

Michael York

Pagan Ethics

Paganism as a World Religion

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*Dedicated to the memory of Johannes
“Joop” Slagter Friesian poet*

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Part I
Introduction

Chapter 1

Overview

Black Rock City and the Monarch's Birthday celebrations in Amsterdam represent two ephemeral moments of humanity at her extravagant best – the one being a makeshift 'city' of 60,000 people gathering for the Burning Man Festival in an inhospitable Nevada desert; the other being a nation's honoring of itself through its monarch in the land at the mouth of the Rhine that artist Jim Clark has identified as the '*riool van Europa*'.¹ Both events, one a week-long and the other a day or two, express the extreme joyousness of collective association. Burning Man establishes itself as a 'gift economy' of radical self-expression in which the only items sold are coffee and ice²; The Netherlands is a birthplace of capitalism in a country in which individual freedoms are perhaps the most established of any other nation in the world and the Amsterdam birthday festivities reveal capital exchange and accumulation at its most gentle and understandable.³

Both Burning Man and the Queen's or King's Birthday are pagan in spirit. Both express the euphoria and gregariousness that can – even should – characterize the human adventure on planet earth. But both are marginal to mainstream life – one occurring in a wasteland in which not even insects are to be found; the other in a bog and terrain that has been wrestled from the sea. With global warming and the possibility if not likelihood of rising sea levels, the very future of Holland is increasingly in doubt. But however temporary, each celebration allows a glimpse of *the* happy life and the ethical freedom that is concurrent with it. Normal life, of course, occurs well short of such extremes, and yet an understanding of ethical behavior is no less important. Any examination of morality can hold up the Burning

¹'Sewer of Europe'.

²See http://www.burningman.com/whatisburningman/about_burningman/principles.html (accessed 22 July 06) for the 'Ten Principles' of Burning Man, namely, radical inclusion, gifting, decommodification, radical self-reliance, radical self-expression, communal effort, civic responsibility, leaving no trace, participation and immediacy.

³For the Dutch celebration, see <http://www.thehollandring.com/koninginnedag.shtml> as well as <http://www.answers.com/topic/koninginnedag> (accessed 22 July 06).

Man and Queen's Birthday as ideal models but must concentrate instead on how we live on an ordinary day-to-day basis. If paganism is expressed by the fringe and unusual, it is no less at home with the atavistic, the vernacular and the everyday mundane, and if we are to locate a pagan ethic that is applicable to all who consider themselves pagan, if not as well to all human beings of whatever faith or practice, we must begin with those pagan energies that infuse and are discoverable in the ordinary. In other words, to comprehend paganism is to comprehend ethics and, vice versa, to appreciate the ethical is to be familiar with the pagan foundation of life.

What, then, is this book to be about? For me, it has been attempt to understand *both* a pagan ethical understanding that I perceive to be implicit behind most pagan and Pagan expressions, and as well to fathom a global conversation concerning ethics in which I will insist paganism has played and continues to play a significant role. If need be, however, I will accept that I am endeavoring to develop what could be termed a pagan idolatrous ethics. The reaffirmation of idolatry as either a concrete practice or a spiritual endorsement is, I feel, a vital distinction that contrasts earthen and related spiritualities from competing religiosities, at least ideally, including especially the Abrahamic religions.

Perhaps in my understanding, the best way to understand the dynamic that elucidates paganism is to acknowledge the fundamental interchange between the terms 'pagan' and 'human' – especially with the latter in the sense of 'earthling'. To be human, whether we recognize it or not, is to be pagan and vice versa. The fuller implication of this terminological equivalence suggests that 'paganism' and 'humanism' are also synonymous. I contend this despite the more traditional understandings of humanism as either rationalism or secularism. As we shall proceed, I will attempt to make clear the importance of secularism both to paganism itself and as a liberating wedge between paganism and the Abrahamic and dharmic faiths in particular. Following in the line of Graham Harvey's 'new animism' (that concerns relationships between persons) in contrast to the 'old animism' (focused on alleged 'spirits' inherent in inanimate objects), the 'new humanism' equivalent of 'paganism' is one that recognizes the importance of the human *qua* human but within both natural and preternatural contexts.

In my *Pagan Theology* (2003), I attempted to elucidate three overlapping areas: a delineation of those religions that may be comprehended as pagan (e.g., Shinto, Candomblé, Wicca, etc.) in order to discern what elements or features they have in common, an exploration of the pagan behavior of the other world religions to explicate the overall atavistic pagan impulse that belongs to humanity in general, and to distinguish the theological divide between what we are permitted to identify as pagan belief and practice, on the one hand, and what is transcendental or gnostic religiosity, on the other. For various historical reasons, paganism as a religion has not been appreciated as such vis-à-vis the more established practices of Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Judaism, that is, those religions belonging to well-over 90 % of the world's population. Nevertheless, my contention in the previous book has been the pagan propensity which is characteristic and detectable in the human *qua* human. For paganism as a specific religious orientation, the salient features include a this-worldly emphasis, a corporeal understanding of the spiritual,

a stress on nature and the natural, an appreciation of deity as multiple and gender differentiated, humanistic valuing and an approach to the sacred as pleasurable and to pleasure as sacred. While paganism is notoriously difficult to pinpoint and define, my argument has been and remains that these specific considerations are what is shared between the various religiosities, spiritualities and venerational practices that we may identify broadly as pagan.

In the present work, my attention has turned to ethics. In particular, I want to locate what we might identify as the moral position of generic paganism that even the specific sectarian forms of paganism could be understood as sharing. Historically, ethical study and consideration has been born in paganism. In other words, morality is a pagan product. But even more than this, I contend that paganism *is* ethics, that is, that paganism is a particular understanding of the divine that merits a particular kind of relationship to it, for it, by it and from it, namely, an ethical relationship. Consequently, in understanding pagan ethics or ethics in general, it behooves us to discern the contributions made to ethical reflection by classical pagan philosophers and schools of thought. I wish to stress here, however, that I am *not* seeking to frame ethics in philosophy, though I recognize the importance of philosophical thought in the evolution of ethics as well as the mere fact that ethics constitute one of the major branches of philosophy. But to the degree that contemporary paganism seeks to reestablish itself in the public arena, the seminal roots of pagan ethical reflection are important, and I shall seek to present a brief digest of the earliest classical contributions – ones I will argue remain very much alive and present for paganism – and the world – today.

Although I could be accused by some for having left sociology for theological research and/or visioning, I will contend that my affinity is with the sociologist Peter Berger and such works of his like *The Sacred Canopy* and *A Rumor of Angels*. Theology itself is an important consideration for the sociologist and helps in understanding the dynamics within any particular religious practice. In my own search for the 'ideal-type' behind religious differentiation, my argument concerns not any lumping of indigenous religions, pre-Christian folk religions, shamanisms, etc. across time and space into some unitary belief system, but instead to discern an early spiritual perception and how it was different from the historical religious developments that followed and remains discernable to our own times. If this endeavor sounds more poetic than academic, then so be it, but to lump all religion into one pot without comprehending how faiths and practices differ from one to another hampers our desires for knowledge, sociological or otherwise. At the same time, contemporary paganism is nascent and represents an ongoing rediscovery of a way of seeing and assessing the world that contrasts with both Abrahamic and dharmic perspectives as well as with secular disenchantment. Consequently, even when attempting to locate the inherent theological perspective within pagan perception, pagan theology is not bound by the textual canons, rules of interpretation, methods and disciplinary boundaries such as exist for the academic discipline concerning traditional religions. In our day, paganism is formative, but with its roots in the organic, natural and environmental, I will argue that despite the enormous variation in pagan expression, there is more unity involved regardless of the myriad

pluralistic differences in cultural and social contexts, cross-practices, high and low traditions, social stratification in terms of age, gender, lineage, status and ethnicity, etc. Although it differs from its historical contenders (e.g., Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism), there is a real pagan tradition. It is not a ‘made-up’ one but a re-discovered one and yet one that now in a different era and situation cannot be said to have existed in the same way as it or the many different paganisms existed previously.

But I have a second agenda in the present work which stems in part from my contention that pagan and human are essentially equivalent terms. If an understanding of pagan ethics is important, equally important is an understanding of a viable human ethic that might assist us in locating an equable good life for most if not all people on our planet. Consequently, while I argue that paganism has a more universal appeal and relevance to persons who do not necessarily identify themselves as pagan, its ethics are important for us all in not only coming to terms with what we hold to be of value in life but in whatever negotiations we must all engage with to be fully human yet respectful of each and everyone’s right for a life of meaning and fulfillment. If religion serves as a means to distinguish the valuable and meaningful, ethics inform us on how to engage with whatever it is we hold to be of worth and significance.

My task in the present work is to investigate not only the pagan roots to ethics but, inasmuch as ethics are something that matter to all of us whether we identify as pagan or not, also to consider some of the key players in post-classical ethical debate. The area of ethics is huge. It is arguably the most important to us as human beings and is one that has occupied an endless amount of human attention let alone artistic endeavor. In exploring ethics and pagan ethics in particular, the present work is only a mere sampling of the many treasures that the legacy of human culture contains – a legacy that we all share as we navigate our individual and collective courses through life on this marvelous planet.

After the exploration of the pagan and philosophical facets of ethical study, I shall turn in Part III to a presentation of the virtue-values that appear to me to be universally normative to pagan and human ethical pursuit. To this end, I have devoted two chapters on liberty, comfort, health, worship, pleasure, productivity and generosity – a grouping of common denominator dispositions that I identify as a heptatheonic⁴ collectivity comprising a fundamental quadrivium (Chap. 11) and a trivium subset (Chap. 12), that is, the four principle virtue-values and the three auxiliary components of worship itself. These seven I argue could be considered the distilled essences of all morality and consideration of the good life. They interrelate and serve as a guiding dynamic of ethical checks and balances.

But if moral norms are the ideal, it is the ethical dilemmas and quagmires that are the reality. Consequently, in Part IV, I will examine various contemporary issues to discern what a prevailing pagan position on these might be and how this position contrasts with a more traditional or established outlook. To this

⁴An *heptatheon* is a pantheon of seven figures: *hepta* ‘seven’ + *theon* ‘gods’.

end, while the particular foci selected are not meant to be comprehensive, they are nonetheless illustrative of specific areas of contention that have arisen in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. These include questions concerning same-sex unions, recreational drugs, hegemony, environment, terrorism and the death-issues of abortion, suicide, physician-assisted suicide, capital punishment, etc. Once again, these issues are examined both as humanitarian concerns in general and pagan concerns in particular.

Paganism for many is a religion; for others like myself it is approached as a generic spirituality and hence not capitalized. This is known contemporarily as the ‘Big P- versus the small p-’ distinction,⁵ and I find myself in concurrence with Andras Corban-Arthen who likewise argues for ‘paganism’ over ‘Paganism’.⁶ Generic spirituality is itself not a religion and does not oppose any religion.⁷ What is meant by the generically spiritual might be gleaned in part from Finkeldey’s description of ‘generic’ medicine as “the medicine itself apart from the trappings of the original manufacturer’s marketing department.”⁸ In other words, generic spirituality is the natural religious response without the obfuscation that comes with the overlay of dogma and doctrine. The generically spiritual is vernacular religiosity, and in as much as it comprises the raw natural spontaneity of human mystical perception, it is the pagan undercurrent to all religion as well as the many sectarian formulations of paganism itself. It is primarily for this reason that I stress the importance of using non-specific paganism over Paganism as a religion or any specific ‘Pagan’ religion.

⁵See <https://finnchuillsmast.wordpress.com/2013/10/05/why-i-dont-capitalize-pagan/> (accessed 9 February 2015). In my writings, I have always preferred and employed the term ‘paganism’ over that of ‘Paganism’ and for several reasons. In the face of editorial ‘dictatorship’ such as I have encountered with *The Pomegranate*, my usage has been altered in the final publication from the original submitted manuscript. In the pluralism that is characteristic of contemporary Western p/Paganism, however, I am not alone and made this argument to Dennis Carpenter back in the days of submissions to the Pagan Spirit Alliance. I fully respect the efforts of Selena Fox and many others to have ‘Paganism’ accepted as a fully legitimate religion along side such others like Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and Judaism, but the legal side of the question is not my present concern.

⁶Personal communication, 3–6 July 2014. Corban-Arthen points out that Europeans and Latin Americans (unlike Americans) tend not to capitalize ‘pagan’ as well as ‘christianity’, ‘islam’, the names for months and days of the weeks, etc. On 16 February 2015, he further clarifies for me the following: “As for the question of ‘p’ vs. ‘P’, I have several reasons for preferring the former to the latter. I don’t capitalize *pagan* for the same reason I don’t capitalize *animist*, or *polytheist*, or *indigenous*, etc. To me, all these words convey generic categories that are just not specific or homogenous enough to warrant capitalization. In the case of paganism, in particular, the pagan movement is notoriously incohesive: not only is there no single accepted definition of what paganism is, but large numbers of pagans, as a matter of principle, have strongly resisted any efforts to bring greater cohesion to the movement. On the face of that, to insist that *pagan* should be capitalized strikes me as naively optimistic, and perhaps even a little dishonest.”

⁷Michael Foster: <http://recoverybydiscovery.com/week0918.htm> (accessed 14 February 2015).

⁸<http://www.examiner.com/article/conscious-recovery-generic-spirituality-part-one>.

It is, of course, not my intention to annoy or upset anyone with my preference for ‘small p rather than big P’. I employ a capital letter for personal names (e.g., Abraham), place names (e.g., Israel, the West Bank), official designations (e.g., the United Nations, the Pagan Federation) and at the beginning of a sentence. Consequently, I tend to write ‘Abrahamic’ but not ‘dharmic’ or ‘secular’ in reference to three of what I perceive to be the world’s broad religio-spiritual orientations. ‘Paganism’, I argue is the fourth. I will admit that in the historic and even recent past, the use of the expression ‘paganism’ has been derogatory if not “offensive,” but it is exactly lower-case paganism that I choose to champion because for me it signals – and has always signaled – what distinguishes the old earth-spirituality and root-religious practice from *all* its competitors. For me, this is a reclaiming effort akin to the use of the words ‘witch’ and ‘witchcraft’. I do not expect everyone within the contemporary pagan/Pagan community to agree with me – far from it in fact, but I do wish for the indulgence and hopefully for the generosity of freedom of expression of which I understand that community predominantly to consist.

Another caveat concerns the pronouns ‘he’ and ‘she’. A reviewer has said, “The use of gendered pronouns is inconsistent and clumsy.” Again there is a nuance involved here, and my lack of consistency has been an attempt to express the fluidity of gender and the variety that has emerged with these pronouns in present times. I will, however, accept in general the reviewer’s preference for ‘he or she’ (or ‘he/she’ or even ‘s/he’), but at the heart of my grammatical soul, I am prevented from substituting the plural ‘their’ as a singular third person general pronoun much as I cannot refer to something as ‘very unique’.

Again I wish to stress that a basic guiding framework in understanding paganism and pagan ethics is informed by the realization that ‘pagan’ and ‘human’ are fundamentally interchangeable terms. There is a third term, however, while not fully an equivalent of the other two, that conveys the distinctive approach of paganism to the spiritual and ethical, namely, ‘natural’. While ‘pagan’, ‘human’ and ‘natural’ are not identical adjectives, pagans in both indigenous contexts and throughout much of the contemporary West will often use them as such. To be pagan is to be natural, to be pagan is to be human, to be human is to be natural, to be natural is to be human, to be human is to be pagan.

The pivotal issue that arises from this understanding is the contrast to the natural. For most people, this is the artificial, and Western history has often emerged as a contest between culture and nature as if the two are opposed and separate – a division that is still retained in much contemporary pagan thought. Throughout this present work, however, in order to achieve a clearer and more fundamental understanding of concepts and terminology I will turn to the inherent ‘logic of seminal etymology’, that is, toward an understanding of the original rationale behind the components that make up a word, in order to discern the word’s earliest significance. For instance, if we were to look to the root components of the term ‘artificial’, we find the words *art* (Latin *ars*) and Latin *facere* ‘to do, make’. The suggestion here is that the artificial is something that is made by man rather than something that occurs in nature. As an artifice, it is understood as a crafty expedient or artful device – having developed the auxiliary connotation of clever or ingenuous deception. In time, the emerging opposition becomes one between art and nature.

But if the human is natural, if humanity is part of nature – nature’s product or child rather than her master and engineer, what the human does and produces is also a condition of nature. For an emancipated pagan as for an emancipated human, art and the artistic are the sought for achievements. As we shall see later, ‘art’ and ‘ritual’ are cognate terms – ones that convey at heart matters that are simply ‘put together properly’. The making of art is not the creation of artificial things that are to be dichotomized from nature but rather the production of civilization that is grounded in the natural but serves as its flowering. Consequently, in this vast interplay between pagan, human, natural, artistic, cultural and civilized – between paganism, humanity, nature, art, culture and civilization, there can be no unmitigated rejection of the things we as humans make. True enough, we can make some better things than others, we can make things better, and we can also produce harmful and deleterious things. Certainly in the historical course of our march across this planet, we have made mistakes. We have produced weapons of mass destruction, we have engendered crusades, and we have mis-gardened when we should have had healthy crops and inspiring parks. But we must not consequently throw the baby out with the bathwater; we must instead recognize what have been our mistakes and seek to remedy them.

It is in the light of this understanding that this book centers on the notion of idolatry. The idol is essentially a work of art; it is human-made – or at least that which is traditionally condemned are the man-made figures that are worshipped. But because of its corpo-spirituality, its valuing of the physical in addition to any consideration of the ethereal or transcendental, I contend that paganism rejects the bias that has traditionally rejected idolatry. By focusing on the idolatrous, I seek in the pages that follow to elucidate the rationale and innovation that is paganism, to question the engrained iconoclastic sympathy and mind-set that has prevailed since the demise of classical paganism, and to reveal the importance of both the fashioned idol and unfashioned nature in pagan worship. Consequently, in seeking to discern a pagan and humanistic ethic, after this present ‘Overview’ (Chap. 1), in Chap. 2 this book examines the arguments both for and against idolatry. While our final endeavor is to elucidate some set of guidelines for a life that is oriented by pagan understandings of the world, nature and/or the cosmos and the mutual relationships between environment and both humanity and the miraculous, I shall ground this challenge in idolatry because I feel, and hope to convey in the next chapter, that there is a centrality of ‘idol worship’ to paganism or nature religion or both in terms of both tolerance and corpo-spirituality in which each allows – if not also encourages – the other.

Ethics

Without doubt, ethics represent the greatest quagmire of life. They have occupied a constant portion of human thought throughout its history, and we are perhaps no closer toward a viable understanding of just what exactly they are – let alone toward

any sort of definitive answers that ethical study and reflection aim to supply. In what is to follow, I wish to take the reader with me in a journey of investigation and discovery. This expedition may at times appear to meander, but I appeal to the reader to trust the process to the degree that a narrative text of exploration is an adventure for both the author and, hopefully, his audience alike. In the present section of this chapter, I focus on a brief survey of morality, the distinction between its relevant types of investigation and the notions of both evil and value. There are two branches to ethical inquiry: (1) the development of a code or set of principles by which to live, and (2) meta-ethics, that is, ethical theory that investigates either how people ought to behave, or what is the good life? While classical thinkers tended to assume that if one knows what the good life is, he or she will automatically live accordingly, we now know that this is not necessarily the case and that the two questions concerning the good life and correct behavior are not inevitably the same.

Meta-ethics is a tool toward the formulation of normative ethics – the development of a moral code to guide us in decisions concerning right and wrong (such as the use of the planet, taking a human life, etc.) Any investigation into a *pagan* ethics is an attempt to discern principles that shape or ought to shape a pagan's life (such as honor, virtue, pleasure, etc.) In general, meta-ethics are not a primary concern for most pagans who instead seek to locate the guiding norms of life as it is lived and directly experienced. In a sense, meta-ethics represent the *metaphysics* of ethics. They are nevertheless important to paganism inasmuch as they have been a significant part of pagan thought's historic development as well as its philosophic reflection, and to this end I wish to sketch out briefly the terminology, schools of thought and issues of debate that have been articulated as part of the more reflective aspect of ethical argument.

In the endeavor to understand the terms 'good', 'evil', 'right' and 'wrong', some of the greatest minds that have addressed the fundamental issues have, in fact, been pagan thinkers: Democritus, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, Diogenes of Sinope, Zeno of Citium and Marcus Aurelius. The schools of the pre-Socratics, Platonism, Eudaimonism, Stoicism, Cyrenaicism, Epicureanism and Cynicism also belong to the variety and permutations of pagan ethical thought. Beyond the classical world, there have been important Chinese contributions through Confucianism and Taoism. While these last constitute a detailed area of their own that is beyond the present book's immediate coverage, they may nevertheless be understood as broadly part of pagan ethics themselves.

Even beyond the pagan world or worlds, however, such Church fathers as Augustine and Thomas Aquinas have played important roles in the development of ethical thought itself. Later milestones of one sort or another have been achieved by Benedict Spinoza (1632–1677), David Hume (1711–1776), Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832), John Stuart Mill (1806–1873), Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) and John Dewey (1859–1952) among others. More contemporary offerings in the meta-ethical field are to be found in the likes of George Santayana (1863–1952), G.E. (George Edward) Moore (1873–1958), Moritz Schlick (1882–1936), Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980), Emmanuel Levinas

(1906–1995), A.J. (Alfred Jules) Ayer (1910–1989), Albert Camus (1913–1960), Jürgen Habermas (b.1929), etc. But finally, in dove-tailing the meta-ethical back to the normative in terms of a pagan perspective, there are important elucidations to be found in the underlying ethical and axial formulations of such peoples as the Kemetics, Vedics, Greeks, Romans, Germanics, Celts, Shintoists, Afro-Latins, Amerindians and shamanists. These various groups are the focus of Chap. 15. Among the contemporary Western pagan developments, further considerations might include both the ecological biases of deep pagans and the Wiccan Rede as well as the ‘an it harm none’ high-choice ethics vis-à-vis the ‘do what you will’ best-choice ethics.

Evil

Evil is not a pagan concept *per se*, and contemporary Western pagans frequently discount it as, like Satan, a Christian or Abrahamic invention. As part of the inquiry into ethics – both pagan and universal, I wish here to present briefly some of the different perspectives on what evil is. Foremost, evil is defined in opposition to good. As the negative of goodness, it may be a force in its own right – as we see in dualistic Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism and even in Christianity, or simply as a privation – the absence of the good, such as Augustine understood. But Augustine also argued, as did Avicenna, that evil is largely perspectival rather than an entity or power. If one looks at it from within a wider context, it may no longer be seen as a negative but instead as something functionally positive. For Leibnitz, there is a metaphysical type of evil, while Schelling holds that evil is a first principle of the universe – traced to what is even antecedent to God and ultimately balanced or disproportionately mitigated by God’s love. In a way, Schelling is adhering to a Neo-platonic position that insists evil is an automatic aspect of the mind-matter dualism in which the corporeal is the furthest emanation from pure spirit and evil is its intrinsic concomitant.

