on the general grounds cited above, and specifically as unable to provide a foundation for an environmental ethic – would deny Brennan's charge.²⁸ They need not deny that "what I am is [in part] a function of where I am", but they would deny this has the moral force Brennan claims it has. It may have more to do with an analysis of personal identity than with ethics.

The ethical theorists Brennan criticises would of course reject his solution to our ecological situation. That solution is a broad one and it is stated

in terms of a reappraisal of the commitments we choose, and a reassessment of “our real location in the world”. They would also reject his more basic positions of ‘ecological humanism’ and ‘ethical polymorphism’. ‘Ethical polymorphism’ is the view that “... an ethic by which to live is not to be found by adopting one fundamental, substantive principle relative to which all our deliberations are to be resolved. Instead, we are prey to numerous different kinds of considerations originating from different directions, many of them with a good claim to be ethical ones.”²⁹ They would regard both Brennan’s solution, and more basic position, as fundamentally *ad hoc*. It is not just that Brennan’s position lacks any supreme normative principle of the kind one finds, for example, in utilitarianism and Kantianism. (In the place of any such ultimate principle there is the dictum “what I am is [in part] a function of where I am.” Perhaps in some ways this is taken to be a functional equivalent of a supreme normative principle?) Rather, what appears to be missing from Brennan’s ethical holism are firm criteria for determining which, among the many ethical principles Brennan advocates, is overriding or applicable in particular cases. Brennan does not see this open-endedness as a drawback, but instead as integral to the ‘ethical polymorphism’ he advocates. Yet, in the absence of a supreme normative principle, and criteria that enables us to choose between various principles that at times conflict, some might see his ‘ethical polymorphism’, as epistemologically speaking implying ethical intuitionism. This is so despite his objectivism, moral realism and naturalism.

Pantheists and theists will respond to Brennan in the same way as do the ethical theorists he criticises. I am *not* here claiming that they would be correct in their response; only that (i) this is the approach they are likely to take, and (ii) more is needed to show that they would not be correct. The ecologically astute pantheist, and environmentally concerned theist, will agree with Brennan’s ecological humanism which holds “our alienation from nature is also a kind of alienation from ourselves, a failure to recognise ourselves in our real location in the world ... [and that] any ethic by which we are to live has to recognise our location in natural and social systems, and take account of our place in history”. However, the pantheist, like the theist, utilitarian, existentialist or whatever, disagrees with Brennan as to what our location and place in history is. As Brennan recognises, so far as these theories employ an account of human nature – and some, such as contractarians and existentialists, attempt (unsuccessfully in Brennan’s view) to eschew any such account – the accounts they rely on are quite different from his own. Yet, what one takes to be one’s ‘real location’ is not independent of one’s view of human nature or ultimate reality.

Since ‘ecological humanism’ itself rests on metaphysical assumptions, Brennan’s dismissal of what he takes to be needlessly metaphysical and religious approaches to environmental ethics is premature. One cannot eschew such approaches *in general* and then employ particular metaphysical positions in defence of one’s own metaethical and normative position. Brennan’s position

concerning the irrelevance of certain metaphysical and religious positions cannot be shared by those who have a different view from his of 'man's place in nature'. This point can be generalised. In asking, "Why reject a religious (specifically pantheistic) framework as a basis for environmental ethics?" Brennan's position is being used primarily as a foil.

Brennan criticises 'deep ecology', while maintaining that many of their insights are consistent with his ecological humanism. His critique is relevant to pantheism because it shows ecological humanism to be anthropocentric. For pantheists however, this anthropocentric view is an anathema and a basic ingredient of environmental disaster. He characterises deep ecology as the view "which develops the central theme that things other than humans, or humans and a select group of other animals, have value or worth of a non-instrumental kind" (p. 141).³⁰ In Brennan's view, a view he claims is supported by scientific ecology, "natural communities have no ends to serve, no purpose in their development, and no goods of their own ... the attempt to fund moral respect for nature on some notion of systemic good or value thus has to be abandoned" (p. 156). Brennan's rejection of deep ecology rests not only on his view of natural communities, but also on his anthropocentrism. It is not just that he finds no basis for funding moral respect in terms of systemic good, or intrinsic value attributable to natural communities. He claims it is unlikely that the non-anthropocentric view held by deep ecologists could be the basis for a practical environmental ethic.