Buddhism,⁹ on the other hand, understands evil as the unavoidable product of desire. Eliminate desire, and evil ceases as well. Differently, but still related, the neo-Confucian philosopher Chang Tsai (1020–1077) argues that it is the violation of human equilibrium through excess that results in evil. This is a formulation of what is known as the Doctrine of the Golden Mean. In the West, this doctrine originates with Aristotle. The Greek philosopher holds that virtue lies in the successful navigation between opposite extremes. Like Chang Tsai, excess (as well as, in Aristotle’s case, deficiency) is the root of imbalance and the lack or loss of virtue. The Buddhist ‘Middle Way’ is similar, but the goal of freedom from desire is not harmony or happiness but nirvana or oblivion.

⁹See <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/health/3047291.stm> (accessed 19 April 2011) that claims Buddhists are happier than non-Buddhists.

A different understanding of evil – one that is also a part of the pagan legacy – is that it is, or arises from, ignorance. Socrates is one of those who held this view, and he believed that if one were to *know* the good, it would be impossible for that person to subscribe to evil. In Socratic thought, knowledge and virtue are identical. Similarly, the Stoic Chrysippus (c.280–206 bce) understood evil as contrary to individual and world reason. While evil for Socrates is ignorance, for Chrysippus it is irrationality.

The problem of evil for the Christian arises from the need to account for its existence despite a God that is considered both benevolent and all-powerful. The branch of Christian effort that attempts to explain the existence of evil regardless of the love and justice of God is known as theodicy (*theos-dikē* ‘God-justice’). This is a peculiar problem for theism and one that does not particularly burden paganism. A pantheistic understanding of evil, resonant with some pagan thought, was put forth in the eleventh century ce by the Hindu philosopher Ramanuja. Opposed to Vedanta philosopher Shankara’s consideration that the phenomenal world is illusory (*māyā*), Ramanuja affirmed the corporeal world and its multiplicity as the body of Brahman, the core self of all things. He thereby limited evil to the *body* of God and, at the same time, encouraged the devotional practices of Hinduism known as *bhakti* by providing the justification for traditional idol-worship.

However, a different approach that also has an affinity to a pagan attitude is, rather than to limit evil to an aspect of God, to restrict the notion of God himself/itself. Two philosophers who have worked in this direction are Hastings Rashdall (1858–1924) and Edgar Sheffield Brightman (1884–1952). The Oxford-based Rashdall held that matter exists only for mind and that minds exist independently of each other (this is the metaphysical position of Personal Idealism). Consequently, God is understood as the force that wills the absolutely moral – although his power is limited. In other words, God is not held responsible for evil. Likewise, Boston-based Brightman, a leading exponent of American Personalism, argued for the notion of a finite God – one not allowed to outweigh human freedom. Evil is an *a priori*, and it becomes the focus of God’s effort.

While neither Rashdall nor Brightman are pagan as such, they echo to some extent what is known as process theology – an understanding that is popular with many contemporary pagans. Process theology developed out of the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947) and stresses ‘becoming’ over ‘being’. Akin to the Greek philosopher Heraclitus, Whitehead contrasts process to substance. Rather than on God’s self-sufficiency, process theology focuses upon his involvement with the world and the slow process of overcoming evil and chance within it. Although seen by many as a theistic attempt to answer the dilemma of theodicy and concentrate on God’s love instead of his omnipotence, there is the contrasting neo-orthodox position of Karl Barth (1886–1968) and Reinhold Niebuhr (1892–1971) that rejects process theology as a form of – or at least leading to – pantheism. In many respects, the process theological view is more at home with paganism than it is with canonical Christianity.

Consequently, evil is understood for both pagan and Christian alike as the antithesis of good or value. Moral evil is something/anything that is wrong; religious

evil is known as sin, but the essential feature of both is their function of being harmful and undesirable. Evil is that which causes pain; it is also that which is disapproved – as being against either purpose or virtue. Evil can embrace ignorance, error, disease, negative will, ugliness, maladjustment, irreverence, incompetence or stasis. In essence, especially from a pagan perspective, it is a relative term – being defined by what it excludes or negates. As we shall see with value, however, evil can be either instrumental (a means to an end) or intrinsic (naturally inherent). For the most part, paganism does not comprise the belief that something can be evil in and of itself. Evil is more likely understood as something that is *done* than as something which *is* in any ontological sense. Additionally, especially for much contemporary Western paganism, there is a dominant reluctance to pass judgments on what evil is because of the possibility of infringing upon another person's or group's freedom. What the negative is is something that a person must decide for himself/herself.

Meta-ethics and Value

In the study of ethics, stress can be variously placed: either on the principles of behavior, or on the consequences of what is done. With meta-ethics, we encounter the more complex aspects of ethical study. For most of us, this is not personally important, and the less interested reader is invited to proceed directly to the following section on the format of this book. But I feel that for those who are more deeply concerned, a brief sketching of the range of ethical theory is important, and the following 12 paragraphs are recommended or at least might be used as an assisting reference. The relationship between meta-ethics to ethics parallels the one between metaphysics and physics. One is grounded and immediate; the other is abstract and speculative. First, I wish to make clear that ethics are values, or at least a type of value. As such, the study of ethics may be seen as part of the broader inquiry into value, the philosophical field known as axiology.¹⁰ Value (worth, goodness; valuation) itself is primarily something that is selected, something that is chosen or rejected, and is, accordingly, distinguished from fact (an actual event, a tangible property). Facts are what are recognized – usually through empirical observation of one sort or another. For some thinkers, values are also a type of fact, but in general they are variously distinguished as being natural or non-natural, essentialistic or existentialistic, absolute or relative, objective or subjective, cognitive or non-cognitive, or justifiable or non-justifiable. The German philosopher, Max Scheler (1874–1928), for instance, considers values to be non-

¹⁰As Urban (Runes 1956: 48) suggests, “Ethics is itself not axiology but presupposes it.” For axiology as a whole, along with ethical values, there are also aesthetical, technical, pragmatic, hedonic and teleological values among other possibilities.

temporal essences that possess objective validity.¹¹ Some contend that the ‘ought’ question is the question of meta-ethics and the ‘means’ question is that of normative ethics or the designing of codes of behavior that are designed to tell us how we should behave.

With meta-ethics, there are three chief ways of analyzing the possibilities for rightness or goodness – two concern determining how people ought to behave, and one considers the approach to value as either objective or subjective. Among the more significant meta-ethical schools of thought are the deontological, formalist, axiological and teleological means of determining how people are to understand rightness or the good. And there is as well as the objective and subjective interpretations of what is value.

Formalist Meta-ethics

Behavioral determination, or how we should behave ethically, can be based on either the principles involved or the results achieved. If we select principles as the determinative factor, there are two kinds of theories. The formalist view is that which recognizes principle or universal truth (e.g., honesty, compassion, justice) as the basis of rightful behavior.¹² For instance, Socrates insisted that inner principle is more important than the consequence of an action. He accepted the Athenian state-imposed death penalty because of his conviction that it is better to suffer than to do wrong.

Deontological Meta-ethics

When, by contrast, it is behavior itself that is considered as the most important, deontologists understand *correct* behavior to be the fulfilment of obligation to the principle whatever the consequences (*fiat justitia ruat coelom* ‘let justice be done,

¹¹But like the conceptual and perceptual realms of concepts and percepts, respectively, Scheler’s values have objective and subjective poles (e.g., goodness as an independent essence vis-à-vis goodness as a personal attitude). He constructs a hierarchy that begins with sensory values superseded by life values. Over these are spiritual values, and on top is what he refers to as religious values. Beginning as a phenomenologist, Scheler converted to Roman Catholicism in 1920, but his final 4 years of life sees him as a vitalist and pantheist. When we look for the ethical in Scheler’s understanding, we find it as part of his spiritual value – along with the aesthetic and epistemological. Among Scheler’s works, there is *On Resentment and Moral Value Judgments* (1912) and his two volume *Formalism in Ethics and the Material Value Ethic* (1913–1916).

¹²For ethical formalists, the logical form of moral judgments is more important than their content, that is, their conformity to universal laws. Moral law is prescriptive and rational and not factual, descriptive or emotional. The formalist view has been held by people such as Socrates, the Stoics, the Earl of Shaftesbury (1671–1713), Francis Hutcheson (1694–1746), Joseph Butler (1692–1752), Immanuel Kant, Henry Sidgwick (1838–1900) and Brand Blanchard (1892–1987).

though the heavens should fall'). Duty, obligation, responsibility or commitment is, for them, the central principle that determines whether an action that conforms to such is ethical or not. For Kant, an action's rightness is unaffected by its consequences; it is the right thing to do, come what may.

Axiological Meta-ethics

Another way to assess that a behavior is correct is to be determined by its actual consequences, whether good or whether bad. Axiological theories of ethics consider the value aspect of the behavior that is necessary in obtaining the good – behavior such as that conditioned by obligations and responsibilities (e.g., those of friendship, those of the ecological balance of the earth, etc.) Axiological theories judge action by its conformity to notions of good, right, bad, wrong, virtue, vice, obligation and ought. They ask what is intrinsically valuable? Answers to this question range from pleasure, knowledge, virtue, consciousness, beauty, friendship, self-expression and mutual affection among others.

Teleological Meta-ethics

By contrast to the axiological, teleological theories of ethics stress the orientation to final goals (e.g., harmony, happiness, knowledge).¹³ Consequently, while both the deontological and the formalist are less concerned with the consequences of an action and more with the intention behind the action – with ethical intention being in essence the conscious attempt to perform one's rightful or proper duty, the axiological focuses on behavioral value, and the teleological assesses an action in terms of its conformity to its originating intention, purpose, effort or likelihood to produce good. The foremost development of teleological meta-ethics has been the utilitarian theory of Bentham and Mill concerning an ethic that depends on performing the greatest good for the greatest number. From a teleological perspective, ends pertain to the production and distribution of value. Duty arises in reference to these ends. But from the deontological perspective of Kant, Ross and Prichard, duty precedes value and may even be independent of it. Consequently, when ethics are formulated in terms of what they achieve, axiological emphasis can be placed on the values entailed in achieving certain ends (e.g., steadfastness, courage) or, teleologically, on the ends themselves (e.g., success, victory).

¹³Teleological thinkers include Democritus, Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, Augustine (354–430), Aquinas (1225–1274), William of Ockham (c.1290–1349), David Hume, Adam Smith (1723–1790), Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill, Herbert Spencer (1820–1903), Thomas Hill Green (1836–1882), again Henry Sidgwick, Friedrich Nietzsche, Brand Blanchard and Stephen Toulmin (b.1922).

Ethical Subjectivism

Value theory is complemented additionally by the range of different identities for whatever value is. Among classical pagan thought, Pythagoreans considered value to be number; Heraclitus recognized its generation in change – more specifically, in conflict. Plato identified values as intuitively known essences. For him, they constitute a hierarchy.¹⁴ By contrast, Aristotle, rather than essences, believed that values are defined by human interests.¹⁵

Ethical subjectivism considers that ethical terms and judgments are simply human proposals that stand for emotions, attitudes, suggestions and so forth and not for anything objective that exists independently in the ‘real’ world. This non-cognitivist position differentiates as either emotivism – grounding ethical terms in emotions of approval or disapproval,¹⁶ or relativism, that is, the strength and value of ethical terms are determined by the group interest by which they arise.¹⁷ Values are understood as relative in that different things (e.g., chastity or promiscuity, enjoyment or frugality) will be good for everyone but will be different for different individuals or groups – the locus varying from person to person and from group to group.¹⁸ In other words, the subjective understanding of ethics views the ethical

¹⁴In Plato’s hierarchical understanding of value, he is followed by Scheler, N. Hartmann, Wilbur M. Urban (1873–1952) and the neo-Kantian Heidelberg or Baden School of southwest Germany of the late nineteenth/early twentieth centuries that held to a concept of absolute value. Scheler and Hartmann argue for values as hierarchical, non-temporal essences, while Urban considers them as objective features of an intelligible world.

¹⁵Aristotle is followed by Perry and Christian Ehrenfels (1859–1932) – the Austrian psychologist who developed an understanding of values in terms of pleasure or desire. Ehrenfels published his two volume *System of Value Theory* in 1897 and 1898. Also important is his *Basic Ideas of Ethics* (1907).

¹⁶E.g., William of Ockham, Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Hume, A.J. Ayer, Charles Stevenson (1908–1979), and Richard Mervyn Hare (1919–2002).

¹⁷Edward Westermarck (1862–1939) is a foremost example of this consideration.

¹⁸We find the relativist understanding in the thoughts of Hobbes, Westermarck, William James (1842–1910), Ralph Barton Perry (1876–1957) and Friedrich Albert Moritz Schlick (1882–1936). For instance, Schlick, leading member of the Vienna Circle that engendered logical positivism, developed a positive ethos that recognized progress through scientific advance and the diffusion of knowledge. Ethics in part are understood as the clarification of meaning through logical analysis. In other words, ethics form part of science in which value-judgments are understood as desires and analyzed, accordingly, as psychological facts. In 1930, Schlick published his *Problems of Ethics*. A.J. Ayer also follows in this tradition, at least initially, though he transforms logical positivism into logical empiricism. As with Hume, Ayer contends that there are only two kinds of meaningful statements: those which are in principle empirically verifiable, and those which are analytically true by definition. All others, whether metaphysical, religious or ethical are meaningless on a factual basis, because the verifiability criterion is inapplicable to them. However, Ayer allows that ethical statements have emotional meaning. Likewise, aesthetic statements are also accepted as having an emotive significance. Ayer’s own ethical position follows in the tradition of utilitarianism but holds that the endeavor for the greatest good for the greatest number is a pursuit to be decided by individual choice.

in terms of either emotional feelings (the emotivists) or the collective situation in which the actions occur (the relativists). Together, the ethical subjectivists, whether emotivists or relativists, take a different position than the empiricists. They hold that the good and right can be known only through the interest or feeling involved rather than through empirical observation.

Ethical Objectivism

Another analysis that does not consider behavior or consequence *per se* is that of differentiating morals, such as the good and right, as objective in themselves, that is, as real factors in things. This position is known as ethical objectivism. It is the contrasting interpretation to ethical subjectivism. To the degree that the meta-ethics/ethics relationship is similar to the one between metaphysics and physics, when meta-ethics approaches ethical behavior as empirical, we have already crossed into the realm of physics or science from the more abstract and non-empirical one of metaphysics. Ethical objectivism itself divides between naturalists and intuitionists. The former, ethical naturalism, differs from both moral theology (antinomianism, situation ethics) and intuitionism. It holds that the good and right can be known as natural objects like apples, pears, trees, rocks, lightning, etc. Empirical verification is possible in ascertaining them.¹⁹ Unlike the intuitionism of Socrates, Plato, the Stoics, Augustine and others, ethical naturalism maintains that right and wrong as well as both values and facts can be detected, drawn out and understood from the evidence of experience (such as that concerning kindness or cruelty). Dewey holds that the 'better' can become apparent through discerning investigation. In defining goodness in metaphysical or psychological terms, the naturalistic position contrasts with the non-naturalist opinion of the intuitionist philosophers²⁰ that considers goodness as an indefinable intrinsic property. For these last, principles of right and wrong are axiomatic or self-evident. The foremost example of the intuitivists is Plato. Augustine also follows in this line of thought.²¹ Nevertheless, the intuitionist take on value still renders it an objective or absolute property in itself rather than something that is either relative or emotionally determined. For a naturalist such as Aristotle, value is objective or absolute in that it might be the same ultimately for everyone (e.g., possibly truth, honesty, obligation, etc.), and, for Aristotle, the good is that for which all things aim.

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¹⁹Naturalists include many of our pagan ethicists (Democritus, Socrates, Aristotle, Epicurus, the Stoics) as well as Aquinas, the Utilitarians, Dewey and Blanchard.

²⁰E.g., Plato, Alexius Meinong (1853–1920), George Edward Moore (1873–1958), William David Ross (1877–1971), and Nicolai Hartmann (1882–1950).

²¹Other ethical intuitivists include Sidgwick, Nietzsche, Harold Arthur Prichard (1871–1947), G.E. Moore, W. D. Ross and Alfred Cyril Ewing (1899–1973).

Perhaps most important, however, in the understanding of ethics as values is the notion of ‘final value’, namely, the value or set of values toward which all humans should or do aim. Classical pagan suggestions include *sophia*, *eudaemonia*, *hedone*, *ataraxia*, *apathia* and *euphrosyne*.²² Christians brought the notion of *agape* ‘selfless love’ into consideration, while later thinkers have introduced or at least furthered the ideas of self-cultivation, self-preservation, self-knowledge, self-realization, self-fulfillment, loyalty, authenticity, etc. Nietzsche holds that the ‘will to power’ is the final goal. Along with seeking to determine how people *ought* to behave in terms of obligation, duty and the concepts of right and wrong, the consideration of the means to particular ends is centrally a part of axiological study and involves determinations of what are value, the valuable, the desirable, the good and so forth.

In axiological or general theories of value, Nietzsche’s *Genealogy of Morals* has been seminal in calling for a re-evaluation of values commensurate with changing times. But the central question remains throughout axiology and ethics: are values real in an objective sense, or are they subjective – as Perry would have it considering values as a functional relationship between any object and any interest in that object? The subjectivists argue that value is dependent on the interest, rather than the interest arising because of some intrinsic value belonging to the object. This psychological understanding of value denies dependency on transcendent or supernatural factors in the determination of value. This becomes a form of naturalism in which the natural world is understood as the whole of reality. In naturalistic metaphysics, purpose is an emergent. A value judgment is understood as a factual statement. Consequently, naturalistic ethics understand ethical notions as determined and confirmed by empirical investigation into nature and society. In many respects, this position conforms closely with pagan pragmatics.²³

The different positions on value theorizing cut across religions and do not appear to differentiate necessarily along religious divides. This is the case with paganism as well. There is nothing intrinsic to paganism, for example, that precludes values being understood as natural, objective, absolute, intuitive, emotional or relative. Some pagans will understand them one way; others, differently. Pagan meta-ethics are no different from Christian and secular meta-ethics in degrees of complexity and contrast. But, at best, through some of their leading exponents, each of these theories may be examined as part of the process that seeks to develop a normative

²²Respectively, wisdom, happiness, pleasure, tranquil pleasure, tranquility, and enduring joy.

²³However, G.E. Moore developed the notion of what he termed ‘the naturalistic fallacy’ which refers to the error that occurs whenever ethical terms are defined as something non-ethical. He argues against finding values only within human contexts (individual experience, personal self-realization and/or social purpose) and regards ethics and values as autonomous realities. Whereas naturalism adopts either a positivistic approach that analyzes ethical expressions into non-ethical terms or a metaphysical approach that logically deduces ethical assertions from ontological principles, Moore holds that ethics as essences can only be discerned through intuition. For him, good is a non-natural quality that cannot be defined in terms of pleasure because, while pleasure may be good, not all good is pleasant. Not recognizing this distinction is what he calls the naturalistic fallacy. It is allegedly the attempt to derive the ‘ought’ from the ‘is’ of any situation. This is supposedly the error of all metaphysical ethics.

understanding of pagan ethics. Consequently, we find both naturalist and intuitive positions actually combined in the thoughts of Socrates, the Stoics and possibly Sidgwick. At the present point, it is enough to recognize that ethics may be approached by studying them empirically – in general the classical or deep pagan position – or through intuitive understanding – also possibly a pagan position but more often a gnostic one.

A problem with the various distinctions arises because both the naturalists and the intuitionists hold that value, the ethical good and the ethical right are objective – the former seeing them as empirically demonstrable factors; the latter, instead, holding them as real essences that can only be known through intuitive reflection. Urban, however, confuses the naturalistic position with the subjective stance that finds value in interest and approval/disapproval.²⁴ Since liking and disliking can be expressed through statements, they become possible candidates for empirical verification, and, on this basis, phenomenological, psychological and sociological examination is possible. As such, this cognitivist understanding, according to Urban, is a sort of subjective naturalism. More usually, however, and as we have already noted, ethical and axiological subjectivism understands the good, the right and the valuable as human proposals that stand for emotions (emotivism) or attitudes (relativism). It denies that ethical and axial terms and judgments stand for anything objective. Perhaps the only way out of this philosophical quagmire is to adopt a pagan pluralistic approach that recognizes values and ethics as comprising a range of objective realities and intuited essences as well as subjective preferences and emotions.

The Format of this Book

“In going through the book, the reader may follow its structure and division, but that is not an absolute necessity. One can likewise begin with the second part of the book . . . One can even begin with the conclusion.”²⁵ While I have cribbed the preceding from the book *Desirable God?*, its instructions apply equally to the present work. The following chapter explores the pagan defense of idolatry and why the idol has been as routinely condemned in the Western cultural legacy as it has. It is through idolatry that I argue the true distinctiveness and innovative character of paganism vis-à-vis the contemporary world of religious rivalries and secular disenchantment are to be found. It is upon the concomitant exploration of idolatry in conception and practice that a compatible ethical stance is to be located for pagans of all stripes and colors if not equally for all humans.

Part II of this book, Chaps. 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7, is focused on the key ethical thinkers or schools of thought of the Western world. Chapter 3 is devoted to the

²⁴Runes (1956: 51).

²⁵Burggraeve et al. (2003: 4).

classical divide between Aristotle and Plato. In this book's delineation of ethical pursuit and the good life, Aristotle is one of the major heroes. Plato, by contrast, is not. Chapter 4 is dedicated to the important pagan schools of Hedonism and Stoicism – the former including Cyrenaicism; the latter Cynicism. Much of the diverse ethical current that is detectable throughout the variations of contemporary Western paganism, if not in pagan indigeneity as well, is already encapsulated by the classical hedonists and stoics. Chapter 4 includes a brief focus on Christian ethics since the overall inquiry of the book is on ethics and ethical debate and not just on that which can be identified as pagan. This section will help the reader distinguish a pagan moral position from a Christian one. The fifth chapter that follows is focused on particularly significant philosophical contributors to the ethical debate, namely, on Spinoza, Hume and Kant. While Spinoza has always been an early favourite of mine, Hume is refreshing, and Kant is important in articulating a quasi-Christian understanding with which most pagans will probably not find themselves in agreement. Nietzsche, the subject of Chap. 6, is the major hero – a difficult hero to be sure, but a daring champion all the same who serves to open the horizons of a formerly myopic world to a newer one in which paganism can find a home. Chapter 7, concerning the aftermath of Nietzsche, not only briefly discusses Hegel and Heidegger but also includes two subsections. The first is titled 'The Argument' and is focused on my understanding of ethical naturalism. The second uses the ideas of Anthony Grayling, John Mackie and Alasdair MacIntyre to bring ethical and philosophical debate closer to the present.

Part III ('The Quest for an Applied Pagan Ethics') includes Chaps. 8, 9, and 10 – this time concerned with enunciating a pagan normative ethics. For some readers, this will be the most important or relevant part of the book. What I seek to provide here is a hands-on ethical practice based on the definitive heptatheonic virtue-values of generic paganism. Chapter 8, on 'Virtue Ethics', is the introduction (discussing Bacon, the cardinal virtues, etc.). The two chapters that follow on Freedom, Comfort, Health, Worship, Pleasure, Productivity and Generosity explore these particular virtue-values as commensurate with and expressive of a pagan ethical position or aspiration. 'The Pagan *Quadrivium*' of Chap. 9 presents the four primary pagan virtue-values (Freedom, Comfort, Health and Worship/Honor); 'The *Trivium* of Worship' of Chap. 10 considers Pleasure, Productivity and Generosity as comprising the informal aspects of worship.

Part IV on 'Moral Issues from a Pagan Perspective', Chaps. 11, 12, and 13, is focused on particular ethical issues. These are not meant to be comprehensive but rather illustrative of specific areas of contention that have arisen in modern times. Successively, I examine gay marriage, drug use, power manipulations, ecology, violence and the issues that arise from human mortality. Once again, these issues are examined both as humanitarian concerns in general and pagan foci in particular. If Part III is a normative guide, Part IV is concerned with some of the issues that hamper human progress and achievement from a broad pagan perspective. In a word, this is the area where the pagan's normative values are applied to the messy and often unpleasant aspects of reality.

Finally, Chaps. 14, 15, and 16, as Part V ('The Ethical Conversation'), seek to draw together the various themes and issues of the moral arena with which paganism might wish to engage. The first, Chap. 14, designated 'Pagan Ethics vis-à-vis the Western Ethical Tradition', contextualizes the global debate and the place of paganism within it. Included are analyses of Roger Burggraeve's discussion of idolatry, the ideas of Levinas, Habermas and Santayana, and Confucian ethics. Chapter 15 on 'Contemporary Sectarian Pagan Ethics' has subsections that explore the ethical positions and articulations of Shinto, Santería, The Northern Tradition, Druidry, Romuva, Slavic Spirituality, Kemetic Spirituality, Classical Tradition and Wicca. Chapter 16 is the conclusion to the book as a whole. Some readers may prefer to begin with Part V or even with the Conclusion (the last chapter) itself "because it explicitly pays attention to the intimate bond between idolatry and desire – a bond that is presupposed throughout the entire book."²⁶

The overall intent of the present work is to locate a humanitarian ethics that, while it may be grounded in paganism – as I argue all ethical enquiry originally is, has appeal more universally – to Christians, secularists, etc. as well as to pagans. My endeavour is to present a substantially different understanding of ethics – one that is intended to appeal to people as they are rather than on how they have been instructed to be or want to be through the historical traditions of our respective cultures and mainstream religions. To date, I believe no one has focused on pagan ethics in anything close to a comprehensive and inspiring fashion. It is this lacuna that this work hopes to fill.

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²⁶Ibid.

Chapter 2

Idolatry and Ethics

If the essential features of a pagan religion consist of, or at least include, nature worship, this-worldliness, corpo-spirituality, enchantment, hedonism, deific pluralism and humanism, idolatry is not necessarily among them.¹ In the broader sense, of course, the spiritual as tangible and corporeal provides the rationale and justification for any veneration of idols. Idolatry may also come under the remit of polytheism. The key thing here is that the idol may be approached as embodiment of the sacred as well as representative of something special but other, something beyond the immediate confines of the tangible presence. It is both the god and a symbol of the god.

But perhaps even more importantly, the idol is a device of reflection. Needless to say, it is an occasion for contemplation and reverence. But it is also reflective. Idols are like mirrors that in some sense reflect the worshipper.² And it is in this respect that we come to the heart of the idolatrous dynamic. Etymologically, the English words ‘smile’, ‘mirror’ and ‘miracle’ all derive from the same root. We can imagine here the earliest humans catching their reflections on the still surface of a body of water and smiling in response. The idol is a device that works along the same principle. In some manner, it becomes reflective of the worshipper, *and* it is an occasion for joy, for happiness, implicitly for smiling.

Consequently, through idolatry, we may be said to be worshipping ourselves or at least, depending on the given situation or particular figure being venerated, some aspect, some idealized feature, of ourselves. Even with the Christian God, especially

¹Note, however, that in the eighteenth century, a pagan was simply “a Heathen gentile, or idolater; one who adores idols and false gods” (Bell 1790: II 149). For a different and more modern understanding of paganism, see York (2003) and Harvey (1997).

²For the Catholic theology tradition of Burggraeve et al. (2003: 266), “The idol is only an expression of one’s own desire, merely a form projected outside of oneself of one’s own finite, injured desire.” This book will be discussed further and critiqued in Chap. 14. Despite the negative evaluations of idolatry held, the authors of this work are astute, fair and reasonable and come across as people with whom pagans could stimulatingly engage.

his/its later developments, it can be argued that we have here a reification of the collective soul of humanity. The Judeo-Christian God really only makes sense when understood as mankind or humanity in its fullest reach. It is not that God, as Genesis puts it, created man in his image, but that we have created God in ours.

The Abrahamic effort to postulate this God not as Self but Other is a means to avoid this truth concerning God as either a human fabrication or a human spirit – perhaps a well-meaning but vain attempt to avoid the implications of human hubris. In the worst case scenario, it has been argued to be a means of control, of human management through one elite or another, but it is this very separation between the human and the divine that becomes the *raison d'être* behind the biblical injunction against idolatry. In a corpo-spiritual pantheistic understanding of paganism, however, there is no radical divide between matter and spirit, and, consequently, no radical distinction between the human and the divine. It is precisely on this basis that I wish to explore a pagan ethics that may be deemed consequent from an understanding of the matter-spirit interchange if not also identity. The present chapter is a presentation and investigation of idolatry as a means by which to gain an appreciation of the significance and dynamic behind corpo-spirituality.

If the human is one of the gods, as (what I wish to refer to as) deep paganism would contend, even the ultimate development of divine consciousness at this stage and within the present limits of our corner of time and space, what are the ethical implications – let alone dangers – inherent in any worship of self? If the Judeo-Christian or Abrahamic God is, at the end of the day, a human projection, contemporary Wicca may have it more clearly in focus by centering on its Goddess, since there are more women on planet earth than there are men. To the degree that Wicca reveres both the Goddess and the God, it has a more accurate balance in the projection of our collective self into apotheosis. The phenomenon I am postulating as 'deep paganism', by contrast, goes both beyond gender constraint toward deification of humanity as a whole *and*, on more vernacular and indigenous levels, does not concern itself with ultimates but with the here and now of specific and often local divine encounter. Pantheonic formulations allow for a range of possibility catering to individual and community tastes alike. But even so, if the pagan godhead, or at least an important part of the pagan godhead, represents a deification of self (along perhaps with a deification of various aspects of nature as mother and *as they relate to us*), what are the ethical implications that follow from such a position of divine and hubristic arrogance?

Part of any answer to that question for anyone conditioned by Judaic and/or Christian culture is determined by the first two commandments of Exodus (20.3-6) in which worship of any other god than Yahweh is forbidden – including worship through the use of images. In other words, Yahweh may not be represented by any idolatrous image, and this is backed by the prohibition against the worship of any other god or goddess – including the idols of these rival figures as well. The second of the Ten Commandments condemns polytheism. It strikes against an essential feature of paganism, namely, its organic and spontaneous consideration of godhead as multiple and gender differentiated. From a pagan perspective, Yahweh's injunction is that of a rival and jealous figure and reflects an attempt not only

for absolute hegemony but a violation against a fundamental and natural human impulse. The difficulty of its imposition is seen throughout much of the Old (or First) Testament (e.g., I Kings 18, I Samuel 19.13, 16; Isaiah 40.18-25). In many respects, this idolatrous human propensity passes on directly to the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox branches of Christendom, only here the idol is not considered an idol as such but rather a mediating agency. The Church claims that the statue or icon of the saint is not worshipped but merely venerated and is employed simply to focus devotion. Paganism, by contrast, accepts the revered object as a vehicle through which to approach the deity, but it may also accept the revered object as a manifestation of deity in and of itself.³ Moreover, and perhaps more importantly at this point in my argument, paganism does not differentiate between worship and veneration. For a pagan, they are the same.

Idolatry is the worship (*latreia*) of an *eidolon* ('image', 'form', 'idea').⁴ The biblical insistence that God is beyond representation (rather than inclusive of all and any representation) is itself an *idea*. In other words, for a pagan, monotheism, or the absolutely transcendent other, is itself an idol. It is a notion with the same ontological status as any other conjectured notion. From a pagan perspective, all theological understandings are in some sense conceptual; idolatry – even if it eschews the use of images – is inescapable. It can therefore not be validly, rationally and legitimately condemned. While paganism in its fundamentals does not embrace the biblical notion of sin, it certainly does not accept the belief that idolatry in any sense constitutes a sin. If the first two commandments are intended as a rejection of paganism, paganism in turn categorically rejects the first two commandments and the principle for which they stand. As Bron Taylor expresses emphatically, “trusting and relying on the sources of existence, *in natural systems and processes*, is not an idolatry to be suppressed but embraced.”⁵

Consequently and implicitly, paganism shares with the dharmic religions of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism the features of iconographic approach to the divine. And it is from these living practices of the East that contemporary Western paganism can learn much about the dynamics of its own lost indigenous traditions. In Hinduism, for instance, the idol is not invariably simply a representation of the deity but often, through rituals of consecration in which the idol's ‘eyes are opened’,

³Bell (1790: II 6) distinguishes between idols and images with the former representing a fiction or something that does not exist (e.g., sirens, centaurs, tritons and sphinxes); the latter being a similitude of something that actually does exist (e.g., a man, tree, dog, star, etc.) However, the author adds, “Generally speaking the words image and idol are used indifferently, to signify one and the same thing.”

⁴The English words ‘idol’ and ‘idea’ both derive from an Indo-European root signifying ‘to see’. The reconstructed radical **weid-* is conjectured to have given rise to Greek *eidōs* ‘form, shape’ and *idea* ‘appearance, form, idea’ (Watkins 1969: 1548). The actual condemnation behind the idea of the idol appears to have originally been against the seeing of ‘God’. In other words, the Abrahamic God is to be invisible at all times. Making and/or seeing the godhead in the visible world were judged to be an anathema.

⁵Taylor (2001: 105); my italics.

becomes the deity itself. As far as we know, the Vedic peoples themselves did not employ anthropomorphic images in cult focus – a situation akin in many respects to present-day Shinto of Japan, but imagism became gradually incorporated from the practices of the sub-strata cultures of the subcontinent. However, if we examine the idolatrous orientations of the other Indo-European peoples (Iranians, Greeks, Romans, Celts and Germanics), the *Rig-veda* anti-imagistic statements may be more a condemnation of indigenous faiths which appeared to the newcomers as alien and contemptible.

Whatever the Vedic/non-Vedic origins of Hindu idolatry may be, Hinduism along with Mahayana/Vajrayana Buddhism is among the largest repositories of iconographic knowledge and practice. Within India, we find a complex and anciently established system of rules for the construction of images. Each deity, for instance, has specific symbols that are required detailing facial features, anatomical parts (e.g., number of arms), weapons or attributes, animal associations, etc. Despite the use of traditional manuals that furnish the rules and regulations concerning definite images, there is nevertheless a wide range of variety to be found throughout India in respect to individual icons – revealing that we have here a living faith that reflects local and historic variation all the same.

In its Vedantic formulation, the explanation behind the *murtis* has been rationalized in various ways to conform to a philosophic predisposition toward transcendental gnosis and the desired release of *mokṣa*, but an idol is an idol is an idol. In Hinduism, the *murti* is installed in the inner shrine of a temple, the *garbha griha* or ‘womb room’, where, after being properly consecrated, it is often regarded as the deity himself/herself.⁶ Some deities’ *murtis* are considered so sacred, that they are kept from public view apart from special occasions where they might be displayed in distinct sanctuaries or taken on procession in *ratra yatra* festivals. The most famous of such processional presentations of a deity is probably the *Jaganath* of Puri in the Indian state of Orissa during which the images of Krishna, Balirama and Subhadra are paraded through the city. The seeing of the *murtis* on this occasion or virtually any *murti* on any occasion is accepted by devotees as an instance of *darshan* (literally, ‘seeing’) and constitutes the giving of (visual) grace by the deity to the worshipper. At the opposite extreme to Jaganath exclusivity, there is the sacred Vishvanath *lingam* of Shiva in Varanasi’s Golden Temple. As ‘lord of all’ (*Vishvanath*), this sacred stone of Shiva is available to one and all, and the daily worshipper and pilgrim alike seek not only *darshan* but physical contact with this tangible manifestation of the deity. Vishvanath, like most Hindu idols, is ritually awakened, daily bathed and dressed, fed and put to bed for the night. The expression of deity in Hinduism is not only to be found in the form of a *murti* or physical idol but also in symbols, mandalas, abstract designs (*yantras*), various gestures (*mudras*) and in formulaic sound (*mantras*).

⁶Bell (1790: II 6) claims that “it was a prevalent notion that, by virtue of consecration, the gods were called down to inhabit or dwell in their statues.” For deification of the idol or image, “three things were necessary . . . viz. proper ornaments, consecration, and oration” (ibid. 4).

In his ‘Defence of Image Worship’, Swami Vivekananda extols idolatry despite the external worship of images being conveyed by the Hindu Shastras as “the lowest of all the low forms of worship.”

... idolatry is condemned! Why? Nobody knows. Because some hundreds of years ago some man of Jewish blood happened to condemn it? That is, he happened to condemn everybody else’s idols except his own. If God is represented in any beautiful form or any symbolic form, said the Jew, it is awfully bad; it is sin. But if He is represented in the form of a chest, with two angels sitting on each side, and a cloud hanging over it, it is the holy of holies. If God comes in the form of a dove, it is holy. But if He comes in the form of a cow, it is heathen superstition; condemn it!⁷

Though Vivekananda is speaking about the use of images in Hindu worship, the dilemma he expresses applies equally to paganism. He situates the paradox in humanity’s inability to see things through the eyes of another. David Abram is equally blunt. The ancient Hebrews, he argues, forsook their former corporeal religiosity and its responsiveness to the natural environment by shifting to a purely phonetic set of alphabetic signs. This allowed an epistemological independence from earthly sensuality. “To actively participate with the visible forms of nature came to be considered *idolatry* by the ancient Hebrews; *it was not the land but the written letters that now carried the ancestral wisdom.*”⁸ For Bron Taylor, idolatry relates to the jealousy of the Abrahamic ‘God’ and is considered being disloyal and not trusting this god.⁹

While idolatry is found throughout Hinduism and Buddhism and, among pagan practice, foremost perhaps in Chinese folk and Afro-Latin spiritualities (e.g., Santería, Candomblé, etc.), it appears not only in the hagiography of the Roman Catholic and iconography of the Eastern Orthodox churches but also in the basic use of symbols throughout the Christian church as a whole (e.g., the cross, the lamb, the dove and the fish-symbol). Christ himself is recognized as the physical embodiment of the transcendental God. While the daily cult paraphernalia that is otherwise attached to the Hindu *murti* may be largely absent, in rudiments, the same idolatrous process is detectable. In some cases, processional *darshan* and popular belief in miraculous powers being attributed to the image, representation or idol itself (e.g., *Il Bambino* of Santa Maria Ara Coeli in Rome) are little different than the idolatrous practices of dharmic and pagan faiths.

Among the Abrahamic orientations, the Jewish and the Islamic are the most vehemently aniconic.¹⁰ The Muslim *shahādah*, in which affirmation is made in

⁷Vivekananda, ‘Defence of Image Worship’ in Mumm (2002: 22). Note too that Poorthuis (Burggraevae et al. 2003: 41) mentions the *cherubim* and the copper snake in the desert as “images that for some reason have escaped the prohibition of images.”

⁸Abram (1996: 240); author’s italics.

⁹Personal communication 6 March 2014.

¹⁰Nevertheless, even in Genesis (31:19) we hear of Rachel taking the idols or *teraphim* of her father. “Gideon’s Ephod and Micah’s Teraphim are remarkable instances of Israelitish idolatry” (Bell 1790: II 4). Then too, of course, there is the story of the Golden Calf in the Sinai (Exodus 32).

Allah as the only God and Mohammed as his messenger, allows no possibility of idolatry. Consequently, the 360 idols of the pre-Islamic pagan center in Mecca, the Kaaba, were destroyed when Islam's prophet first conquered the city. The foremost Arabian deity was Hubal, a moon-god, and along with him there were the goddesses al-Uzza, al-Lat, Manat and Wudd. The pilgrimages associated with these figures were replaced with the Hajj as the annual Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca. The Kaaba itself was retained as the 'holy house', and the black ovoid meteorite embedded into its south-eastern wall retains the magnetic focus associated with pagan idols found elsewhere. In Muslim legend, the Black Stone was originally given as a white stone to Adam by God. Subsequently, the stone turned black due to the sins of mankind. The archangel Gabriel bequeathed it to Abraham who installed it in the rebuilt Kaaba. The stories and practices associated with the Black Stone, however, are reminiscent of the Roman Catholic denial of idolatry in connection with its veneration of saints. The customs may be overtly similar, but they are argued to be something different. Nevertheless, idolatry in both its persistent explicit and implicit manifestations would appear to betray a fundamental human need to symbolize the divine or supernatural in visible and embodied form.

If, however, the subliminal processes of idolatry are part of a reflective device by which the human projects herself into the transcendent and as one of the gods, the ethical question remains whether this act is not the ultimate of arrogant pride on the part of mankind. Certainly, the argument derived from the first two of the Ten Commandments holds little persuasive logic for a pagan perspective. Pagans adhere to a multiplicity in their godhead. And to the degree that earth or nature is both sacred and 'mother' of all, a pagan pantheistic take on reality allows no ultimate distinction between the divine and tangible reality. In other words, there is no separation between God, Goddess or the gods as a transcendent other, on the one hand, and humanity and the world, on the other. Idols are not inherently false but are part of – as well as expressive of – the divine totality. The naturalness of idolatry is expressed by Spinoza when he claims simply that the likeness or image of the object likewise gives rise to the same responses of joy or sadness as may be forthcoming directly from the object itself.¹¹ In a pagan sense, each idol is a hologram reflective of the whole in the same manner as each jewel in Indra's infinite net mirrors every other jewel in that net's unending nexi. The reflection of nature includes any and all reflections of humanity, and to whatever degree the act of worship is a human natural, self-worship and worship of the tangible as this-worldly and not necessarily as something otherworldly or *a priori* transcendental are inevitable. Whatever else hubris or excessive pride may be, anything that is natural and inevitable cannot be hubristic. If anything, in fact, exercising the choice *not* to worship or honor the sacred could be the only instance of the insolence of human pride.

While an understanding of worship or honor is a central part of the broader question concerning pagan ethics, before pursuit of this deeper issue, I wish to signal the recognition that polytheism itself disallows the presumption of human

¹¹ Spinoza *Ethics* III Proposition 16 [III/153] (Curley 1996: 79).

narcissism. In a pagan formulation, we are not God but one of the gods. Ideally, the gods relate to one another in conformity to the principles of harmony. As one of the gods, we too are obliged to strive to cooperate with each other and with nature in all endeavor. If this sounds hubristic, I argue that such an assessment derives from an Abrahamic mind-set and conditioning. Perhaps in exceptional circumstances of need it may be otherwise, but for the most part a pagan concept of human divinity countenances the more terrapolitan understanding of a god as not only animate but also humbly in awe of nature. In all, pagan godhead is multiple and as such encompasses the balancing rounds or oppositions of the natural world while, at the same time, encouraging the freedom of diversity – including what John Locke considered the sacred freedom of conscience.¹²

Of course, not all pagans even think in terms of gods, goddesses and/or human apotheosis. But along with atheistic forms of paganism, there are for many, if not most pagans, non-atheistic forms as well. Among these, pagan pantheism recognizes the ubiquity of godhead; pagan polytheism recognizes the plurality of godhead. While for the former there is nothing that is not an aspect of the divine, for the latter this same non-exclusion need not necessarily be the case. In other words, a pagan polytheist could entertain the possibility that there are ‘false gods’ (e.g., Mammon, a nation-state, an economic ideology, etc.) as well as genuine deities. Here the multiplicity of possibility is the emphasis and not some monistic unity that may nonetheless underlie that multiplicity. In the development of Judaism, the former biblical condemnation of idolatry as the ‘worship of other gods’ is replaced by the Talmud codifier Maimonides (1135–1204) as the ‘worship of false gods’ (the rabbinic *avodah zarah*). In the worship of God falsely, Maimonides was opposed to the internalization of idolatry: understanding the godhead in anthropomorphic terms. He interpreted this as rendering God corporeal. Apart from the use of idols as fetishistic intermediaries, it was this attribution of a body along with emotions and human mentality to God that became in Judaism the ‘sin of internalized idolatry’. Maimonides extended this last to include ‘internal polytheism’, namely, the consideration of God as complex rather than a ‘simple unity’.¹³

For a pagan, by contrast, there is no gap between the god and the world. Both are complex and challenging to human contemplation and ecstatic imagination, and the revered representation is simply one device that assists the worshipper in blurring any tendency to consider the two as separate. Paganisms, more usually, are instead comfortable with the notion of the idol as both acquiring the characteristics of the deity it represents and as something independently autonomous. Divine diversity, as well as the access to it, is a phenomenon to celebrate rather than to shun. And as all this may be subsumed within the inherent and ubiquitous sanctity of nature, to reject the natural in both corporeal and intangible/ethereal forms is the supreme instance of human conceit. The formulation of pagan ethics, of any ethical/moral position from a pagan perspective, occurs beneath the aegis of this understanding.

¹²Vide McGraw (2003: 73, 87f *et passim*).

¹³Halbertal & Margalit (1992: 109–112).

The world itself/herself is divine – including we humans, her children, along with whatever other product is derived from the earth, either directly or through us as intermediaries. This is the full implication of pantheistic/polytheistic idolatry, and, as such, there is implicitly for a pagan a tendency to respond to what Diana Eck refers to as the need to develop “a hermeneutic of the visible.”¹⁴

Therefore, a pagan pursuit of the ethical, whatever the specifics, occurs against a sacred background that in both its material and spiritual aspects partakes of divinity. This is why the principle of idolatry is central to pagan consciousness – whether a pagan bows down to idols *per se* or, rather, reveres nature in all its fullness. Idolatry is an acceptance of the ubiquity of the divine, the pantheistic undercurrent of all phenomenal existence. While idolatry may concentrate the divine in certain instances, creating a sort of *primus inter pares* in direct access to the holy, it is simply endorsing the use of a pragmatic vehicle in apprehending or communicating with the sacred all as the cosmos’ fundamental predisposition. However, this idolatrous propensity in pagan veneration puts pagan religious expression in a precarious and vulnerable position by default. Firstly, its idols can be destroyed – as occurred in the wake of the militant Christian church. But, secondly, matter itself inevitably allows betrayal in a manner that the pure realm of Platonic abstraction does not – ultimately, for a pagan, death itself is the ultimate betrayal against life. Invariably, incarnation entails pain and loss. These are the integral constraints to physical existence, and whereas this might explain the universal appeal of transcendental religion, pagans, by contrast, may be assessed as accepting these constraints as the price to be paid for incarnational existence.