... it may prove impossible for us, as human beings, to take seriously the judgement of the non-anthropocentric perspective. But that may be not so much a matter of morals but a reflection of what we are. Even if morality succeeds as a device for counteracting limited sympathies within the human community, it is unlikely to succeed as a device that will enable us to yield priority over human concerns and interests to the good of things 'natural, wild and free' [p. 30].

I doubt Brennan is mistaken in his assessment. If he is not mistaken, this would not show that a non-anthropocentrically based environmental ethic is mistaken, but only that it cannot succeed. Combine this with the view that *only* a non-anthropocentric view such as pantheism can provide the foundations of an acceptable ethic and the prognosis is worse than gloomy.

A pantheistic ecological ethic will not be anthropocentric. This rules out the notion of man as a 'steward of nature', whether his own or God's, who is responsible for nature. It also rules out utilitarian, contractarian, and Kantian approaches as providing an ultimate basis since they are anthropocentric. It does not, however, rule out contractarian etc. principles as useful guides to making and justifying environmental decisions. Applying anthropocentrically conceived principles to environmental issues would suffice in many cases, but not all, to sound reasoning about the environment. (The practical problem environmentally speaking has been that almost no principles have been applied until recently. Selfish economic 'forces', i.e. people, have ruled without restraint.)

The situation here is no different than with respect to theism. For the theist, ultimate justification of ethics resides in a view about the nature of God. But the theist is not prevented, *qua* theist, from invoking less ultimate ethical principles.

The pantheist's ethic, her environmental ethic and her ethics more generally, will be metaphysically based in terms of the divine Unity. It will be based on the Unifying principle which accounts for an important commonality, and it will be the grounds for extending one's notion of the moral community to other living and non-living things. Everything that is part of the divine Unity (as everything is) is also part of the moral community. Aldo Leopold says, "The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively, the land ... A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise."³¹ Looking towards pantheism as a metaphysical justification of, for example, Leopold's 'land ethic' is not unreasonable – or rather no more unreasonable than pantheism itself is.

An anthropocentric view of morality can at best make the non-human and non-living world an object of moral consideration. But it cannot, according to some, provide a basis for regarding those things as having a 'good' of their own or as being non-human members of a moral community. This may satisfy those who think, as Brennan does, that an environmentally sound ethic need not or cannot rely on 'enlarging' our notion of the moral community in the sense in which Leopold or the deep ecologists advocate; and that regarding the non-human and non-living world as having 'moral considerability' from an anthropocentric perspective suffices. Indeed, it had better suffice in Brennan's view since it is the only basis that can be rationally justified and provide morally adequate reasons for action. His reasons, as we have seen, partly have to do with his notion of personal identity; but they are enforced by his claim that an anthropocentric view should not be abandoned because, practically speaking, it cannot be. What he means by an anthropocentric view is an egoistic one. The only practical basis for a feasible environmental ethic is one that enforces a belief in the congruence between what is good for the environment, and what humans regard as serving their ends. What is morally speaking environmentally right must be seen as good for humans.

Others, however – including pantheists and theists – will generally reject any environmental ethic as unsound if it fails to regard the non-human world as a full-fledged member of the moral community. In their view, to do otherwise is ultimately to rest the prospects of environmental well-being on the good will of the only members of the moral community there are – humans. This is seen like resting the welfare of colonies on the goodwill of the colonisers. In order to enlarge our understanding of the moral community in the appropriate ways a metaphysical basis for an environmental ethic is needed which limits the significance of the anthropocentric view.

Furthermore, it is clear that those, like deep ecologists, who argue that our

notion of the moral community must be enlarged to include the 'good' of the non-human and non-living, and that it is metaphysically correct to do so, also claim that practical consequences *are* involved. The issue is not merely one of providing a rational basis for an environmental ethic. The results that both deep ecologists and Brennan think are desirable coincide to some extent, though they differ significantly as well. Brennan thinks these desirable goals can only be obtained through 'ethical polymorphism' and ecological humanism. These views do not rely on a radically different concept of 'moral community' and reject 'systemic value'. But the metaphysically minded deep ecologist, or pantheist, claims that the desired results can only be obtained by changing our concept of what constitutes the moral community.