In exploring the potentials of a pagan idolatrous ethics or, at least, an ethics founded upon pagan values and perception, I wish to pursue the subject further. According to the 1993 Catechism of the Catholic Church, idolatry involves divinizing what is not God. It contends that idolatry occurs whenever the individual reveres or honors an object or creature in place of God. Paganism, however, holds that there is nothing other than God/Goddess/the Godhead. In fact, Robert Corrington expresses a pagan position when he claims that ‘there is nothing outside of or other than nature’.¹⁵ For a pagan, nature is divinity, and any aspect of nature can stand for, or serve as portal to, the all of nature as divinity.¹⁶

But while divine, nature is neither ‘good’ nor ‘bad’; it just is. Paganism views the cosmos, for the most part, as amoral or non-moral rather than either moral or immoral. It is left to human and/or other sentience to impose or infuse the ethical within the cosmos. In other words, it is consciousness (whether human or at least

¹⁴Diana Eck, ‘Seeing the Sacred’ in Mumm (2002: 15).

¹⁵Corrington (1997: 10).

¹⁶As a caveat, it may be said that even if everything is sacred, it may not all be necessary – at least to human well-being. This last is a tricky concept, however. For example, while we may have subdued the smallpox virus and seek to do the same with the retro-virus behind Aids, it may not be to our advantage to eliminate such entities entirely in consideration of humanity’s on-going and continual efforts to find cures or preventions for future pathogens.

including the human) that has the responsibility of creating an aesthetic telos that is to become the foundation of ethical action and aspiration. From a pagan perspective, ethics are the aura of the human soul, that is, of humanity's collective mind/spirit. And within this aural spectrum that saturates the entire range of possibility, it is idolatry or specific devotion that allows – even encourages – focus within a world of otherwise unbounded choice.

Galatians 5:19 includes idolatry as a work of the flesh. Along with idolatry, such behaviors as immorality, impurity, licentiousness, sorcery, hatreds, rivalry, jealousy, fury, selfishness, dissensions and factious behavior are equally condemned. For good measure, this New Testament passage throws in envy, drinking bouts and orgies. In some sense, however, Galatians has provided a sort of check-list against which we can explore a pagan understanding of moral behavior. We must ask: where does a pagan stand on these various and allegedly sinful actions? Obviously there are some behaviors included within the Galatian list that a pagan would also reject, such as hatred, jealousy and dissension. But if idolatry is not to be included, what other endeavors might not be as well?

We are embarking here precisely on an ethical exploration that has preoccupied much of human thought through its historical development and into the various forums of engagement and exchange to be found as part of the world arena of today. Any discernment concerning what is happiness and/or what is virtue – both pagan and non-pagan – must consider what others – from religious leaders and sensitives to philosophers and theoreticians – have had to say on the matter. Ethics are the ultimate question – more important than even the nature or reality of the godhead. They concern what it is to be human and what our path through the marvelous labyrinth of terrestrial existence might be. The ethical is humanity's greatest focus, and among the many philosophical and religious answers that have been given to the question of the good that underlies this focus, what is a pagan answer, or, at least, what might it be? The part of the answer I wish to pursue especially is that which either entertains and accepts the idol or that which condemns and rejects it.

According to Jonathan Sacks, the idols of today include “self-esteem without effort, fame without achievement, sex without consequences, wealth without responsibility, pleasure without struggle and experience without commitment.”¹⁷ While the current fashion is to reject such ideals as consumerism, faddism, multi-corporate capitalism, etc., what Sacks' labeling makes clear is that conventionally to refer to something – anything in fact – as an idol is simply to make a value judgment.

¹⁷Sacks (2004). The underlying notion of an idol as “a statue or image of some false god” (Bell 1790: II 3) is still retained. An earlier yet similar usage is Francis Bacon's *idola fori, specus, theatri, tribus* which the English philosopher (1561–1626) considers to be four fundamentally incorrect ways of understanding nature: the idols of the tribe (natural human errors based on the assumption that man is the measure of all things), the idols of the cave (errors caused by individual bias), idols of the market place (incorrect inferences and assumptions based on language), and idols of the theater (errors caused by the influence of faulty philosophy, illogical empirical inference, and/or superstition). A discussion of Bacon's idols is also to be found in Burggraeve et al. (2003: 122–5).

Whenever an ‘ism’ is disliked and rejected, it becomes an ‘idol’ to the disparager – whether hedonism, narcissism or materialism or even such ‘*bona fide*’ religions as Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity (Christism) or Islam (Mohammedanism). Whether the object is something to be revered, or it is something to vilified and condemned, the consideration of the focus as an idol occurs within the eye of the beholder – more than it is to be attributed to any body of knowledge and practice or considered intrinsic to some tangible object. And whether Christians and Muslims have actually been hexed through some Magian conspiracy¹⁸ or not, they are nevertheless illustrative of idolatry in its worst form, namely, that of the *idée fixe* which seemingly blinds them to the divine-human aesthetic and renders them incapable of forming a participatory bonding with humanity as a questing affirmation. The question with idolatry is always one of treading the fine line between passion and obsession. Our idols evoke fervent commitment – even zealous adoration, and as long as this devotion – even the occasional frenzied devotion – remains within the boundaries of organic sensitivities and decorum in consideration of others, it is something to be encouraged. But when that fervor removes us from the collective human community of which we are part or, worse, sets us against our sisters and brothers, we are encountering idolatry as anti-human and sacrilege.

In our present focus, however, we are concerned with the idol of paganism, an orientation that unabashedly embraces idols in a variety of forms, and within this concern, we are examining the ethical implications that follow from a pagan orientation. Any examination of ethical activities must consider not only those that are specifically pagan, of course, but also those that have been espoused by other, more rival traditions – including Christianity. The ethical is an interest that transcends all sectarian division because the ethical is the meeting point for all humanity. In formulating what is – or what can be – a pagan ethic, we must listen to all voices in the ongoing debate. We want to know what is right not only for the pagan but also for all of us as ‘children of the earth’ (literally, humans). What are the major ideas that have been put forward in the ethical arena of debate? How can these various inputs be balanced and harmonized for the better of all?

In this endeavor, we shall hopefully find that paganism not only has been, but continues to be, a major contributor toward discerning what the good life is. Paganism has a decided advantage in today’s world of increasing complexity and diversity because paganism is a plurality that includes its own opposites. There is no single paganism, and nor could there ever be. But the implicit earthiness of paganism in most of its varieties is what allows and even encourages an ethical idolatry. Against the perpetual diaphanousness of a cosmos of transcendentals, the positive idol lures to the corporeal and grounds the human spirit. In other words, a cosmic gossamer, a diaphanous cosmology, necessitates the tangible as a healthy antiphon. It is the idol that provides us with something to grasp within a sea of perpetual bewilderment.

¹⁸For this supposition and what could follow as the basis of a theological if not also actual exclusion of the Abrahamic mind-set from a collective human quest, see York (1995).

Consequently, the historical and still current condemnation of idolatry as the worship of false gods has no viable foundation when paganism is understood as a legitimate religion that merits the same protections and tolerance as the other major faiths of the world. A pagan rejection of the biblical rejection of idolatry rests on two foundations. Firstly, the attribution of falsity to any god is to be recognized as a value judgment on the part of the attributer. The authenticity of a god or deity is not only beyond the scope of empirical inquiry, it is also a matter that can only be decided subjectively between the worshipper and the worshipped alone. And, secondly, the theistic denunciation of the use of any object, whether natural or man-made, to convey godhead because God is allegedly transcendent to every and all particulars is refuted by paganism's intrinsic pantheistic understanding. For the pagan, it is not that God/Goddess/the godhead is beyond the visible, but rather that there is nothing that is not God or divinity. The pagan god is not some separate being or (non-)entity but is instead the all of reality and potential. Further, following in the line of Process Theology, this god is forever growing and augmenting. It is not static, aloof and detached. It is our world if not also all the worlds beyond.

Of course, it is not pantheism that has given rise to idolatry even though it may be a rationale for it. Instead, it is idolatry that gives rise to pantheism. Idolatry itself is founded originally on the magical, the numinous, and the consideration of a pantheistic reality to our cosmos arises from the ubiquitous extension of the enchantment perceived locally in place and object. In a word, idolatry is a portal to pantheistic perception.

Consequently, the range of religious understandings of God suggests that he/she/it is 'none, one, many or all'. The 'none' position is that of atheism – the denial of God altogether; the one position is known foremost as the Abrahamic. But inasmuch as the Judeo-Christian God is conceived as utterly transcendent to manifest reality, as absolutely other, he/she/it amounts to a non-entity or 'none', an ultimate absence. In some senses, the dharmic position is the same. As Vedanta puts it, Brahman is 'not this, not that'. Though occasionally Hinduism is understood as a form of pantheism, its doctrine of *māyā* renders the all as illusion, and we are back to the ontological status of nothingness. And further, despite the prolific polytheism of Hinduism, most Hindus one encounters on a vernacular level have been trained to say that 'God is one'. This last is, if not the same, at least akin to, the gnostic understanding that does indeed understand God as *the One* – a something from which everything else has emanated. Consequently, with the exception of paganism, most religious positions range to the left on the 'none, one, many and/or all' spectrum concerning the possibility of God.

Pagans, however, emphasize both the plurality and all-ness of God. If and when they speak of the oneness of God, they tend to be referring to the unity of the godhead – either as a monistic substratum of the divine, or as the interdependence and interconnectedness of all being. Overall, while they touch on the oneness of deity, in the 'none, one, many and/or all' possibility of godhead, pagans shift toward the right of the span in distinction from the theological positions of most other faiths.

If idolatry is understood in John Bowker's terms as the "attributing of absolute value to that which is not absolute, and acting towards that object, person, or concept

as though it is worthy of worship or complete commitment,”¹⁹ a pagan response is to question the very idea or concept of ‘absolute value’. In understanding godhead as an organic and growing phenomenon or process, the notion of an ‘absolute’ is already precluded. Absolute worth could only be understood as the cosmos itself, and, for a pagan, the universe is conceived as an endless hologram in which the all is reflected and accessible through any part. Apart from the cosmos or nature itself, there is nothing that could be desired absolutely, or, conversely, any possibly total desire for a thing, object, person or idea is or becomes a yearning for the universe/multiverse itself. It is this connection with the all of reality that is central to pagan thought, and any pagan understanding of ethics as either the goal of life or the correct way to live life is guided and informed by this interconnectedness between the individual, the community, the world and the cosmos. In fact, so central is this bond that, despite the pantheistic understanding of divinity as immanent, it is the cosmic connection itself that is the *fons et origo* of the divine. If the tie is holy, that which it connects is equally sacred.

Among the things to explore in ethics and/or pagan idolatrous ethics is the very notion of value since pagan virtues and preferences may be understood as values in themselves, and value is instrumentally connected with whatever one might wish to idolize or cherish. But are values intrinsic or relative and instrumental? If a value might be objective and independent of human interest in some transcendental sense, need there be only ‘one’ absolute value? From a pagan understanding of plurality, it is more likely that there may be several values, absolute or otherwise. Before continuing to explore the axiological aspects of ethics, let us tease apart a bit further Bowker’s notion of ‘absolute value’ in the singular and its relationship with idolatry. Bowker ties God as ‘absolute value’ together with ‘complete commitment’. But even for Abrahamic monotheists, it is doubtful that the worshipper totally surrenders. We might ask: fully surrenders to what? To anything? And when?

As William Reese puts it, “For anything, attitude, ideal, purpose, or goal to be of value, it must be the object of a preference, of a judgment of importance.”²⁰ This, of course, brings the axial issue back to being a subjective question. In the full scope of philosophical debate, values are variously considered to be objective, subjective, absolute, relative, known intuitively or discovered experientially. If the question remains an open one, perhaps better than considering God as ‘absolute value’, he/she/it may be concentrated on as simply ubiquitous. Abrahamists understand God’s ubiquity in a transcendental sense; pagans see instead the divine as ubiquitously immanent. But the omnipresence of godhead itself is – or could be – a unifying feature between many of the world’s religions. However, if God is ubiquitous, ultimately both internal and external to the self, why privilege the one over the other? For pagans and some other religionists, it is the idol that provides a focus amidst the ubiquity of possible choice. The idea that the non-pictorial is superior to the pictorial idea or image is none other than a further subjective

¹⁹Bowker (1997: 465).

²⁰Reese (1999: 805).

preference and value judgment. In Gandhi's words, while the idol did not "excite any feeling of veneration" for him, he still "did not disbelieve in idol worship." In fact, he accepted "that idol worship is part of human nature. . . . Images are an aid to worship."²¹ According to Swami Vivekananda, "It has become a trite saying that idolatry is wrong, and every man swallows it at the present time without questioning."²²

The pagan herself/himself disallows the disconnection of the body from the natural world. Paganism considers the complete interconnectedness of humanity, life and the natural environment. Drawing on Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–1961), Abram understands that to touch a tree is to be touched by the tree in turn; to see the world is reciprocally to be seen by the world. "Clearly," he concludes, "a wholly immaterial mind could neither see things nor touch things – indeed, could not experience anything at all."²³ Similarly, Langer claims that images are "our readiest instruments for abstracting concepts from the tumbling streams of actual impressions."²⁴ The pagan rationale and argument for idolatry rest on this kind of non-transcendental and interactive experience between sentience and tangibility – a living and immediate interaction that is both sensuous and animistic.

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²¹M.K. Gandhi, 'Images as an Aid to Worship' in Mumm (2002: 24).

²²Swami Vivekananda, 'Defence of Image Worship'. Ibid. 22.

²³Abram (1996: 68).

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Part II
The Western Ethical Tradition

Chapter 3

The Classical Divide

To understand both Western ethics and pagan ethics both specifically and as a vital part of Western ethics, it is virtually imperative to have some familiarity with the ethical tradition as it emerged in the Greco-Roman world. Apart from the earlier contributions of the Sophists, pre-Socratics, Eleatics and Atomists – as well as the general tendency to consider Plotinus’ neo-Platonism as distinct from Platonism itself, there are seven classical schools that more or less summate the pagan legacy: the Academics, Peripatetics, Cyrenaics, Epicureans, Cynics, Stoics and Skeptics. The next chapter will discuss later developments in the form of the Epicureans, Cyrenaics, Stoics and Cynics as well as Christianity itself as both a growth and rejection of Greco-Roman paganism, but the present chapter focuses on the thoughts of Skepticism, Aristotle, Socrates, Plato, Plotinus and the Sophists. In time the Epicureans and Stoics came to constitute the two, rivaling, schools of classical pagan ethical thought, but it is with the empirical materialism of Aristotle and the idealist transcendentalism of Plato that a ‘pre-Cartesian’ split has been established at the foundations of virtually all subsequent Western thought. To understand both the ethical debate of the West and the pagan influence upon which it has developed – as well as anything comprising what we might term a ‘pagan idolatrous ethics’, it is necessary to consider the ancient schools of ethical thought and the divide between Aristotle and Plato. Material reality is central to both Aristotle and the Sophists but tangential at best for Plato, the Academics and Plotinus. Skeptics take perhaps a more neutral position between the two contrasting valuations, but they along with Aristotle, Plato, Plotinus and the Sophists help to clarify the dynamics and *raison d’être* behind an idolatry of the physical and an ethical stance that can be derived from it.

Skepticism

The school of Skepticism is important both for the influence it exerted on other classical thinkers and for the role it plays in much of modern thought (scientific methodology, phenomenalism, etc.). Briefly, the basic notion for the Sceptics is that we are dependent on impressions for whatever ideas we have. Because our senses are not fully reliable, we have no certainty of knowledge – including that of divine nature itself. As the Scottish philosopher David Hume expresses this last, “Our ideas reach no farther than our experience. We have no experience of divine attributes and operations.”¹

The general idea for the Sceptics is that, against the conflicts of human opinion, peace of mind results largely through the suspension of judgment (*epoché*). The Sceptic searches for all arguments that both support and refute an assertion, and he/she does this in a manner which aims to make it impossible to decide between the possibilities. The ‘dogmatic’ stance of the Academics, namely, that no knowledge is possible, eventually was replaced by an understanding of the ‘probability’ in which the plausibility or convincing strength of certain things allows us to operate *as if* they were true. The Pyrrhonian position affirmed from the start a skeptical attitude that denied even the Academics’ assertion that *no* knowledge is possible. Academic Skepticism originates with Socrates’ statement, “All I know is that I know nothing.” It emerged in time to be the chief rival of the Stoics.

The Pyrrhonian stand is one of suspending all judgments and avoiding commitment to any position. The goal here is to achieve the state of mind known as *ataraxia* – a tranquil condition of being unperturbed. Phenomenal appearances and perceptions were all that concerned the Pyrrhonian Sceptics – not the ‘truth’ that could be argued to be behind them. In contrast to the ‘negative’ dogmatism of the Academics, the followers of Pyrrho and Anesidemus were more positive and pursued a course of open seekership. They sought to be free from all forms of dogmatism – living in accord with the customs and laws of society without passing judgment on them. Instead, the Pyrrhonian Sceptic endeavors to remain in tune with natural inclinations as well as immediate experience and, as such, is expressive of much nature religion paganism of the present. Mental tranquility is understood as the product of disregarding all perceptions and values.² While Skepticism was not

¹Hume *Dialogues* II [Bell 1990: 53]. As a philosophical method, Skepticism appears both as a stance adopted by the later Academy and as an extreme philosophical school in its own right. This last is traced primarily to Pyrrho of Elis (c.360–275 bce) and his student Timon (c.315–225 bce). While Academic Skepticism grew to be more moderate, Pyrrhonism is more ‘total’. Cf. Sextus Empiricus *Outlines of Pyrronism* (Mates 1996); for the skepticism of the Academy, see Cicero *Academica* (Reid 1874/2005). Pyrrho advocated the development of a position known as *isostheneia* – balancing the reasons that support a belief against those that deny it.

²While Pyrrhonism as a philosophical movement ended in the third century ce, it was revived subsequently by such thinkers as Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592) and Pierre Charron (1541–1603). Montaigne’s three volumed *Essais* (*Essays*) dates to 1588. His basic argument is that the skepticism represented by the Pyrrhonic position, that humans can know truth, allows the faith

significantly popular in the classical world, it has emerged as particularly important for the modern-day emergence of science and its methodology. It also might have appeal to many throughout the contemporary Western pagan world.

Aristotle

A much different approach to ethics, though fully within the pagan tradition, is that of Aristotle.³ In fact, virtue ethics – deriving from the Peripatetic tradition of Aristotle – along with Utilitarianism and Kantianism constitute the three major ethical options that the West has before it today. For what follows on Aristotle, a giant in the study of ethics and a pagan giant at that, I wish to discuss a range of issues from vernacular expression and identity, empiricism, the desire for happiness and pleasure, the anti-idolatrous exaltation of an ultimate, the contrasting notion of matter, pagan humanism, Aristotle's doctrine of the mean and his pragmatic relativism, the notion of virtue and especially the classical stress on courage, temperance, prudence and justice, and the philosopher's considerations of common sense, friendship and contemplation. Aristotle is encyclopedic, but he is comfortably at home with this diverse range and the various issues that it still raises for

of Christianity. Charron follows his close friend Montaigne but comes to stress in the absence of certain religious and moral knowledge that one should live as conveniently and pleasurably as possible. His published works are *Three Truths* (*Les Trois Vérités*, 1594), *Les Discours Chrestiens* 1600 and *Wisdom* (*De la Sagesse*, 1601). It is the last which is his most original and important. The contrasting school of skepticism, that of the Academic Skeptics, held that no knowledge is possible, although, in time, it came to allow the probability of knowledge. Also, in time, the New Academy and Stoicism increasingly assimilated and became similar to one another. The Academic Skeptical legacy itself has survived through the writings of Cicero (*Academica* and *De natura deorum*), Augustine (*Contra academicos*) and Diogenes Laertius. The influence of the New Academy on modern philosophical thought has been profound – especially in the skepticism of scientific methodology. A key player in this process has been Hume who, influenced in particular by Cicero, traced his moderated skepticism to the New Academy.

³Aristotle, the great Peripatetic philosopher, empirical naturalist and student of Plato, was born in 384 bce in the Chalcidian city of Stagira in the northern Aegean near Macedonia. He arrived in Athens at the age of 17 and stayed for the next 20 years until about the time of Plato's death. On the island of Lesbos, he engaged in systematic zoological investigations. Around 342 bce, Aristotle became the tutor of Alexander, the son of King Phillip of Macedon. In 335, he returned to Athens and launched his own school, the Lyceum – taking its name from 'Lyceus', an epithet of Apollo whose grove was nearby. However, in the wake of the anti-Macedonian sentiments that followed the death of Alexander the Great in 323, Aristotle went into voluntary exile and died the following year at the age of 63. Along with Plato, he is considered the most influential thinker in Western philosophy. His range of interests, and the encyclopedic legacy he has left as a result, covers the areas of logic, physics, natural history, psychology, ethics, politics, rhetoric and metaphysics. He has also given us many of the basic concepts and classifications that we continue to use today. Aristotle's analysis of ethics is to be found in three works: the *Eudemian Ethics* (possibly an early work), the *Nicomachean Ethics* (his major work on ethics) and the *Magna Moralia* (possibly post-Aristotelian).

contemporary consideration. For Aristotle, the structural logic of an argument is more important than its content. In his explorations, classifications and assessments, employing the faculty of reason is the most necessary. Virtues are to be cultivated reasonably and in rational conformity to common sense logic. While Aristotle's own concern is with understanding the good life, this interest leads directly into the political as well. Aristotle's *Politics* is his attempt, based on reflective conclusions regarding numerous constitutions, to situate the ethical in the social/communal life of a person. The *Nicomachean Ethics* is the seminal Western work on ethical analysis. For Aristotle, it is the first part of the study of political science, and it comprehensively poses all the problematic issues without, consensus holds, offering final solutions to the riddles and conflicts that have been articulated by the philosopher.

In connection with politics, one might reasonably assert that religion is finally a matter of taste. On the vernacular level with which Aristotle is specifically concerned, let us consider a Mexican village with its om-pa-pa band and its annual festival during which laborers return from north of the country's border to show off their Yankee dollars.⁴ The band – raucous, discordant, jazzy and wonderful – conveys the thrill of local tradition and cultural solidarity – exactly what appears to be missing from so much of our accelerated, bureaucratic and pressured hierarchical life styles in today's target culture of more advanced areas within Western civilization. The appeal of the Mexican village with its organic hospitality is understandable in contrast to what has been lost in the growing anchorlessness of technical, consumeristic society. In my *Pagan Theology*,⁵ in attempting to discern the atavistic pagan behavior that is detectable as part of our cultural substrata, I am in part seeking to offer a naturalistic pagan re-grounding as a component of a human need for re-centering. But for all the glories that comprise the beauties of Mexican culture – in my feeling the preeminent cultural matrix of the New World's northern hemisphere, we must by today's standards measure it additionally by any embedded resistance to social change it may contain. The homophobia, for instance, of the Mexican village would be doubtless, and its opposition to something like 'gay marriage' most likely even more intense than that of the typical American Midwestern community.

Tradition and change are increasingly today's mutual foes. The right to be different, however, is a pagan natural, and the corpo-spirituality of paganism as a spiritual practice and way of being, along with its ancient pageantries and earth-rites, might be one way to accommodate the old with the new. Many have argued,

⁴04:00 BBC World Service News (4 February 2004). A note to the reader: I let portions of this book write itself. This is not what some might call channeling because I participate in the process as well and perhaps principally, but the rest still occasionally intrudes. The om-pa-pa band encounter is one of these moments.

⁵York (2003).

and continue to do so, that Christianity is the traditional way of the West, the bedrock of the Mexican village and Midwestern community alike. And it is equally likely that an innovative Christianity could equally mediate between grounding dissent and accommodating change in the social turmoil of our times. That is why I am finding in today's world that religion is increasingly a question of taste and hopefully increasingly less one that is simply a matter of birth and indoctrination. Our preferences are something that each of us must eventually decide for ourselves. But within this kind of choice, it is the incumbent ethical orientations that link our divergent behaviors and life styles on the individual level with the social. Aristotle is spot on when he sees the ethical as the prelude to the political. Through all the color and emotional satisfaction that religion might offer us, whether a formal ceremony before an elaborate altar or the om-pa-pa band of communal celebration, it is finally the ethical as an autonomous force that colors and determines the political associations and religious identities we have and can have.

To appreciate Aristotle is to appreciate his empiricism. Whereas Plato is the transcendentalist *par excellence* in regard to epistemology and ethics, Aristotle is an empiricist and naturalist – one who meticulously classified his observations of nature and gave rise to the categories that have remained fundamental to philosophical inquiry ever since. In contrast to Plato's emphasis on forms, ideas or universals as pure essences and the fundamental reality, Aristotle concentrates on the particular and individual as primary substances (e.g., specific human beings, actual animals, concrete objects) with the species and genera into which they may be grouped as secondary. Unlike Plato who exalts the abstract, reality for Aristotle is sensible – known through the body's senses.

Aristotle considers that all people aim for the good, but he does not like some others identify the good with virtue.⁶ Instead, he understands the good as happiness. In Greek, the word for 'happiness' is *eudaimonia* – a wonderful term that literally expresses 'being under the protection of a favorable spirit'. The daimonic, in fact, is what comprises the animistic undercurrent of paganism. The implications of the *daimon* as 'divider', hence 'provider', implies that the numinous is the distributor of physical goods, of riches, of health and wealth.⁷ It is intimately connected with the people themselves, the *demos*, and expresses the preternatural and telluric origins of humanity itself. Nevertheless, in Hebrew and Christian thought, the daimonic is transformed into the demonic – a force or collectivity opposed to God, his angels and saints. Once again, we witness the Abrahamic transmutation of the physical into something other and less than the divine. We might note in addition, along with

⁶This is not to say that Aristotle is not interested in virtue which is precisely not the case. Aristotle understands two kinds of virtue: intellectual (e.g., wisdom, understanding) and moral (generosity, self-control) (*Nicomachean Ethics* I 13 [1103a] [Edel 1967: 364]). In Book II [1104b], building on his understanding that moral virtue is determined by habit, Aristotle informs us that "moral excellence is concerned with pleasure and pain; it is pleasure that makes us do base actions and pain that prevents us from doing noble actions" (Edel 1967: 367).

⁷York (1995: 538). In a word, a fundamental pagan understanding of the gods is summed up in the expression: 'the gods give gifts'. In other words, it is their nature to bestow favorably upon others.

MacIntyre, that designating anything as good “is to place it as a proper object of desire” and “that which men seek or desire cannot be the name of a transcendental object.”⁸

But placing the origins of *eudaimonia* to the side, we have Aristotle’s expression of the chief end of all human activity and purpose, and the question becomes: what does Aristotle mean by happiness and how does one obtain it? This question is the object of his inquiry in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. In this study, Aristotle adopts an empirical approach to consider what people themselves understand as a ‘good life’ or a ‘bad life’. He determines that in vernacular sentiment it is happiness that makes a life a good one. Consequently, Aristotle’s project is to analyze what people mean by ‘happiness’.

Before, however, specifically examining Aristotle’s analysis of the particular and immediate, let me place his endeavor into a larger picture of what might be conceived as an understanding of that to which paganism has evolved. While, for instance, pagans might be in full accord with what Richard Fenn (Princeton Theological Seminary) condemns as the idolatry of civil religion, of such national heroes as Pinochet, Hussein, Mugabe, etc., or of any institutional religion, Fenn’s argument is founded on an understanding of the idol as the penultimate standing for – and precluding – the ultimate that is beyond it.⁹ Fenn is here influenced by Dietrich Bonhoeffer and his dream of a ‘religionless Christianity’, but his argument is that anything deeply cherished that is not simultaneously perceived as providing a sober and direct access to a posited ultimate transcendent is to be condemned as idolatry. This attitude, however, is a further rejection of corpo-spirituality and the vernacular. It amounts to a theological snobbism. For Aristotle, by contrast, what people do and believe is what is of paramount importance. In his thought, there is not some vague platitude concerning the sacred as non-institutionalized and “widely diffused in the population” but instead the “mundane, popular, and temporary” – and immediate – forms of the sacred that are the very instances Fenn rejects.¹⁰

Fenn’s argument rests on the supposed existence of ultimates – or an ultimate. None of this necessarily implies that Aristotle is more correct than Plato, but he approximates what we might consider a basic pragmatic attitude of paganism. This is at the same time not to say that paganism cannot contain the almost passionately irrational and impulsive – such as Plato’s ardent abandonment and rejection of the phenomenal and the material, an attitude more likely to be found in Christianity and gnosticism but one that nevertheless is or can be pagan as well. But for Aristotle, the good is located in what people actually do and less in what they should do. He draws

⁸MacIntyre (1998: 61). For Burggraeve et al. (2003: 122), both religious and profane forms of idolatry are manners of desiring.

⁹Fenn (2001: 10). While Fenn’s secularism is seductively appealing in and of itself, see McGraw (2003: 109–136) for an analysis of some of the secular left’s shortcomings vis-à-vis the open forum of debate and exchange that constitutes the foundation of democracy.

¹⁰Fenn (2001: 74).

his observations from nature; he is not deducing or inferring an understanding of the good and perfect through the pure study of philosophy and mathematics as does Plato.

The physicality of pagan spirituality is the consideration that is needed to include and base any formulation of pagan ethics upon, and, in this connection, we might consider for the moment the role of the stone in idolatry. Pagans use, even can adore, their stone idols, but they are not bound or restricted by them. To be so would be to strike against an essential humanistic chord of paganism that encourages emancipation and openness as prerequisites for growth. The irony is that, for many pagans, a false idolatry is to cast one's commandments in stone. Instead, the stone or idol is intended as a vehicle, not a prison. The dimensions and implications of the 'stoned' mind for the pagan I hope to address later. But once again, we are confronting a pagan cherishing of the natural in the communication with the divine through stone, water, trees, fire and sentience. The idol is not an absolute end in itself but something that aids and assists devotional focus and concentration. The way to and through idolatry is one that itself is, for the most part, guided by the intermediate balance that Aristotle consults for the virtuous and happy life.

A question that arises from a corporeal understanding of spirituality concerns absolutes, transcendentals, ultimates – but to put these in the plural already betrays my pagan inclination toward determinative multiplicity. In paganism, I will contend there is no absolute. In fact, from a corpo-spiritual perspective, if we take matter as the ultimate foundation, we must ask what is matter? Atoms? What are atoms? Protons, neutrons and electrons? But what are these? Quarks? And quarks? String theory holds that quarks themselves are composed of superstrings – now conceived as stretching between 11 dimensions. Whether string theory will ever be proved, whether it could even be proved in the first place, the point here is that there is no center, no ultimate component or foundation – even with something as tangible and fundamental as matter.

This reminds me of Plato's cave in which prisoners only know reality to be the shadows that appeared on the wall from the light behind them.¹¹ Plato's point is that if they could but turn around, these ignorant people would see the light, the truth, that was causing their shadows to appear. But the truth of the matter really is that, while we welcome and rejoice over the sun's existence, we cannot live on it or even look let alone stare at it. We need the bright light of the sun and other truths, not as our foci, but as our guides and assistants. The over-dazzling light of the sun is not our target. Consequently, reality must lie somewhere between the extreme of blinding light and the obscurity of shadows – the kind of mean or balance that Aristotle suggested as a way of life, one that navigates between the ultimate and illusion or mistake.¹²

¹¹Plato, *Republic* 7.6.7 [514–518].

¹²For Aristotle's Doctrine of the Golden Mean, see *Nicomachean Ethics* 2.6-9 [1106a–1109b] (Edel 1967: 371–377) (McKeon 1947: 338–347).

Aristotle's doctrine of the mean looks for the middle way through – or between – the extremes of excess and deficiency. For the full and virtuous life – as one that has the greatest likelihood of achieving happiness – the philosopher speaks in terms strongly reminiscent of both the Buddha's Middle Way and the *Doctrine of the Mean*, one of the four Chinese classics. As Aristotle puts it, "what is both intermediate and best . . . is characteristic of virtue."¹³ Praise and success are understood as characteristics of virtue, and virtue itself is seen as a mean between both excess and defect as forms of failure, one that aims for the intermediate.¹⁴

Aristotle has been criticized on his doctrine of the mean since not all situations have a middle way.¹⁵ For instance, either one tells the truth or one does not. If lying were always to be judged as immoral, then the suggestion is that truth itself – and the speaking of truth – is an absolute virtue regardless of whether people adhere to it or not. This is a Platonic position in which virtue is transcendental rather than something expressed in what people actually say and do. As Aristotle would understand, however, life is greatly more complicated, and morality may not always lie in a clear-cut choice between opposites. For instance, when Dutch resisters hid Jewish people during the German occupation of The Netherlands, would they have been unethical had they lied to questioning authorities in order not to reveal the existence of those they were protecting?

Nevertheless, Aristotle himself recognizes that there are certain actions and feelings that do not suggest a middle way between excess and deficiency. Such things are bad in and of themselves. Aristotle mentions spite, shamelessness and envy as negative passions, and adultery, theft and murder as negative actions. While shamelessness might constitute an excess of modesty, in itself it allows for no excess of excess, or, as in the case of cowardliness or unjustness, no deficiency of a deficiency. As Aristotle puts it in relation to shamelessness and other negative behaviors and feelings, "however they are done they are wrong."¹⁶ In all this we still need to remain mindful that Aristotle raises more questions than he provides answers. It is his methodology and suggestions that are important and require

¹³*Nicomachean Ethics* 2.6 [1106b] (McKeon 1947: 340).

¹⁴Other examples Aristotle gives are those of courage as the mean between fear and rash confidence, temperance between insensibility and self-indulgence, liberality between meanness and prodigality, proper pride/high-mindedness between undue humility or small-mindedness and empty vanity, good temper/gentleness between apathy and irascibility/short-temperedness, truthfulness between mock modesty or self-deprecation and boastfulness, ready wit between boorishness and buffoonery, friendliness between quarrelsomeness/surliness and obsequiousness, modesty between bashfulness and shamelessness, righteous indignation between envy and spite, and justice between having one's rights abused and abusing the rights of others.

¹⁵For MacIntyre (1998: 65), the doctrine of the mean is "perhaps the single most difficult concept in the *Ethics*." He concludes that it is "an arbitrary construction" (p. 67) – reflecting Aristotle's own "class-bound conservatism" (p. 68). Subsequently, he goes so far as to label the Greek philosopher's moral attitude "priggish" (pp 76f). Aristotle's "great-souled man . . . is very nearly an English gentleman" (pp 78f).

¹⁶*Nicomachean Ethics* 2.6 [1107a] (McKeon 1947: 341).

discerning consideration; not necessarily what he advocates or holds to be either good or bad. For example, the issue of adultery connects with questions of freedom and voluntary contract: is one person ‘owned’ by another because of the marriage vow? There are also the problems of war and capital punishment let alone abortion. If any of these are murder, when do we allow them?

One other consideration in relation to Aristotle is necessary to keep in mind. Aristotle, as any ethicist, uses such terms as ‘happiness’ and ‘virtue’ throughout his discussions. While the term ‘virtue’ for many pagans may have various Christian connotations and, consequently, suggests labels with which they might feel uncomfortable, we must remember that virtue is originally a pagan concept and one that is central to every pagan’s relations with nature, the world, humanity and whatever is understood as the magical. If the notion of virtue is felt to have been appropriated by Christianity and some of the other major world religions, it is time for pagans to re-appropriate the field of morality and the inquiry into it as their own natural birthright. This likewise applies to the label ‘happiness’. Aristotle is not using the term in any possibly New Age airy-fairy sense of pure sweetness and light. He is asking what is it that all humans are after, what are their goals and what does this variety of goals have in common for their aspirants’ satisfaction. He sees this as happiness or *eudaimonia*, but he has no presupposition concerning what this could be. Instead, he is endeavoring to find out what happiness is or at least may be and how it impacts on what people do and wish. He appears to be certain, however, that happiness is the final end. It is neither a means to some other end nor simply a component of some other condition. Happiness for Aristotle is a self-sufficient good – essentially the unmoved mover.¹⁷

While Aristotle is providing us with a framework within which to explore the ethical and, hopefully, determine some range of guiding principles for a complete and happy life, what is perhaps most significant in his contribution to the overall discussion is his recognition that the ‘middle way’ is different for different people. His is not only an empirical approach to ethics but also a relativist one. The correct way of living, the mean between extremes, will vary from one individual to the next as well as from one situation to the next.¹⁸ In like manner, Aristotle understands that happiness and pleasure are different for different people and may vary for the same person on different occasions. Consequently, and in accord with the pluralistic pagan legacy as it is understood and practiced today, ‘correct’ ways of living vary for different people.

For Aristotle, along with the possibilities of pleasure, honor or wealth constituting the good for an individual, he considers contemplation as a fourth alternative. He places happiness beyond praise and reserves this last for virtue – both moral and intellectual. Moral virtue is understood as a state of character rather than a passion or even a particular faculty. In as much as it involves the acquisition of a disposition, pleasure is to be identified in virtuous behavior, namely and principally, the ability

¹⁷MacIntyre (1998: 62).

¹⁸*Nicomachean Ethics* 1.4 [1095a] (McKeon 1947: 311; Edel 1967: 357f).

to chose the mean between extremes. This ability is seen as actions done with a balanced understanding of the circumstances and as something chosen freely and deliberately – in full and unconstrained awareness. The moral virtues that Aristotle considers are courage, temperance, wisdom and justice as well as liberality and astuteness in relation to finances, and a balanced disposition in relation to anger. Aristotle’s social virtues are friendliness, truthfulness and a sense of humor. He also understands shame as a quasi-virtue and the medium between bashfulness and shamelessness.

Aristotle explores in detail the common opinions concerning what is moral strength and moral weakness or incontinence.¹⁹ He relates these opinions with negative views on pleasure, namely, that pleasure is not a good, that it is not the chief good, that most pleasures are bad, and that pleasure is understood principally as bodily pleasures. For Aristotle, the study of pleasure and pain is properly part of political philosophy as the determination of which ends are good and which are contrary to the social fabric. If, as Aristotle has it, virtue and vice are determined by pains and pleasures, he asks then why does the common opinion identify happiness with pleasure. He explores the various nuances of pleasure and pain and their relationship to moral strength or weakness but, in the *Nichomachean Ethics*, caps this discussion with his eighth book on friendship which in itself is either a virtue or implies virtue. Here he recognizes clearly that the young tend as a rule to base friendship on pleasure. For youth, friendship more often than not is temporary for, inasmuch as “their lives are guided by emotion, . . . they pursue most intensely what they find pleasant and what the moment brings.”²⁰ Friendships are quickly formed and just as quickly ended. In the advent of new and changing pleasures, “the pleasure of a young man changes quickly.”²¹ This applies equally to the ability of young people to fall in love since this last is based on emotional pleasure and may be satisfied and exhausted within the space of a day. But as we advance in years, different things become pleasant. Consequently, for Aristotle, perfect friendship is formed between people who are similar in virtue and moral achievement.

¹⁹The range covered includes the attitude that moral character is praiseworthy, while moral softness deserves blame; the role of rational calculation in the determinations of the morally steadfast person and their abandonment by the morally weak; the emotional dominance in the decisions undertaken by the morally incontinent even when knowing those choices are wrong; the belief that the morally tenacious person is always self-controlled, whereas the self-indulgent are morally weak and/or the morally weak are self-indulgent; the confusion that the person of practical wisdom is of strong character but if the person displays cleverness, he or she is of weak moral character; and the moral fallibility that is indicated by anger and the pursuit of honor or profit: *Nichomachean Ethics* 7.1-3 [1145b–1147b *et passim*] (McKeon 1947: 443–450; Edel 1967: 401–405).

²⁰Edel (1967: 406)[1156a].

²¹Ibid. [1156b]. Cicero, in his *Laelius: On Friendship* 20.74 (Grant 1971: 213f) says something similar: “Friendships formed before one grows up cannot possibly be stable or permanent. . . . altered tastes are what bring friendships to an end.” Later, Laelius advises not to be hasty in forming an attachment because of the danger that the recipient may prove to be unworthy of the association.

Friendship is something that is needed in both good fortune and bad – more necessary with the latter; more noble with the former. In other words, when times are down or one is in grief, one needs friends; but when one is enjoying good times, it is an honorable thing to have friends. In addition, Aristotle consults that, ideally, one should have *some* intimate friends but not too many. If one has an excess of friends and seeks to mix with them all, one is simply obsequious. Friends, in themselves, “are thought the greatest of external goods”²² – and this invalidates the assertion that the person who is fully self-sufficient and supremely happy has no need for friends. It once again relates to our being social-political creatures, and, as such, the fulfillment of gregarious needs becomes part of our happiness. A solitary life is neither pleasant nor easy. And as a part of the good of friendship entails being noble and sacrificing one’s own interests to those of a friend’s, the good person who lives by virtue will need not to be alone but to have friends. In fact, as Aristotle sees it, the most desirable feature of friendship is to live together. Each type of persons (Aristotle mentions drinkers, dice-players, athletes, hunters and students of philosophy) seeks to spend time with those who pursue and enjoy the same activity. This, in turn, produces a sense of living together. Companionship, therefore, is a form of partnership. But along with what Aristotle considers as the need for friends in the good life, for many a contemporary pagan friendship extends to include both animals and the environment.

Aristotle concludes his *Nichomachean Ethics* with a further examination of pleasure and happiness. He defines happiness as an activity of the soul,²³ but to understand what happiness is, he approaches the answer to the question first through pleasure. For Aristotle, pleasure is what completes an activity; it is not an inherent characteristic of something but a kind of superimposition. As life itself is an activity,

²²*Nichomachean Ethics* 9.3 [1169b] (McKeon 1947: 511).

²³*Nichomachean Ethics* 1.13 [1102a]. In the *Ethics* itself, the philosopher speaks about the two parts of the soul: the irrational and the rational. The former divides between a vegetative or nutritive element – common in fact to all living things and responsible for nurture and growth – and the desiring self, the seat of the appetites. The desiring self is additionally that part of the soul or self that can accept the leadership of reason. The rational element of the soul also divides into two aspects: self-contained reason, and the ability to obey reasonable advice. While we have here echoes of the rudimentary and virtually universal understanding of the pagan concept of soul-duality (York 2003: 13), Aristotle develops what amounts to a tripartite division of the soul into vegetable, animal and rational aspects.

In *De Anima* (‘On the Soul’), Aristotle accepts that the soul as the form of the body is the principle of animal life. He dismisses the properties of movement, spatial magnitude and harmonious blending as belonging to the soul. Instead, the soul is understood as an essential substance – the rudimentary actuality of any potentially living natural body. As Aristotle puts it, the soul is “the essential whatness” of a body (*De Anima* 2.1 [412b] – McKeon 1947: 172). But in addition, it is also the source of the phenomena by which the soul itself is characterized, namely, “the powers of self-nutrition, sensation, thinking, and motivity” (Ibid. 2.2 [413b] – p. 175). Rather than seeing the soul as a subject or as matter, Aristotle understands it more in terms of an essential ratio. As he puts it, the soul is “an actuality or formulable essence of something that possesses a potentiality of being besouled” (p. 177). Consequently, the soul is understood by Aristotle as the origin of movement, the end of achievement and the essence of the complete living organism.

pleasure is the aim of life – desiring to live is to desire pleasure. As Aristotle sums up, “there is no pleasure without activity, and every activity is completed by pleasure.”²⁴ The supremely happy person, therefore, is the one who is ‘completed’ by the pleasures which are most ‘proper’ to humanity.²⁵

It is here that we come to the heart of Aristotelian ethics. The ‘proper pleasures’ are those that involve the effort of virtue. They produce happiness as itself the ultimate end. In other words, joy itself is the end of all human activity – with everything else, except happiness, being chosen to obtain something other than the thing itself. This something other for which all activities are chosen is itself *eudaimonia*. Happiness has no goal beyond itself. But for Aristotle, it is not simply amusement, however pleasant amusements may be. As he expresses, we do not labor and suffer hardship throughout life merely for the sake of amusement. Using our faculties of intelligence, we instead find virtue and reason as the sources of morally good activities, and the happy life is the one that is lived in conformity with virtue.

For Aristotle, it is the contemplative life that exceeds the one of practical virtue. As important as courageous and virtuous acts on behalf of others are, and as interconnected practical wisdom is with excellence of character, it is the joy of intelligence that for Aristotle is foremost. Recognizing that the supreme divine activity of the gods is not acts of justice, courage, generosity or self-control but that of contemplation, Aristotle strips away production and all other activities from the human being to find the same for the individual. He concludes that “the human activity which is most closely akin to [study and contemplative activity] is, therefore, most conducive to happiness.”²⁶

But as much as Aristotle exalts the life of learning and study, he is too much the pragmatic pagan to ignore the material aspects of life and their necessity for a person to be happy. The need for external goods is part of what it is to be human. While our actions can and should be guided by virtue, to be happy we also need health, food, attention, and various other favorable externals. None of these needs to be to any degree of excess, but the fulfillment of our physical necessities to some extent is required both for contemplation and the happy life.

Finally, we may understand Aristotle’s ethics as applying to people in general. Just as he insists that constitutional democracy is only feasible with a strong

²⁴*Nicomachean Ethics* 10.4 [1175a] (Edel 1967: 410).