It may seem that pantheists can claim that ethics and an approach to ecology should be kept separate from, or that they are separate from, the more general pantheistic view that asserts the existence of a divine Unity. A kind of 'separation between church and environment' might be proposed. But I doubt that such a separation is possible. The pantheist, like the theist or atheist takes the nature of reality as determinative of ethical requirements. Since Unity is predicated upon some evaluative consideration (e.g. the divine Unity being constituted on the basis of 'goodness'), value is a focal point for the pantheist and a principal concern. This situation in regard to pantheism is not too different from the one for theism. For the theist, ethical requirements and evaluative concerns of all sorts are connected to God's alleged goodness, and overall nature.

NOTES

¹ Owen 1971, p.74. See pp. 65-75. MacIntyre 1967. Cf., Macquarrie 1984, pp. 51-2.

² Toland 1976, pp. 32-3. The term 'pantheism' was possibly first coined by Toland in 1705. Cf., McFarland 1969, pp. 266-267.

³ Passmore 1974, p. 10. Cited in Sessions 1977, p. 516 n.11.

⁴ There are a variety of ways in which pantheistic 'Unity' is explained. For Spinoza, Unity is explained as following from his substance monism. However, pantheistic Unity is usually understood naturalistically in terms of a unifying force or principle evaluatively interpreted. Pantheists do not, and never have, simply equated the world with God as Schopenhauer claims. Cf., my articles and book listed below.

⁵ See Sayre-McCord 1988, p. 13. The reason the assumption is mistaken according to Sayre-McCord is because, as Alexander Rosenberg (1990) says,

... naturalism – has again become fashionable in metaethics. This is the brace of theses that (a) the conditions that make some moral claims true are facts about the world and its denizens, ontologically no different from the facts dealt with in physics or psychology, and (b) the way in which we come to know such claims to be true is identical to the ways in which scientific claims are acquired ... To be plausible, moral realism needs to avoid any tincture of ethical intuitionism or metaphysical mystery mongering. Naturalism is the only option available to realism for avoiding the charge that its metaphysical and epistemological

foundations are untenable.

The view that to be plausible, moral realism must rest on moral ‘naturalism’ as described above is of course rejected by theists and pantheists who are nonnaturalists. The idea that nonnaturalist moral realism (e.g. some types of theistic or pantheistic moral realism) is “metaphysical mystery mongering” or that naturalism is at least *prima facie* more plausible than nonnaturalism – or even that it avoids “metaphysical mystery mongering” – is contentious and question begging.

⁶ There are also theistic and (possibly) pantheistic, forms of moral naturalism. Richard Swinburne (1977, chapter 11) gives a theistic naturalistic account of ethics. Presumably, naturalistic accounts such as Swinburne’s run afoul of Sayre-McCord’s criteria for acceptable foundations for moral realism on the grounds that a connection between theism and naturalism renders naturalism untenable.

⁷ Even if the pantheist eschews any notion of ‘supernatural’ properties, her moral realism will be based on some nonnatural property that will be equally objectionable to the new breed of moral realists who, as others before them have tried to do, base their realism on ethical ‘naturalism’.

⁸ The claim that pantheists and theists are ‘nonnaturalists’ is complicated by the fact that although to say ‘moral properties are nonnatural’ means they are distinct from natural ones; it does not (necessarily) mean that moral properties are not entailed by, or do not *supervene* upon the possession of natural properties. Some ethical naturalists believe that possession of a moral property is the possession of a natural property. But one need not believe this to be an ethical naturalist. Those who hold moral properties are *nonnatural* because they are logically distinct from natural properties, may also be *ethical naturalists* if they believe that moral properties are entailed by, or supervene upon, natural properties.

This kind of naturalism (i.e. one which holds that moral properties are nonnatural but supervenient upon natural ones) is not to be confused with what Swinburne calls ‘anti-naturalism’ which also holds that moral properties, being distinct from natural properties, are nonnatural properties. He describes anti-naturalism as the view that “possession of natural properties never entails possession of moral properties. Moral properties are logically distinct from natural properties, and so it is logically possible that any moral property be possessed by an object with any combination of natural properties.” Swinburne 1977, p. 185.