²⁵MacIntyre’s analysis of Aristotle’s dismissal of pleasure as a final goal (1998: 80–82) is unconvincing. He cites Aristotle’s phrase that pleasure supervenes on a *telos* “like the bloom on the cheek of youth,” but MacIntyre appears unable to distinguish any fundamental difference between happiness (*eudaimonia*) and pleasure other than that pleasure “does not complete or terminate an activity” as allegedly happiness does. But, as with happiness, he admits that pleasure “cannot be a means to anything else.” Perhaps the ultimate question is whether happiness can be unpleasant. Perhaps also pleasure might refer to a feeling within the temporal flow of life, while happiness is an assessment of a teleological condition. In other words, the two words might be designating the same thing but from different angles or perspectives.

²⁶*Nicomachean Ethics* 10.8 [1178b] (Edel 1967: 418).

and well-established middle class, we may assess his ethics as bourgeois.²⁷ He recognizes that the ability to live properly and contentedly requires a degree of material goods. In his assertion that friendship is the greatest of external goods, he is denying any kind of ascetic renunciation such as we might find in *sannyasin*-oriented Hinduism or monastic Christianity. Aristotle's is an ethic of and for the people. If we were to assess middle class life from the perspective of Leonard Bernstein's *Trouble in Tahiti* or from a kind of suburban community in which I was raised, a virtual prototype of *Peyton Place*, we might consider the bourgeois as simply something that appears to be pleasant but which in reality is degenerate and unhappy – a tapestry of frustration, anguish and loneliness. But beyond the limitations of Suburbia and consumer society, Aristotle is not necessarily speaking of a middle class that is based solely on social conformity. He is looking at people largely as he sees them and they are. What is perhaps most missing from the middle classes of today is Aristotle's emphasis on the use of reason as the dominant faculty. It is to be suggested that through our rational abilities we are capable of assessing where we are, what is good about it, what is deficient, how to change any unpleasant situation and how to live nobly in our relationship with others – loved ones, friends, business associates, fellow citizens as well as the poor and disenfranchised. Aristotle has supplied us with the basic parameters of moral life as they might apply to people in general.²⁸ He is not so much dealing with idiosyncrasy and individualism, but with the 'common man and woman'. Pragmatic empiricist that he is, he understands and stresses that ethics and any golden mean will vary for one person to the next, but he has painted for us an ethical portrait for a stable and just social polity – one that is to be founded on ordinary and virtuous people capable of electing or selecting wise politicians and capable of listening to and incorporating their advice.

Socrates

With Plato, his transcendental philosophy can be traced through the pre-Socratics, specifically, Anaximenes, Pythagoras, Xenophanes, Parmenides, Zeno of Elea, and Anaxagoras. Nevertheless, his concern with moral behavior is attributed to his teacher, Socrates (c.470–399 bce). Little is known of Socrates apart from Plato's

²⁷In MacIntyre's understanding, what I refer to as bourgeois he considers to be the norms of ancient Greek aristocracy (1998: 67). Where we might agree, however, is in assessing Aristotle's specific delineation of ethical standards and behavior as applicable to a "parochial form of human existence" (p. 83).

²⁸In referring to the flexibility of Aristotelianism as witnessed through the Thomist reinterpretation and amendments of the Greek philosopher's code of ethics, MacIntyre (1998: 118) makes the impressive claim that "Aristotle's concepts can provide a rational framework for moralities very different from Aristotle's own." Writing 31 years later, in his Preface to his Second Edition, MacIntyre (1998: xviii) again reiterates that "Aristotelianism always has possibilities of revival in new forms in different cultures."

early dialogues, Xenophon's writings, Aristophanes' caricature, and brief mentions elsewhere. The composite that has been built, however, depicts him to have been a philosophical teacher who stressed the ethics of duty. Accordingly, Socrates held that knowledge is virtue: a person who knows what is right can only do the right. Incorrect behavior can never be performed willingly. Consequently, the Socratic position suggests that wisdom provides the most feasible route to happiness.

Nevertheless, Socrates does not appear to have subscribed as completely to transcendental metaphysics as did Plato. According to Aristotle, Plato's theory of Forms or Ideas is not one that Socrates accepted.²⁹ Instead, Socrates apparently focused completely on moral philosophy and not on metaphysics, politics, epistemology, mathematics or physics. In this, Plato's scope – like that of Aristotle's – is much greater. But in his focus, while still considering ethical principles as objective, Socrates is more a naturalist and less the intuitionist as is Plato. More basic and down-to-earth, for him, the unexamined life is not worth living, and it is better to be treated wrongly than for a person himself/herself to commit wrong acts. The fullest expression of this conviction for Socrates was his acceptance of the Athenian death sentence rather than to seize the opportunity to escape from prison or accept the alternative to live in exile. In his emphasis on conduct and character, Socrates seeks to know the good through inductive reason and a process of unending cross-examination. To be virtuous is for him purely an intellectual pursuit, and once the proper way is known, the knower automatically follows it.

Plato

Socrates made the claim that he knew nothing. His pupil, Plato,³⁰ however, did not agree with this position. He asserted that truth exists as an objective reality and that absolute knowledge of it is possible. Platonism argues that through the study of mathematics and philosophy, as well as the development of virtuous habits of behavior, a person can come to know the good. In other words, knowledge of truth, the good and the beautiful is an intellectual pursuit that depends upon a proper and

²⁹Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1078b 27–32: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0052:book=13:section=1078b> (accessed 12.10.14).

³⁰The philosopher Plato (429/428–347 bce) was born either in Athens or Aegina. As a young man of 20, he became an ardent follower of Socrates. With the death of his teacher in 399, he traveled possibly to Egypt, and more definitely to Sicily and the Greek cities of Magna Graecia (the southern Italian peninsula). His fortunes varied, and, after getting to know Dionysius the Elder, he was sold into slavery by the Sicilian tyrant – to be later freed by Anniceris of Cyrene. Subsequently, Plato returned twice to Sicily – first, heeding to the urgings of Dion, a student of Plato's and possibly a love interest, to attempt to teach philosophy to Dionysius the Younger, and, secondly, to convince Dionysius to rescind his banishment of Dion. Plato was unsuccessful in both these ventures, but his real achievement remains his teachings and his writings. Plato has become an instrumental figure in any discussion of ethics – both in classical Greece and as a foremost figure for Western civilization as a whole.

rigorous mental training. Plato follows Socrates in insisting that immoral behavior results from a lack of knowledge – not knowing what the good life is. Once we know what is good and proper, we will live accordingly. Those of us who do not possess this knowledge, or the abilities to procure it, can at least be guided by those who do. For the ordinary person, Plato advises that he or she should seek to imitate those who have become philosophical and ethical role-models.

Unlike his pupil Aristotle whose systematic analysis is founded on empirical data, Plato developed a philosophy of idealism based on his theory of Forms or Ideas (*eidōs*, *ideā*) as the primal or sole reality.³¹ Plato's theory has been described as a 'realistic ontology of universals'. The Form or Idea is a perfect original that exists in a supra-sensual world. Anything that is encountered on the material plane (tables, chairs, presumably trees, individual human beings, etc.) is simply a copy of its pure archetype and, hence, is of an inferior quality. For Plato, the earthly and tangible only seem to be real; the ideal alone is what really exists. This idealism informs the philosopher's understanding of what he considers to be ethics and the good life.³²

Following the death sentence imposed on his teacher Socrates, Plato became disillusioned with Athenian democracy and perceived it as terminally corrupt. The

³¹In Athens, Plato used the gymnasium of the Academy to give his lessons, and it was here where he established his school of mathematics and philosophy in 387. His writings survive virtually all in the form of dialogues. His output is traditionally divided into three periods, and most of the works of the first period do not appear to contain much of Plato's original thought itself but are recognized as the most reliable sources for what we know of Socrates. The works of Plato's middle period represent the philosopher at his peak and express his own views rather than those of Socrates – although Socrates still appears as the chief speaker. We also have a collection of 13 letters some of which may be forgeries, but the consensus holds that at least the third, seventh and eighth are genuine. The Seventh Letter recounts the details of Plato's unsuccessful excursion to Sicily and his encounters with Dionysius II. It alone provides most of our knowledge concerning Plato's personal life.

Plato's early works include the *Apology*, *Crito*, *Ion*, *Hippias minor*, *Euthyphro*, *Lysis*, *Laches*, *Charmides*, *Hippias major*, *Meno*, *Euthydemus*, *Protagoras* and *Gorgias*. Plato's middle period is known through the works of *Phaedo*, the *Symposium*, the *Republic* and *Phaedrus*. Plato's late works are the *Parmenides*, *Theaetetus*, the *Sophist*, the *Statesman*, *Timaeus*, *Philebus* and the *Laws*. Some scholars consider the *Timaeus* to belong to Plato's middle period. Both the *Republic* and the *Laws* are long works – the former divided into ten books; the latter into twelve.

³²Platonic metaphysics itself would appear to be a development of the strain of thought we find in the pre-Socratic thinkers of Anaximenes, Xenophanes, Anaxagoras and Pythagoras. While the Ionian physicists of the sixth and fifth centuries bce sought the ultimate substance of things (for Thales it was water; for Anaximander, *apeiron* 'the boundless'; for Heraclitus, fire), Anaximenes held that it is air, and he identified this as God. The Milesians (from the Greek city-state Miletus), Thales, Anaximander and Anaximenes, all sought the material source of the cosmos. Anaximander identified the world-principle as infinite, eternal, imperishable and inexhaustible. Anaximenes' contended that it is air (*aēr*) that possesses the attribute of infinity and indestructible eternity, and, by combining these qualities with the airy immaterial, he leads us toward the transcendental direction that is encapsulated in the idealistic philosophies of Pythagoras, Xenophanes, Plato, Plotinus, Porphyry and Iamblichus. For Anaximander and Anaximenes, see, respectively, Kirk and Raven 1957: 99–142 & 143–62.

Republic presents Plato's plan for the ideal society. This last is not a democracy but a puritanical and parental oligarchy in which philosopher-rulers are the governors. Plato's state is designed in a way that endeavors to preclude certain behaviors and activities that the philosopher deemed as obstacles to the people's development of virtuous habits. Perhaps the closest realization of Plato's state has been the experiment of the Soviet Union, although in this instance it would appear that its governors were primarily bureaucrats rather than philosopher-kings. Nevertheless, the Soviet Union sought to censor and control the production of art in much the same way that Plato rejects artistic creation, that of the poet and painter alike, as fabrications, that is, imitations of life and of no value for elucidating life itself. All in all, for Plato, art corrupts human development.³³

Whereas Aristotle sees good and virtue as at least in part relative and varying for different people and different situations, Plato argues that the good is an unqualified ultimate in and of itself. Consequently, there is only one good life – not a variety of good lives, and this good life is the same for all peoples. Plato's 'good' exists independently of humanity. It transcends the whims, wishes and outlooks of all people in general. Instead, the 'good' and the 'truthful' are absolutes – ones that exist in some pure, transcendental realm that remains uncontaminated by the corruptions and immoralities of the mundane world that we humans inhabit.

It is clear how Plato is able to derive his ethical views from his metaphysical arguments concerning the Forms or Ideas as the sole and independent reality. Morality for Plato is therefore not subjective, not a question of taste, opinion or preference, but a self-existing absolute. Moral laws are objective and fully independent of men and women. While the Judeo-Christian God is understood as the creator of the good, Plato's God or Demiurge is good only to the degree that he conforms to independent moral standards. From the Platonic perspective, ethical values are *a priori* to all human endeavor; they are not to be discerned as developing within, or created by individuals in, day-to-day contexts. They are instead principles to which we must conform, or at least seek to conform, at all times regardless of our particular circumstances and moral dilemmas. They, along with the pure and immutable essences, are ideals that exist fully independently of the imitative inferiority that is our earthly existence.

There is in Plato an incipient world-weariness – one that manifests as his longing for a better and different world, one known through intuitive reason and not through empirical investigation based on the bodily senses. These last allow us simply to know the changeable nature of the world and produce at best *doxa* 'opinion' rather than true knowledge. Instead, *epistēmē* or 'scientific knowledge' for Plato is that which is arrived at through mathematics and philosophy.³⁴ It differs from both belief and illusion and is based on the assumed objective existence of

³³*Republic* 10.10.3 [605c]. In fact, for Plato, in his ideal understanding of education, at least for the guardian-rulers and their military auxiliaries, the works of Hesiod and Homer were to be eliminated because they do not portray the gods and heroes as perfectly moral and honest.

³⁴*Republic* 7.7.6 [510]. For the distinction between knowledge and opinion, see 7.5.1 [476–480].

independent essences. It is these last, Plato's Forms or Ideas, that provide not only the epistemological foundation of human knowledge but also the ontological ground for the tangible objects we encounter in the world we know through our senses.³⁵ Plato's ontology is hierarchical: above the realm of the senses³⁶ are the relationships of pure mathematics: equality, proportion, similarity and dissimilarity. Beyond these we encounter the major virtues: justice, piety, temperance, courage and wisdom. Above these are the Ideas of truth, beauty and symmetry – sometimes equated with but other times superseded by the Idea of the Good as the pinnacle.³⁷

In the *Symposium*, Plato comes to modify his earlier assertions concerning the soul whose natural tendency is to seek the 'higher dimensions' of pure forms. Here we find that it is not only intellect that spurs the soul in this direction but also desire or love (*eros*).³⁸ The soul that is trapped within the body is a soul that has lost its wings. Whether Plato is conceding to the role of the appetites at this point, his emphasis on what we now refer to as 'platonic love', the highest form of love based on the vision of pure beauty – itself transcending the sensual, stresses the power of the aesthetic to help us *recall* the realm of pure form from which our souls have descended. This dualism between the transcendental and the sensual world, the opposition between the immaterial soul and the material body, is not one we find even in the Old or New Testaments but is one that comes to Christianity from Plato chiefly through Ambrose and Augustine. In his *Timaeus*, this duality is extended to the universe itself as the body of the cosmic soul – both cosmos and world soul being created by the Demiurge or 'divine craftsman' using the eternal forms as inspiring models.

Consequently, one of the great difficulties with Plato is that his writings are not fully consistent.³⁹ Like what we may assume for Socrates, Plato's chief concern is with moral philosophy. But unlike Aristotle, Plato is not concerned with the good life in terms of happiness. Rather, his preoccupation is with the 'correct' life as understood through virtue and justice. His basic position is shaped by his metaphysics concerning the ideal world of pure Forms, and his understanding of ethics correspondingly conforms to an assertion that moral correctness is an absolute in and of itself – existing as an unchanging reality independent of humanity and the phenomenal world. Though, in the *Philebus*, Plato understands goodness in terms

³⁵*Republic* 7.6.5 [509b], 11.10.1 [592–602].

³⁶The "twilight world of change and decay" (*Republic* 7.6.5 [508d]; ed. Lee 2003: 234).

³⁷E.g., *Republic* 7.6.5 [508e, 509ab], 7.7.7 [517bc], 8.7.2 [526e]. Note, however, that Pirsig (1974: 374) suggests that Plato's Good is subordinate to Truth rather than vice versa.

³⁸E.g., *Symposium* 204b, 210a–212c (Waterfield 1994: 45, 53–56).

³⁹Plato's writings contain contradictions – especially some of his early third period works (e.g., *Parmenides*, *Theaetetus*, *Laws*) vis-à-vis his middle period dialogues. There are also uncertainties and non-conclusions (again in both the *Parmenides* and *Theaetetus*). For the most part, however, the later third period works are clearer (the *Sophist*, *Statesman*, *Laws*, *Philebus*) but again contain new ideas on metaphysics and politics, etc. at variance with the established Platonic thought in such major works as the *Republic* and *Phaedrus*.

of proportion – the balance between pleasure and intelligence, his ethical position is known by subsequent generations as a development of his theory that dichotomizes ideas and appearances and his assertion that absolute knowledge of truth is possible.

In our present navigation of ethical nuance, it is not possible simply to declare that Plato's absolutism is wrong while Aristotle's relativism is correct. Nothing in ethics can be that simple. But our basic question is a twofold one. It concerns *both* what we might refer to as the metaphysics of ethics – the possibility of ontological moral independence – and the locus of ethics and meaning for the individual. The Platonic position is akin to that of Gnosticism and Vedantic Hinduism. It denies that the world we know through our senses is real. It is an illusion – masking the allegedly real but invisible world of pure ideational form. Consequently, beauty and truth exist as innate knowledge and are not to be discovered through our bodily senses of sight, hearing, touch, smell and taste. For Plato, beauty, truth and wisdom are already possessions of the soul, and our task is to discover them or re-awaken to them – similar to Vedanta's mission for the individual to realize what it considers to be the fundamental identity between self and God, between *atman* and *brahman*. Likewise, moral standards are independent of person, place and situation. They are known innately or intuitively and provide what we all seek in terms of progress. Knowledge, then, is a process of recollection – allowing us to recognize what we know internally already, namely, the beauty or goodness of something to the degree that it partakes in the paradigmatic form of 'beauty' or 'goodness'. But when we come to consider morality, can Plato's 'good' really be found in everyday reality and the concerns of ordinary people as well as others? Does it allow or provide any of us with guidance for making the kinds of choices we need to make in our complex, contemporary society – one seemingly far distant from that conceived by Plato in the *Republic*?

For a contemporary pagan, this does not necessarily suggest that a choice must be made between Aristotle and Plato when the concern is to act ethically or make moral decisions. Aristotle is useful but perhaps in a manner that is less comprehensive for addressing the kinds of dilemmas one is likely to encounter today. Also, Aristotelian ethics might be more applicable to status quo situations and for more middle class or mainstream parameters and less so for the growing range of diversity in individual behavior that modern/postmodern Western society encourages. In contrast, however, Plato may appeal to more escapist urges, that is, to those who yearn for some sort of pristine transcendental reality uncontaminated by the vagaries, compromises, excesses and pleasures of mundane, this-worldly existence. While there are contemporary pagans who pursue the Orphic, Platonic, Neo-platonic, cabalistic, etc., these orientations remain more marginal to core pagan values and aspirations that treasure this world, the worldly, the sensual and, above all, the givenness of nature in all her actuality as something sacred *sui generis*.

Nevertheless, Plato's contribution to ethical debate remains central. His basic question – to which the entire *Republic* is a response – is 'what is justice (*dikaisunē*)?' Plato's consideration of justice in an ideal political framework is in some respects a foil for his presentation of justice as a moral quality in the individual. As the component parts of the ideal state (guardians, auxiliaries,

the producers) are to function together harmoniously (i.e., the social order), the aspects of the just person's soul (reason, spirit, appetite) know their place and are arranged in a similarly balanced proportion.⁴⁰ In other words, for Plato justice is a matter of harmony and proper ratio for either the state as a whole or the individual himself/herself – constituting for both the right way to live.

Plato also delineates the specific virtuous attribute for each part itself. For the ruler, this is wisdom (*phronēsis* or *sophia*); for the soldier, it is courage (*andreia* or *arete*); and for the artisan, it is temperance (*sophrosyne*).⁴¹ These qualities correspond in the individual with wisdom for the rational aspect of the soul, with spirit for the energetic part of the soul, and with temperance or self-control for the soul's basic appetites. In Plato, the overall term he employs is *arête* 'goodness, excellence' which is more a quality than a virtue as such. It is, however, through Ambrose's reading of Plato in Cicero that the principles of prudence, fortitude, self-control and justice became recognized as the four cardinal virtues of the classical Greeks. In the nuance of historical translation and interpretation, the terms have varied. For instance, concerning the word *sophrosyne*, Grayling claims that "no single English expression gives an adequate rendering, although standardly translated as 'temperance', 'self-restraint' or 'wisdom'." He continues by reflecting on Plato's definition of the term in the *Republic* as "the agreement of the passions that Reason should rule."⁴² Nevertheless, Christianity came to add the theological qualities of faith, hope and love/charity to the four cardinal virtues, and together these were posited in contrast to the 'seven deadly sins' of pride, envy, anger, dejection, avarice, gluttony and lust.

Plotinus

Plato's real successor is the Egypt-born Plotinus (205–70 ce) who developed a more mystical religio-metaphysical philosophy known as Neo-Platonism. Plotinus begins with an eternal principle of unity that he terms the One, the source of the great chain of being. The first emanation of the One due to its innate and overflowing fullness is Intelligence (*Nous*) – containing Plato's forms or ideal paradigms and representing intuitive thought. Next emerges the World Soul, the second emanation – the active

⁴⁰"So justice is produced by establishing in the mind a . . . natural relation of control and subordination among its constituents" *Republic* 5.4.3d (Lee 2003: 154).

⁴¹The Latin equivalents are *iustitia* for 'justice', *sapientia* for 'wisdom' or *prudencia* for 'prudence', *fortitudo* for 'courage' and *temperantia* for 'moderation' or 'self-control'.

⁴²Grayling (2003: 11). For Lee (2003: 392), the word "means in origin 'sound sense', and has two main meanings in ordinary Greek usage: (a) 'prudence', good sense; (b) 'temperance', moderation, or . . . 'control over the sensual desires'." Lee rejects the former translations of 'prudence' or 'temperance'. However, in the Swiss Mueller deck of tarot cards, the cardinal virtues appear among the major arcane as *la force* (strength), *la justice*, *temperance* and *l'ermite* (the hermit representing wisdom or sagacity).

intelligence of the space-time cosmos, forever in contemplation of the *Nous* or Mind, containing the world as its body, and representing discursive thought. The final emanation is formless matter whose invariable concomitant is evil. In this format, the human being is understood as a spark of the divine, the soul, entrapped in the material body – the *soma sema* concept that considers the ‘body as a tomb’. The mission for the individual, his/her quest for the good, is to re-ascend the ladder of being and reunite or re-merge with the absolutely transcendental One – allegedly the unknowable object of worship and all ‘true’ desire. This is to be accomplished through intellectual contemplation and austere spiritual practice. Less rationalistic than Platonism itself, Neo-Platonism incorporates various physical exercises for the body in the attempt to liberate the soul from the bondage of matter.

Although Plotinus attacked the religious philosophy of Gnosticism, and someone like Ken Wilber can recognize the process of emanation as a positive act of procreation,⁴³ the essential thrust and goal of Neo-Platonism is still gnostic – to escape the inevitable and intrinsic pollution of the lower realms of fragmented existence.⁴⁴ To this end, following both Orphic and Pythagorean thought, Plotinus affirmed the doctrine of reincarnation to provide the soul successive opportunities for its release from the mundane, the ordinary and the corrupt or sinful.

The Sophists

The underlying gist of Plato and Plotinus’ perspectives is the supreme sanctity of absolute truth that is believed to exist as the fundamental and transcendental reality. Variously identified as the good, beauty, the idea or form of the good, etc., truth is one part of a cosmic duality with error, darkness and evil. The task of the individual in such a framework is to secure correct knowledge and engage in ascetic practice to separate himself/herself from the lower world of illusion, appearance and corruption. In essentials, Platonic and Neo-Platonic spiritual philosophy, like the Orphic mysteries and the Pythagorean religious school, is a form of gnostic dogma and doctrine. In the case of the development of Socrates and Plato in particular, their respective stances are seen as reactions to the prevailing teachings of a group of Athenian teachers in the fifth century bce known collectively as the Sophists. What we now know of the Sophists comes through the surviving fragments of their written work but primarily from their appearance in the works of Plato.⁴⁵

⁴³Note that for John M. Dillon, Plotinus sees “the whole cosmic process as an inevitable result of the superabundant productivity of the One, and thus ‘the best of all possible worlds’” (Audi 1999: 605). See also Wilber (1996).

⁴⁴In the *Enneads* 2.3.9 & 18, Plotinus here as elsewhere refers to matter as ‘evil’. He also typically understands the soul as in the torment of a ‘fall’ (e.g., 5.1.1).

⁴⁵E.g., *Protagoras*, *Gorgias*, *Cratylus*, the *Republic*, the *Sophist* and *Critias*.

Despised by Socrates because they charged for their teachings, the Sophists are known foremost for their development of the art of rhetoric. They contrast with the pre-Socratic philosophers who concentrated on cosmological speculations. The negative assessment of the Sophists' distinction has evolved as one solely concerned with clever and devious argument in which the skill of subtle disputation takes precedence over everything else – including whatever truth may or may not be found behind their persuasive arguments.

As a Sophist, Thrasymachus in the first book of the *Republic* is exemplary of selfishness and immorality. He understands evenhandedness or righteousness as defined by the interests of the stronger, and he contrasts natural with conventional justice. However, there is no body of doctrine through which the Sophists may be identified, and several (e.g., Protagoras and Prodicus) were concerned with bona fide moral principles. For the most part, the Sophists are associated with rhetoric as the art of persuasion. Gorgias constructed an argument that denied not only knowledge and communication but existence itself. His student Lycophron went further and argued for the very elimination of the verb 'to be' in speech and writing for purposes of greater clarity. The most famous of the Sophists, however, is undoubtedly Protagoras (490–c.410 bce) – possibly a student of Democritus. Presumably also interested in grammar as well as law and mathematics, Protagoras was a relativist who proclaimed that 'man is the measure of all things'. As an agnostic concerning the existence of the gods and their nature, he nevertheless argued for the advantages of education for human betterment and the health of the soul.

Though the conventional perspective on the Sophists is the demeaning consideration of them as simply clever and corrupt opportunists, Robert Pirsig argues differently and concludes that

Plato's hatred of the rhetoricians was part of a much larger struggle in which the reality of the Good, represented by the Sophists, and the reality of the True, represented by the dialecticians, were engaged in a huge struggle for the future mind of man. Truth won, the Good lost, and that is why today we have so little difficulty accepting the reality of truth and so much difficulty accepting the reality of Quality, even though there is no more agreement in one area than in the other.⁴⁶

Pirsig contends that Plato incorporated the *arête* of the Sophists into his dichotomy between ideas and appearances – where it was subordinated to Truth. Once Plato identifies the True with the Good, *arête*'s position is usurped by "dialectically determined truth." This, in turn, allows Plato to demote the Good to a lower order and minor branch of knowledge. For Pirsig, the Sophists were those Greek philosophers who exalted quality over truth; they were the true champions of *arête* or excellence.⁴⁷ With a pagan quest for the ethical that develops from an idolatrous understanding of the physical, while Aristotle remains an important consideration, it is to the Sophists (particularly Protagoras, Prodicus and Pirsig's understanding of

⁴⁶Pirsig (1974: 365).

⁴⁷Pirsig (1974: 374).

them) and a reconstruction of their underlying humanist position that perhaps the most important answers are to be framed if not found as well.

A basic pagan position is an acceptance of the appetites – in fact, their celebration rather than their condemnation. We find the most unbridled expression of the appetites in the actions of the young. Youth may engage in binge-drinking, vandalism, theft, promiscuity and profligate experimentation. Pagan perspectives may recognize the inherent dangers in these as there are in life itself. But they also trust the overall process of learning. In paganism, morality has a much greater latitude than it does in the transcendental philosophy of a Pythagoras, Plato or Plotinus: it may veer toward a form of relativism, but its ultimate check is always the sanctity of other animate individuals. An it harm none, do what ye will. The pagan ethic must be found within the appetites and not in their denial.

In fact, paganism is part of a protest against Platonic assertion. The wider denial is that of nature herself. Nature denies the Platonic by refusing to conform to the Platonic ideal. It insists on moments of chaos, the epagomenae, the carnival, that overlap between the real and the ideal that is itself a metaphor for reality. The actual year is a refusal to cooperate with the mathematically ideal year of 360 days – close but only tantalizingly.

In addition, pagans have always loved asking what is *arête*? This is the fundamental question we encounter with the Sophists, Plato and Aristotle. It is the question that is before us still. The classics considered variously both happiness and the good as alternate answers. The Hedonists pick happiness – but a particular kind of happiness. The underlying principle recognized behind all these possibilities is *arête* ‘excellence, the best’ however it is embodied – whether god, goddess, goods, the good, gods, virtue, happiness, pleasure or all of these together. *Arête* is that to which both individual and community aspire. Each wants one’s own individual way of putting it together in excellent fashion – but at the same time wanting some commensurable overlap of the individual way with the community way.

A pagan approach will, and must continually, ground itself in nature. Pagans can always work with the magicians – pagan and gnostic both. But in a pagan consideration concerning the transcendental and peculiar nature of the Abrahamic ‘God’ and that, in subscribing to such a belief, much of our world (at least half) lives under a hex of some form or manner, it can be left to the gnostics with their own transcendental affinities to deal with the unhexing part of the global social equation.⁴⁸ The re-growth part is the pagan contribution. Paganism works with – and models its basic behaviors on working with – the soil. The soil is its emblem for the nutritive earth – itself the metaphor and actuality of a pagan trust in the evolutionary fulfillment of matter. That trust connects in today’s world with an understanding

⁴⁸From perhaps a more poetic perspective but one that is nonetheless grounded in an understanding of a pagan orientation that accepts both the material and spiritual as equally sacred, the dominance of the Abrahamic thinking that belongs to roughly one-half of today’s human population may be, metaphorically at least, considered as a kind of magical spell that hypnotizes those under its influence to be incapable of comprehending the earth as divine.

that the whole matter-energy dimension is a series of differing vibrations. Even the most solid substances we know are vibrating – ultimately indicating to us that form and substance are similar if not the same.

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Chapter 4

The Ancient World

In classical ethical inquiry, the chief question is ‘what is *arête*?’ Each tradition, however, appears to appropriate the term for itself, and each formulates its own particular understanding of what it means by ‘excellence’. For some, the good is virtue; for others it is happiness. But again there are different understandings of happiness. For the Stoics, it is *apathia* ‘not suffering’, ‘complete tranquility’, ‘passionlessness’. For the Epicureans, it was rather *ataraxia* ‘not disturbed’, ‘serenity’, ‘peace of mind’, ‘freedom from passion’. Among the ‘Socratic Schools’, the Cynics went for virtue, while the Cyrenaics opted for *hedone* ‘pleasure’. Much contemporary Western paganism conforms with this last. This chapter will examine both the Hedonists (Cyrenaics, Epicureans, post-Classical Hedonists, Utilitarians, present-day pagans – both indigenous and Western) and the Stoics (and the related Cynics) to gauge how they understand *arête* and possibly contribute to an earth-centered, physically based and idolatrous comprehension of ethics. And as we are also concerned with the emergence of ethics as a global conversation, I will inspect Christianity, which develops out of the same milieu in which these pagan schools flourished, to assess both its contributions in general and its differences from paganism in particular. Although Christianity in practice reveals substantial historical diversity, the focus here will be both on the biblical texts that belong to the time of the classical world and which are seminal to the faith, and on the Church Father giants of Augustine and Aquinas.

The Cyrenaics

Together, the Cyrenaics and the Epicureans are classified as hedonists – those who identify *arête* with pleasure, although each understands pleasure differently. In other words, there are contrasting varieties of hedonism, and even Epicureanism has come subsequently to be understood as the pursuit of sensual enjoyment – although this understanding does not follow the original teachings of Epicurus himself. In fact, the

contemporary vernacular consideration of Epicureanism is closer to the beliefs and practices of Cyrenaicism – the school of thought established by Aristippus of Cyrene (c.435–350 bce), a former companion if not also student of Socrates.¹ In general, for the hedonists of all colors, the appetites are not regarded as some wayward black horse, simply to be reigned in, but as constituting an important component of the soul or human nature if not also its very foundation. The hedonists do not subscribe to anything like an attitude derivative of a puritanical position, and, even when they advise caution or moderation in the pursuit of pleasure, it is for pragmatic reasons and not ones that simply seek to avoid adulteration *per se*.

Originally from North Africa, Aristippus of Cyrene held that objective knowledge of the world is not possible. He derived this generally skeptical attitude presumably from Protagoras, but because of his relativist theory of knowing, he stressed that in this situation the only thing that truly matters is enjoyment, namely, pleasurable feelings.² Aristippus advised that one should enjoy the present (*carpe diem*), and this advice clearly resonates with such contemporary adjunctions as that of Ram Dass' to 'be here now'. The good life for the Cyrenaics is identified with whatever yields the greatest degree of pleasure or contentment through satisfying desire. Aristippus' epistemology is phenomenalistic. Since the only things that are certain to us are the impressions we have of them rather than the things themselves, and since Socrates allegedly claimed that happiness is our main objective, he concluded that the goal for humanity is simply to avoid painful sensations and cultivate those that are agreeable. Whether Aristippus equally stressed the cultivation of more mental pleasures such as aesthetics, friendship, reading and the like is not completely clear, but the Cyrenaics are known for their emphasis on the importance of sensual pleasure. The school as a whole often took positions that, by today's standards, are morally questionable. For instance, Cyrenaics suggested that one should obey the law not for reasons of correctness or virtue but because, by doing so, one could avoid punishment and hence pain. Honest behavior was encouraged because it was held to be more pleasurable, not because it was considered more virtuous.

Nevertheless, despite the criticisms that are often leveled against Cyrenaicism, it represents the school of thought that most directly centers on the pursuit of pleasure *per se*. It holds to a subjective moral relativism – virtually an 'an it harm none, do what thou wilt' attitude. We can also surmise that the Cyrenaics did not discriminate between the genders but that women could and did hold positions of honor within their framework. Aristippus' daughter Arete may have, in fact, succeeded her father as the chief custodian of Cyreniac teachings. In turn, her son,

¹There are no extant writings of the Cyrenaics. Their ideas can only be discerned through brief mentions of them in the works of other writers, most of which are disparaging.

²<http://www.iep.utm.edu/aristip/> (accessed 13 October 2014): "He was probably the most scandalous of Socrates' followers because of his advocacy of a life of sensual pleasure and his willingness to accept money for his instruction, as the sophists did."

Aristippus the younger, succeeded his mother and might have actually been the founder of the Cyrenaic School. He was known by the epithet *matro-didactus* or ‘mother-taught’ as a reflection of Arete’s esteemed position.³

The Cyrenaics advise prudence as a part of the art of living. Reason is important but primarily as a means to increase one’s ability to attain pleasure. One sought through education and intelligence to be master of pleasure and not to be enslaved by it. For the Cyrenaics, the cultivation of the mind is understood as an aid to the satisfaction of desire and maximizing pleasure without causing pain in the process. However, they argued against dwelling either on the future or the past. The immediate bodily gratification in the present is what is important. Anticipating some future pleasure or remembering some past one is counterproductive to proper enjoyment. Instead, the Cyrenaics advise a ‘be here now’ attitude to life in general. Even the elimination of pain is of less importance than the experience of pleasure, though both pleasure and pain are understood as simply internal physical motions. But from the Cyrenaic perspective, Socrates’ carnal rejection of the beautiful Alcibiades despite being in love with him was a folly and a waste of an opportunity of sensual pleasure.⁴ The exercise of self-restraint in the consummation of sexual attraction between otherwise willing and adult parties is seen as a travesty of the aesthetic principle of experiencing pleasure as the supreme goal of life.⁵

While psychological hedonism develops around the assertion that all human acts are motivated and performed for purposes of the agent’s own pleasure, ethical hedonism is concerned with the goals or values of life, namely, happiness understood as pleasure. This has been an attitude that has been attacked and condemned by Christian thinkers and others through the ages, and yet it comes close – if not the closest – to natural human desires. For this reason, it is exemplary of the values and aspirations of paganism in general and contemporary Western paganism specifically. To the degree that its stance is vulnerable to ‘high’ moral

³Other Cyrenaics include Bio and Euhemerus. In the third century bce, Hegesias argued that it is more important to avoid pain than to seek pleasure, but Anniceris, following more closely Aristippus and his emphasis on both bodily and intellectual pleasures, stressed the social pleasures of relationships: friendship, parents, fellow citizens, people in general. Anniceris even went so far as to suggest that one should be willing to suffer for the very pleasures of respect and gratitude. In this he represents a development away from the basic Cyrenaic attitude that seeks the cultivation and maximization of each momentary enjoyment. Anniceris’ reflections reveal in themselves that the Cyrenaic School was not bound to any narrow and inflexible remit in its understanding and pursuit of pleasure. In fact, the late thinker known as Theodorus the Atheist even suggested that, above and beyond momentary pleasure, life’s true goal is the achievement of persistent joy. To this end, he argued for the development of practical wisdom. He also denied the divine. Epicurus does not agree with Theodorus. He affirms the existence of the gods but claims that, as perfect beings, they have no concern with us and, consequently, we should have no concern or fear of them. We do not know what Aristippus’ own attitude toward the deities might have been, but Theodorus’ epithet of ‘atheist’ is suggestive that he was introducing an innovative position vis-à-vis the Cyrenaic School itself.

⁴Plato *Symposium* 218c–219e, 222a-b (Waterfield 1994: 64–66, 69f).

⁵*Vide* Waterfield (1994: xvif).

condemnation, it must contend with Butler and Sidgwick's formulation of the 'hedonist paradox' that asserts that people who seek consciously simply to increase their own pleasures rather than being primarily concerned with others are those who are most likely to fail in their efforts. The Cyrenaic Anniceris, with his emphasis on human relationships, is one attempt to move beyond egoistic hedonism. Epicureanism and utilitarianism are two others.

Epicureanism

Epicurus (341–271 bce),⁶ along with his close colleagues Metrodorus (c.331–278), Hermarchus (Epicurus' successor at the Athenian school) and Polyaeus (died 278), inaugurated his teaching center, the 'Garden', in 306. Other significant Epicurean communities were to be found in Mytilene and Lampsacus. These functioned as havens for philosophical engagement and the cultivation of friendship, withdrawn from political and administrative involvement, and equally open to men and women, rich and poor, free people and slaves alike. Once again, as with the fundamental openness of the Cyrenaics, we find an affinity between Epicurean hedonism and contemporary pagan values of equality. However, Epicurus rejects the skepticism of the Cyrenaics and adopts the materialistic-atomistic metaphysics of Democritus and Leucippus – holding that the world, of finite duration, has been accidentally generated by the combination of its atomic compounds. He also argues that all sensations are valid and claims that the skeptical denial of the possibility of empirical knowledge by the Cyrenaics and others is itself an unfounded assertion and, consequently, a self-refuting position. Nevertheless, Epicurus rejects the pre-determinism of the atomists and defends free will. He bases this last on what he refers to as the *clinamen* or spontaneous 'swerve' of atoms in their course of movements.

In the goal of achieving *ataraxia* or 'freedom from disturbance', Epicurus denies that the individual has anything to fear from the gods – not because they are inherently benign but because, as perfect beings, they have no concern with

⁶The surviving writings of Epicurus consist of three brief epitomes: *Letter to Herodotus*, *Letter to Pythocles* and *Letter to Menoeceus*, respectively, covering physics, astronomy and ethics. There are also a group of maxims plus fragments of *De rerum natura*. Beside Seneca (c.5 bce–65ce), Epicurus is frequently mentioned by Plutarch (c.46–c.120 ce). Fragmentary expositions of Epicurus have survived in the works of Philodemus of Gadara at Herculeaneum. Apart from Cicero and Lucian, Epicurean teachings appear on a second century ce colonnade at Oenoanda that was inscribed by Diogenes Flavianus. Another important source is Diogenes Laertius (second/third century ce) who considered Epicurus' contribution as 'the beginning of happiness'. By far, however, our greatest source for the ideas of Epicurus and Epicureanism in general is Lucretius' *De rerum natura*. Lucretius' dates are c.99–55 bce.

imperfect humans. He also denies that there is anything to fear in death.⁷ The human can only have feelings when he or she is alive. When the body dies, there is no possibility of sensation of any sort. This post-mortem argument is in essence the same as David Abram's when he claims that "a wholly immaterial mind . . . could not experience anything at all."⁸ Epicurus, of course, according to Lucretius, considers that the mind-spirit dies with the body. But as it is the body that is the locus of sensation, without the body, there can be no feelings – and, hence, there is nothing to fear.

With Epicurus' hedonic philosophy, pleasure is an innate, natural goal – the highest of all values including the value of virtue itself.⁹ Evil is simply pain and nothing more.¹⁰ But rather than following Aristippus' understanding of the supreme good as the pleasure of the moment, Epicurus turned instead to Democritus and his concept of *euthumia* or 'cheerfulness' as the highest goal – a state of complete mental tranquility. In his consideration, a longer life does not necessarily indicate that one has more moments of pleasure. Consequently, the task of Epicurean philosophy is to show how pleasure can be maximized in terms of prolongation rather than intensity.¹¹

In Plato's *Gorgias*, the Sophist Callicles sponsors living for the satisfaction of short-term bodily appetites. Callicles claims that nature structures every individual to satisfy his or her desires. Socrates' refutation of Callicles' argument is that natural motivation is based on well-being rather than immediate pleasure – necessitating one's ability to differentiate between beneficent pleasures and harmful ones. For Plato in the *Republic*, the good is the rational to which pleasantness is subordinate. Epicurus reverses this hierarchy, however, and it is here that he comes to differ the most from both Callicles and Aristippus. In the obtainment of *ataraxia*, rationality for Epicurus allows one to understand the limits of life, to avoid false gratifications, to eliminate unnecessary desires and, above all, to purge the fear of death. In other words, the rational serves the acquisition of pleasure rather than, as with Plato, pleasure being a means to augment reason.

While Aristotle's goal of happiness may be considered encompassing of pleasure but nevertheless something broader, for the hedonists it is specifically on pleasure

⁷Epicurus *Key Doctrines* 2. See also Lucretius *De rerum natura* 3.31-93. For Epicurus, even the pain of death, or the pain involved with death, is of limited duration. With death, the pain can no longer occur; it is completely finished. In Epicurus' *Letter to Menoecus*, he states that 'death is nothing to us. For all good and evil lies in sensation, and death is the end of all sensation'.

⁸Abram (1966: 68).

⁹*Letter to Menoecus*: pleasure is 'the primary and natural desire'.

¹⁰*Letter to Menoecus*: 'all pain is an evil', and yet not all pain is to be avoided since submission to some pains sometimes has the consequence of a greater pleasure.

¹¹See further <http://philosophy2.ucsd.edu/~brink/courses/161/Handout-12.html> (accessed 19 March 2006). Epicurus recognized two types of pleasure: the *kinematic* – volatile, sensory pleasures that amount to compensating a deficiency, and *katastematic* – a stable freedom from all pain or disturbance, i.e., those pleasures that are capable of prolonged duration. For Epicurus, *ataraxia* depends on the latter – the kind of pleasures that may be varied but not increased.

that they concentrate and which they hold to be the ultimate of human concern. Among the Cyrenaics, Aristippus understands pleasure as the immediate *sensation* of pleasure. Particular pleasures are to be chosen for themselves, while happiness is a secondary consideration that is merely dependent on those pleasures that are chosen. Aristippus is concerned with specific pleasures (those that afford ‘smooth’ change as opposed to ‘rough’ change) rather than with exploiting simply the greatest amount of pleasure throughout one’s life as a whole.¹² It is, however, Epicurus who insists that the achievement of *ataraxia* depends not on a Cyrenaic pursuit of immediate sensual pleasure but on adopting basically a humble lifestyle, eating simple and plain foods, satisfying only our natural and necessary desires, and finding support through like-minded friends.¹³

Post-classical Hedonism

Consequently, the hedonism of classical paganism finds its chief expressions through the quasi-competitive, frequently overlapping and eventually fusing schools of thought represented by the Cyrenaics and the Epicureans. Broadly, both schools held to the belief that the *summum bonum* or greatest good is pleasure – pleasure understood as either peace of mind or elation, and, if the latter, either momentary thrills or something more durable and lasting. Whereas the Cyrenaics might build their lives around both the experience of pleasure and the delight in its memory, the Epicureans sought pleasure through prudent moderation and the avoidance of pain. Both approaches delineate important considerations and positions for global and contemporary forms of paganism. Without the constrictions of an *a priori* transcendental mandate that theologically rejects pleasures of the flesh as well as natural bodily comforts, paganism is free to pursue and explore the hedonic as a primary *raison d’être* in life. In its unadulterated remit, paganism can marry the theory of psychological hedonism, namely, that the individual will always act from a desire for pleasure, with the ethical position that, in the long run, one *ought* always

¹²Hegesias modifies Aristippus because of the inevitability of pain in life. He advocates the development of an excess of pleasures over the number of pains in the individual’s life. Anniceris, however, stresses instead merely the sum of pleasures. He claims that the wise person can be happy even with few enjoyments. Anniceris also places a high value on such non-sensual pleasures as friendship. While Theodorus holds that the foolish are those who possess friends for their utilitarian purpose only and that the wise do not need friends at all, Anniceris like Aristotle recognizes the necessity for friendship if an intelligent person is to be pleurably happy. In this he continues the line of thought of Epicurus himself who describes *ataraxia* as not only freedom from fear and falsity but also the cultivation of friendship, peace and aesthetic contemplation.