⁹ Taylor 1975, pp. 177-178.

¹⁰ Contrary to nonnaturalism, naturalism entails that moral claims are (to some extent) empirically verifiable in ways identical to those by which other matters of fact are verified. If one knows that having a particular moral property is entailed by the possession of certain natural properties, then showing that some action has such properties will thereby show it also has the moral property.

¹¹ Cf., G.E. Moore, *Principia Ethica*. Also, Adams 1987. Adams does not explain ‘nonnatural’ in terms of empirical verifiability. Instead, he says “a nonnatural fact is one which does not consist simply in any fact or complex of facts which can be stated entirely in the language of physics, chemistry, biology and human psychology” (p.105). Adams says

Given that the facts of wrongness asserted in Judeo-Christian ethics are nonnatural ... in what do they consist? According to the divine command theory ... insofar as they are nonnatural and objective, they consist in facts about the will or commands of God ... It is clear, I think, that in stating that X is wrong a believer normally commits himself to the view that X is contrary to the will or commands

of God. And the fact (if it is a fact) that X is contrary to the will or commands of

God is surely a nonnatural objective fact. (p.106).

It is one thing to say “that in stating that X is wrong a believer normally commits himself to the view that X is contrary to the will or commands of God”. It is *another thing* to maintain that “facts of moral wrongness ... insofar as they are nonnatural and objective ... consist in facts about the will or command of God”.

¹² Swinburne 1977. According to Swinburne, theism maintains (or should maintain) that “moral properties are distinct from natural properties but “possession of the former is entailed by possession of certain of the latter”. (See pp. 184-187). Thus, Swinburne disagrees with R.M. Adams’s claim that “typically, the Judeo-Christian believer is a nonnaturalist”. Adams says “that X is contrary to the will or commands of God is surely a nonnatural objective fact”. Nor does this nonnatural fact appear to be entailed by, or supervene upon, any natural properties according to Adams. He does not say so at any rate (Adams 1987, pp. 105-6). But on Swinburne’s account this does not suffice to make theistic ethics nonnaturalistic. Granted that ‘X is contrary to the will of God’ is a nonnatural objective fact, this will not be, in many cases, what *makes* an action wrong.

¹³ Adams 1987, p. 105.

¹⁴ Armstrong 1976, p. 188. Armstrong denies that Plotinus was a pantheist, but there are significant pantheistic elements in Plotinus. See my *Pantheism*, forthcoming.

¹⁵ Jantzen 1984, pp. 156-157.

¹⁶ Lloyd 1980, pp. 293-294. Cf., Naess 1980; 1977. Also, see Mathews 1990. Mathews is original in her pursuit of fundamental Spinozistic themes in relation to the metaphysical bases of ecological issues.

¹⁷ Lloyd 1980, pp. 306-310. In the deep ecology movement’s search for a metaphysical basis for their environmental ethic they have focused mostly on Spinoza, but other pantheistic systems might serve them better. However, since a well-developed general pantheistic metaphysics is lacking (i.e., there are only specific systems like Spinoza’s, Plotinus’s etc.) deep ecologists would likely find themselves constructing rather than discovering the required metaphysics. This is a task philosophically minded deep ecologists might turn themselves to – as most already have to varying degrees.

¹⁸ Cf., Taylor 1975, p. 31. “A person’s only duty is to promote his own good as much as possible ... being moral ... never requires a sacrifice of one’s own long-range interests.”

¹⁹ Sessions 1977, p. 508.

²⁰ Hampshire 1951, p. 115. “[Spinoza’s] metaphysics and dependent theory of knowledge are designed to show man’s place in nature as a thinking being. Spinoza always argued that, until this is understood, nothing can be said about the nature and possibility of human happiness and freedom” (p. 115). Cited in Sessions 1977, p. 519 n.25.

²¹ Lloyd 1980, pp. 293-294. Perhaps the principle reason for not looking towards Spinoza as a basis for environmental ethics is that “the whole is too abstruse and, in some crucial respects, too alien to modern thought” (p.294).

²² Wood 1985, pp. 157, 160-161.

²³ Wood 1985, p. 152. His pantheism is distant from Spinoza’s identification of God with nature, and much closer to nature mysticism. In fact it is nature mysticism. He talks about interacting with ‘God-as-nature’. With the important exception of Spinoza, pantheists generally do not equate God with nature. But Wood’s account of pantheism is not altogether inconsonant with a naturalistic model of pantheistic Unity; one that predicates Unity on the basis of a unifying force(s) or principle(s). The idea of unifying principles is also present in nature mysticism, which is really what Wordsworth’s and the other

Romantics' pantheism is. It is also in classical literature and music (e.g. 'pantheistic overtones' in Beethoven's music). The idea that Unity is rooted in nature is what types of nature mysticism (e.g., Wordsworth and Robinson Jeffers, Gary Snyder) have in common with more philosophically robust versions of pantheism. It is why nature mysticism and philosophical pantheism are conflated and confused with one another. But they are distinguishable in theory – even though they both talk about unity and are partly the result of the same intimations and feelings. Nature mysticism, however, is as compatible with theism as it is with pantheism.

²⁴ Cf., Brennan 1988, p. 134. Robin Attfield (1983: 63) has argued that the Judaeo-Christian tradition does not promote an exploitative ethic towards the environment and non-human world, but embodies the attitude that we are “custodians and stewards of a precious natural order”. For a different view see Passmore 1980. Cf., Lipner 1984. Lipner says, “... Ramanuja's body-of God theology, in its very choice of the 'body' term ... looks positively on the world of materiality ... but, Ramanuja's articulation introduces a much-needed note of radical ambiguity to the 'body' idea. Though in its microscopic application the self-body relation is intended to be a benign one ... the relationship remains an open one in that the body... (really, in this context, one's material body, but by extension, the material world) may 'rebel'... and thwart the true goal(s) of the self ... [M]atter has to be understood ... for what it is and what it can do – its 'co-operation has to be sought. Allied to this insight is a much-needed corrective for the western world ... with its Nature-exploitative and anti-ecological ethics derived from *Genesis* I: 26-30. We subdue and dominate, rather than co-operate” (p. 160).

²⁵ See Brennan 1988, pp. 31-35 for the distinction between scientific and metaphysical ecology.

²⁶ See Brennan 1988, p. 139 for references to others who give an account of “the *moral considerability* of non-human beings”.

²⁷ 'Ethical holism' is not to be confused with 'ecological holism'. For Brennan's discussion and rejection of ecological holism see Brennan 1988 pp. 180-182, 202.

²⁸ For Brennan's critique of various ethical theories and a defence of his claim that “modern ethical theory ... suffers from ignoring ecological facts of life” (p. 174), see Brennan 1988 Chapter 11, “The Environment and Conventional Moral Theory”; Chapter 12, “Beyond the Social Contract”.

²⁹ For a discussion of 'ethical polymorphism' see Brennan 1988, p. 186, cf., pp. 186-190. 'Ethical polymorphism' as it is characterised here, is somewhat reminiscent of Joseph Fletcher's 'situation ethics'. A common criticism of 'situation ethics' is that it is *ad hoc*. That it is *ad hoc* can also be seen as its principal virtue. See Fletcher 1966.

³⁰ Brennan notes some deep ecologists would “be suspicious” of his account of their position. For the original paper on deep ecology see Naess 1973; cf., Naess 1983; 1986; Callicott 1983.

³¹ Leopold 1949, pp. 219, 240. The philosophical Taoism of the *Tao Te Ching* captures something of what Leopold is after. It is probably the most pantheistic traditional religious text.

[I]n the *Tao Te Ching* we have a clear statement of a naturalistic Heaven which is wholly indifferent to the struggles of human life. In Lao Tzu's philosophical system, it is man's lot to cope with the problems of the human sphere, and this can best be accomplished by emulating the pattern of the universe – the Tao – and developing according to our intrinsic natures. By developing according to what

is natural, we not only realise our full human potential, but further, we do not interfere with the cosmic harmony.
(Ch'en Ku-ying 1981, p.45 of the introduction by Young and Ames.)

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