¹³In the *Letter to Menoeceus*, Epicurus advises simple and inexpensive foods as well as the avoidance of profligate and sensual pleasures. These last include extravagance as well as any pursuit that ultimately produces pain and disturbance, such as continuous drinking, dancing and sex. Instead, prudence, honesty and justice are important for overall balance and well-being since the virtues are intimately connected with the pleasant life.

to act to achieve the greatest pleasure. Fundamentally, the hedonist is interested in producing the greatest quantity of pleasure – whether the pleasurable is understood as philosophical inquiry, as the contemplation of beauty, or as sensual enjoyment.¹⁴

In contrast to the Christian Epicureanism of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the empiricist Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) returns to something closer to the materialism of Epicurus – one that precludes consideration of a non-corporeal soul or spirit. Unlike the insistence by Epicurus on free will, however, Hobbes argues for the inevitability of causal determination. He also posits the necessity of the social contract over and above the state of nature understood chiefly in terms of humanity's instinct to survive. Morality itself results from our innate desire for peace, but our survival instinct remains expressed through feelings of pleasure and pain, desire and repulsion. Sensations that evoke negative memories produce aversion; those that recall benevolent pleasures generate attraction. In his *Leviathan, or the Matter, Form and Power of a Commonwealth* (1651), Hobbes claims that people's motivations are for material gain, renown and security, but nonetheless his pleasure-pain continuum remains firmly rooted in the physicality of reality.¹⁵

Utilitarianism

Nevertheless, Hobbes' subordination of the individual to civil law and society prefigures the main shortcoming of classical hedonism in both its Cyrenaic and Epicurean forms, namely, its egoistic orientation in lieu of social considerations. When hedonism takes on universal ethics, its clearest and most articulated expression is the Utilitarianism of Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832), James Mill (1773–1836) and John Stuart Mill (1806–1873) that proposes the intrinsic moral goodness of whatever actions produce, or tend to produce, 'the greatest happiness for the greatest number'. While this specific articulation is formulated by the Moral Sense theorist

¹⁴In the post-classical importance of hedonism, we find a Christian form of Epicureanism in the Renaissance humanistic thought of both Lorenzo Valla (1405–1457) and Desiderius Erasmus (1467–1536). In his 1431 work *On Pleasure*, Valla accepts the hedonic principle but places it as more appropriate for the next world rather than this one. In his works, *The Contempt of the World* (1490) and *The Epicurean* (1533), Erasmus, too, moderates Epicurus' this-worldly values with the Christian virtue of faith and belief in immortality – thereby undercutting the foundations of Epicurus' own philosophy based on the totally ephemeral condition of life and the necessary disregard of the gods. Christian Epicureanism also appears in the 1516 *Utopia* by Sir Thomas Moore (1478–1535). Influenced by both Valla and Erasmus but also by Plato's communistic political philosophy in the *Republic* and *Laws*, Moore conceives of the ideal society as focused on equality and pleasure. Like Aristotle, he recognizes the necessity of goods for the individual, but, like Epicurus, he stresses simple pleasures and the avoidance of pursuing such things as wealth, fame or status. But in his Christian perspective, he places ultimate pleasure as something belonging to the next world rather than this one.

¹⁵Hobbes (1651: Chap. 13).

Francis Hutcheson (1694–1746),¹⁶ and the philosophy of David Hume (1711–1776) prefigures Utilitarianism,¹⁷ it is Bentham who developed these thoughts into the Principle of Utility, a sort of hedonic calculus. Bentham and J.S. Mill are philosophical hedonists inasmuch as they identify happiness with pleasure.¹⁸

John Stuart Mill, son of James Mill, continues with Bentham's Utility Principle but seeks to refine pleasure by distinguishing between the quality of the pleasures concerned. With Mill, it is no longer simply a question of the sum or highest quantity of pleasure but now the question of the greatest amount of 'higher' intellectual pleasures. He contends that is better to be an 'unhappy Socrates than a happy pig'.¹⁹ Like Aristotle, Mill is concerned with the possibility of majority tyranny, and, consequently, he favors education and public responsibility as 'higher' values and, thus, higher pleasures. The main importance of Bentham and Mill's Utilitarianism, however, is not its interest in the production of pleasure but rather in its articulation of the consequences of whatever actions are chosen and undertaken. In this more universal application of the hedonic principle, the rightness or wrongness of any given action is a separate consideration from the moral nature and actual motives of the acting agent. And inasmuch as the correctness of an act is judged by how it affects the majority, Utilitarianism has a natural affinity with political democracy.

The critiques of Utilitarianism include a rejection of the equivalence of worth between all individuals. Nietzsche, for one, objected to Mill on this basis – claiming some people are more important than others and so the determination of the goodness of an action on the numbers of people affected is not always valid. The difficulty, however, in this kind of assessment is that it allows the kind of travesty of general human dignity as we can see in the attack on the World Trade Towers. One group of people is devalued in favor of another and its aspirations. The 911 debacle as well as the bombing of Iraq are also indicative of another weakness of Utilitarian theory, namely, pre-determining the number of people whose pleasure will be increased in excess of those for whom it will be diminished. Utilitarians (e.g.,

¹⁶In his 1725 work entitled *Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*.

¹⁷Hume's prefiguring of Utilitarianism rests with his consideration that our natural propensities are aspirations toward pleasure coupled with sympathy for others – making value a social matter.

¹⁸Among Bentham's publications, two works of particular significance are *Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1789) and *Deontology or the Science of Morality* (1834). For Mill the father, his 1820 essay "On Government" for the *Encyclopedia Britannica* is relevant, and for John Stuart Mill, the son, *On Liberty* and *Utilitarianism* were published, respectively, in 1859 and 1861. Bentham stresses the consequences of behavior in terms of pleasure's intensity, duration, certainty, immediateness, productiveness, purity and extent. It is this last that specifically refers to the number of people affected. Individual and social decisions alike are based on producing either the largest sum of pleasure or the smallest sum of pain. Bentham also rejected the concepts of natural law and the social contract as fictions – being non-reducible to real entities. Mackie (1977: 128) makes the dismissive claim that Bentham's assertion, that everyone should count for one but nobody for more than one, offers no clear principle of distribution.

¹⁹See <http://fergusmurray.members.beeb.net/utilit.htm> (accessed 19 March 2006). "It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied" (*Utilitarianism*, Chap. 2).

John J.C. Smart) stress instead the degree of *probability* for the long run desirable consequences, namely, the greatest good for the greatest number.²⁰ The dilemma that arises, however, is that if an action is to be judged by its consequences rather than by the intent of the agent, even a person acting in good faith is wrong if the ultimate consequences of his or her actions prove to be detrimental. Unless one knows all the results in advance, which is impossible, no one can know at the time of making them whether his/her decisions are morally worthy ones or not. While the motive for hedonic pleasure for both self and others is perhaps valid within the individual or egoistic context, there are inherent weaknesses involved when that principle is extended to a universal level of consequential utility.

Despite its weaknesses, Utilitarianism has, and continues to have, an influence on many ethical thinkers.²¹ Utilitarianism remains among the most influential ethical theories of our times. It is strongest when applied to the making of everyday decisions based on practical reason. Although Utilitarianism is a development or extension of Hedonism's identity of happiness with pleasure from the individual to a broader community or social context, in its concern with consequence, Utilitarianism does not necessarily remain hedonistic. The 'good' of the greater

²⁰Note J.J.C. Smart and Bernard Williams, *Utilitarianism: For and Against* (1973).

²¹For instance, William Paley (1743–1805) developed a Christian Utilitarianism that seeks general happiness by incorporating theological authorization within the ethics of Christian Scripture, while Henry Sidgwick (1838–1900) abandoned hedonism for an Intuitive Utilitarianism based on the self-evident principles of intuitionism, egoism and utilitarianism. Other kinds of Utilitarianism have been advocated: Herbert Spencer's Evolutionary form and Hastings Rashdall's Ideal Utilitarianism.

One distinction within the doctrinal reflection that the principle of greatest utility ought to be the decisive factor in ethics is the differentiation between Act Utilitarianism (such as that of Bentham) and Rule Utilitarianism (as understood in Richard Brandt's advocacy of utility based on an ideal moral code). Brandt allows that the ideal moral code is modified by any given society, but this relativity is itself reduced by his affirmation of what he calls the universal obligations of humanity and fairness. One concerns the responsibility to ease the suffering of others; the other relates to the necessity of fulfilling one's associational duties equitably. J.S. Mill is considered to be an intermediate combination of the two forms of Utilitarianism. For example, Mill accepts the utilitarian use of general rules and social principles in decision-making through the assumption that these have been derived from or designed for the benefit of society as a whole. In Act Utilitarianism, the utility criterion is applied to individual acts; in Rule Utilitarianism, it concerns not utility *per se* but the action's conformity to a set of ideal rules.

For a brief discussion on act and rule utilitarianism, see Mackie (1977: 125–9 & 136–140). Mackie refers to himself as a rule-right-duty-disposition utilitarian (199f). He considers act utilitarianism as 'extreme utilitarianism' – advocating simply for a balance of hedonistic pleasure over pain (125) – and is in general critical of the "fantasy moralities of utilitarianism and neighbourly love" (134). In his stress on specific rules as the core of morality rather than any general utilitarian principle, Mackie prefers the two-stage procedure of rule utilitarianism in which, following J. Austin, rules for right action are fashioned on the notion of general happiness or utility, but conduct is fashioned on the rules (136). Examples of the rules that Mackie allows include those of justice (within a particular society), against invading someone's recognized rights, of keeping agreements, of not punishing the innocent and of making impartial judicial judgments. These rules are for Mackie neither innate principles nor laws of nature to be discovered by reason but rather only principles of equity and the contractual ways of making and keeping agreements (239).

number or greatest good need not always be pleasure. Part of this development stems from a prevailing vernacular sense of common decency. For instance, if people acted purely out of selfish and immoral motives but nevertheless achieved pleasurable and beneficial results for others despite their original intentions, while Utilitarians would in theory have their basic criterion for the good fulfilled, most people would not want to accept this particular scenario as illustrative of morality. Among the attempts to refine Utilitarianism itself, those of R.B. Brandt and R.M. Hare are perhaps indicative of rectifying possibilities.²² Nevertheless, as Bron Taylor conveys to me, utilitarianism remains “the prevalent approach to public and economic policy in capitalist economies.”²³

Pagan Hedonism

While a pagan may be no less concerned with the general welfare of the social polity than is anyone else, he or she in the contemporary milieu is more apt to begin within the parameters of the individual pursuit of pleasure. This is not necessarily the same for paganism in its more global manifestations where often in the indigenous context there is a definite preference for the community’s well-being over that of the individual. Nevertheless, as our world continues to grow more dense and populated, and as the world community itself emerges universally into a single cosmopolitan plurality, the navigation of the individual vis-à-vis global society is one that is, or at least begins with, hedonic concern. For a pagan, part of this concern – even as a pleasurable concern – is the question of the sacred. Is there the divine, and, if so, where and how does it operate or interplay with the individual and society?

We are now once again with the issue of idolatry and corpo-spirituality. From the hedonistic perspective, the question is clouded by the anti-supernatural understandings of Epicurus. While the philosopher does not deny the existence of the gods, he contends they are useless for all human wishes and needs. The Epicurean gods are perfect and, as such, have no interest in humanity because, if they did, they would no longer be perfect.²⁴ In Epicurus’ thorough-going materialism, he wants to establish that humans have nothing to fear from the gods. His position, prefiguring Deism to the extent that his gods are *dei otiosi* or *dei absconditi*, has frequently been written off as a form of atheism.

²²In *The Language of Morals* (1952) and *Freedom and Reason* (1963), R.M. Hare argues that moral judgments are imperatives rather than descriptions. He opposes ethical naturalism by which value terms are defined as neutral statements of fact.

²³Personal communication (7 March 2014).

²⁴The “gods . . . pass their unruffled lives, their placid aeon, in calm and peace” (Lucretius, *De rerum natura* 2.1093-4 [Latham 1994: 64]). According to John Godwin (Latham 1994: xvi), the argument is that “The gods by definition live a life of serenity. If they bother about our lives they cannot be serene.”

The problem with Epicurean theology is the same problem with Epicurean philosophy as a whole. While this last is appealing in many respects, it contains various *lacunae* and self-contradictions. One irony is that Lucretius, who follows Epicurus with evangelical fervor, begins his work with an elaborate personification of Venus and Mars and prays to the goddess for inspiration and peace. While admittedly this may be poetic metaphor, considering Epicurus' antipathy to poetry,²⁵ there is the possibility within Epicureanism of the sort of cognitive dissonance or counter-intuition that Pascal Boyer speaks of in connection with the inevitable plausibility of extraordinary religious claims.²⁶

Epicurus' materialism is fully inspired by the atomism of Leucippus and Democritus. One major difference is that for Democritus the all-embracing causal mechanism precludes the possibility of free will – as well as immortality. The soul and consciousness are simply composed of smaller atoms than those that make up the phenomenal world. These atoms are diffused throughout our bodies – some being lost in sleep, more in a faint or coma, and all in death. Epicurus, however, through his doctrine of *clinamen* or the 'swerve' of atoms, allows room for free will which is essential to Epicureanism and its denial of mechanistic determinism. Both Democritus and Epicurus nevertheless reject the notion of personal immortality, and both endorse a hedonistic value theory as something natural to the human condition.

The materialism of both Democritus and Epicurus holds that sense impressions are themselves caused by the physical impact of images (*eidola* or *simulacra*) on our sense-organs – these *eidola* detaching themselves from the objects perceived and, as thin films, merging in some manner with our bodies and interpreting spirit or mind. For Democritus, the gods are themselves *eidola* – real images rather than hallucinations – that appear to us in dreams.²⁷ Less the Skeptic than Democritus and the Sophists in general, Epicurus allows that our sense-impressions could be mistaken but in general are reliable. This epistemology permits him to believe in the gods' existence since there must be a material cause for human belief in them in the first place. As John Godwin explains concerning Epicurus' understanding, "The gods exist . . . in [the] 'spaces between the worlds' (*intermundia, metakosmia*), and their atomic bodies are in some way as deathless as the atoms out of which they are composed."²⁸

Consequently, what is missing, for the pagan, in the otherwise agreeable philosophy of Epicurus are the notions of both sacred place and apotheosis. In the very notion of the shrine – central to pagan religiosity – the invisible divine world is believed to make contact with and infuse the secular world of empirical reality. Epicurus wants to remove fear from people in their aspiration toward a pleasurable serene life, and part of this attempt is to deny any role to the gods as causal factors behind our fears of punishment resulting from their anger or intimidating behavior.

²⁵ Vide Plutarch, *De poetis audiendis* 15d, and Diogenes Laertius 10.13.

²⁶ Boyer (2001: 35, 74, 84 & 346).

²⁷ Thrower (1999: 94).

²⁸ Latham (1994: xv).

Instead, in understanding the gods as role-models, Epicurus teaches that, through prudence and the pursuit of modest pleasures, we are capable of “leading a life worthy of the gods.”²⁹ In other words, Epicurus wishes us to be like the gods but in our here-and-now. That is the full scope of his concern.

Nevertheless, the situation is reminiscent of throwing out the baby with the bathwater. To inspire god-like lives in this world need not be predicated on a postulated total aloofness of the gods or the non-penetration of the divine otherworld with the life we know here on earth. Most traditional and contemporary pagans endeavor in some manner or another to interact with the gods through worship and divine intervention. These in themselves do not prevent us from pursuing pleasure and leading moral lives. In a sense, the gods may be understood as reflexes and/or allies that a pagan uses and from whom one may seek assistance.

Even in Epicurus’ framework, however, if the gods are “examples of atomic compounds that can constantly regenerate themselves and thus not disintegrate with age and death,”³⁰ there is no inherent reason that humans cannot achieve the same. As a general rule, pagan religiosity affirms the essential connection between the human and the divine.³¹ This link is already suggested in a modified and rational form by the Cyrenaic Euhemerus of Messine who lived in the court of Cassander in Macedonia around 316 bce. In his *Sacred History*, he suggests that the gods developed from local folk traditions whereby famous heroes, warriors and benefactors were deified by a grateful people.³² This understanding that ancient myths are genuine historical events became known as Euhemerism and was traditionally used by Christians to assert that the deities of the classical world are simply human inventions. Nevertheless, it suggests as well something closer to the pagan notion of apotheosis that we find among the ancient Greeks and Romans as well as in Chinese folk religion, Japanese Shinto and Yoruba-derived Santería. In many cases, the gods or *orishas* are recognized as having been originally people on earth. In other cases, human beings are understood to be able to translate into deity in one manner or another and join the community of the gods.

Of course the mental *eidola* of today are no longer thought of as compositions of superfine atoms, and the spiritual other is more often considered as belonging to a non-empirical, metaphorical or imaginal realm than to the bodily world known through our senses *per se*. Many contemporary pagans, however, take inspiration from the matter-energy continuum understanding that derives from Einstein’s theories of relativity. The gods may be pure energies found in some relatively non-corporeal dimension. Nevertheless, even in this case, as with Epicurus, the deities and humans are different by degree rather than by kind. Pure energy exists as wave movements, and as these oscillating waves encounter one another, they either mutually augment or mutually nullify if they interact at all, but in most instances

²⁹Lucretius 3.322 (Latham 1994: 75).

³⁰Godwin *apud* Latham (1994: xvi).

³¹*Vide* York (2003a).

³²See also Thomas Carlyle’s *Heroes and Hero Worship* (1841).

they simply pass through one another without effect. It is only in the state of material incarnation that there can be touch along with the risk of conflict and collision. But along with the body, we have the possibilities not only of touch but also sight, sound, smell and taste. The Hedonist position is one that rejoices in these opportunities and capitalizes on them as pleasurable 'gifts from the gods'. Whether this last is actually true or not is of less importance to both the Cyrenaic and Epicurean alike. Hedonism calls for one simply to be mindful of the present and to enjoy it as fully as possible.

There remain many questions still attached to hedonism as a starting point for moral reasoning, and some of these will be addressed as we come to consider other contributions to the ethical debate. Robert Nozick supposes that it may some day be possible to develop a pleasure machine that could be capable of stimulating the gratification center of the human brain. While a gut reaction is to reject such a likelihood as contrary to some innate moral sense – even though the hedonist's very goal is to maximize the sum total of pleasures, we must at the same time entertain the possibility that any antipathy to such an idea is the product of cultural conditioning and an enculturated predisposition that disallows the range of imagination on which paganism itself is predicated. The current general thrust of civilized development, and specifically of paganism, is to reject distinctions between 'high' and 'low' culture, and any honest appraisal of Western culture and its growing addiction to sensual body work, self-oriented therapy, pampering gimmicks and stress-reducing tranquilizers cannot deny that this appears to be a growing trend in human choice. If a common need is being met through such wide-ranging developments among the public, are these by default wrong? If the general public can be made to be happy – as Utilitarianism seeks, no one need condemn such a scenario even if one personally opts not to participate in it oneself. The real issue here concerns individualism as well as the generosity of the magnanimous soul.

In the introduction of 'utility' along with 'happiness', 'pleasure' and 'virtue' in the debate concerning ultimate human goals, the Utilitarians have sought to broaden the inquiry from the purely personal or egoistic domain to the collective or social. This is important inasmuch as we, as humans, live with and as groups. Even as hedonists, we are obliged to consider the feelings and freedoms of others in our own pursuits. A pagan, or at least a contemporary Western pagan, tends to begin with pleasure (an it harm none, do what ye will), and the search is to find a formula within the hedonic quest that allows not only space for the other but a simultaneous catalyst that promotes the well-being of others at the same time that the acting agent produces pleasure for the self. The weakness in the Utilitarian position, however, is its approach to pleasure as something quantitative and measurable. In actuality, the axiological cannot be reduced to a hard science.

At the same time, the hedonist faces the question whether pleasures are to be maximized in terms of both intensity and duration. An intense but prolonged delight is fatiguing and, ultimately, monotonous. The constant pursuit of sensual pleasures may finally be beyond any human capacity. What this brings up for the hedonist are the issues concerning the amount and quality of pleasure. Perhaps the hedonist can only seek to collect a range of delights (gourmet meals, passionate sexual encounters, reading good books, experiencing enjoyable parties, stimulating

debates, artistic encounters, learning and so forth), but whatever the hedonic options may be, hedonism eschews in general the ascetic abandonment of sensual and intellectual joys. Viable pleasures may be regarded by some as simple and non-elaborate – the position of Epicurus, but we might surmise that if the founder of Epicureanism had had a stronger stomach, he might have been more the epicure we presently understand the epicurean to be – adopting a philosophy more compatible with ephemeral sensual pleasures. In any event, we are here reminded of Felicitas Goodman's conclusion that in the long run, the human individual cannot tolerate ecstasy deprivation.³³ It may be that for the pagan hedonist, the occasional experience of the ecstatic and the general experience of the enjoyable are all that are necessary for a full and satisfying life.

None of this takes us, of course, into a consideration of others *per se* and any indisputable foundation for altruistic behavior. At this point in our discussion, however, we are more concerned with deciphering the 'good' life in contrast to a 'proper' one. Paganism is not particularly oriented toward notions of self-sacrifice. It begins instead with the search for the full life, and for the individual this refers to how one is to live his or her life in terms of honoring the gods and realizing the range of potentials that life has to offer. The bottom line for a pagan on this score is enjoyment. It may be that altruism and service to others is for some a pleasure – perhaps the greatest of pleasures, and paganism has no difficulty with that possibility. In its corpo-spiritual predisposition, all pagans share a deep love and reverence for the earth, and this is the earth in all her manifestations – both self and other.

In its more indigenous expressions, paganism is chiefly concerned with the community, and any integrated effort toward others is part of the social fabric of a pagan society. In the more cosmopolitan and Christian West, however, the pagan community is only one among many, and many pagans live and function primarily as solitaires rather than in any aggregate. Community concern is nonetheless a part of any pagan's life – even if and when that community is not a pagan one. But in navigating one's way through life and the intersections with whatever communities one is a part of, the hedonic pursuit is for a pagan the most trustworthy guide. The various schools of hedonism offer different but compatible suggestions for a pagan to locate his or her course. Despite its shortcomings, Utilitarianism provides a more universal focus in its various attempts to provide the greatest good for the greatest number. But for the person himself or herself, Cyrenaicism and Epicureanism delineate the possibilities for the individual who chooses to negotiate in terms of pleasure. The latter seeks to reduce the likelihood of pain by living a life of few desires (hence, few disappointments) and simple enjoyments. By today's standards, an Epicurean pagan may follow, for instance, a macrobiotic or organic diet, vegetarianism or veganism, a regime of salads, fruit, nuts and/or porridge. A Cyrenaic pagan, by contrast, might be happier with meat and potatoes, a burger meal from a fast-food

³³Goodman (1988: 171).

outlet or a repast in a three-star restaurant. In its basic orientation toward life and insistence of diversity and freedom of choice, paganism embraces the variety of hedonic possibilities. For a pagan, life is to be enjoyed, for by enjoying life, one is honoring the gods and accepting what nature has offered as the supreme gift.

Nevertheless, the realities of life are such that it is not always a pleasurable experience. By default, incarnation entails sooner or later loss and pain. These are inevitable concomitants of life, for by its end, we lose everything. And even before the end of our own lives, the loss of others is painful, the occasion of grief. Other forms of pain accompany the loss of health, accident, injury, the loss of one's possessions through theft or financial difficulties, the loss of the familiar, torture, imprisonment, the loss of freedom, war, famine, plague, poverty, discrimination, catastrophe – the list is interminable. In short, for many on this planet, life is a hardship, and any hedonic options are few – if they exist at all. When pleasure is outweighed by suffering, hedonism seems unlikely to be the viable choice for a pagan or anyone in relatively dire conditions. It is in such situations – when ‘the chips are down’ – that a religion like Christianity can thrive and capitalize. It can offer a rationale for *why* someone is encountering distress (original sin, sinful behavior, refusal to accept God or Christ) and a *promise* for salvation – if not here-and-now at least in ‘the world to come’.

While Christianity came to be the religion that emerged triumphant, during the Roman Empire the chief philosophies that prevailed were the Platonic/Neoplatonic, the Peripatetic, the Epicurean and the Stoic. To this day, Stoicism offers itself as a fundamental pagan alternative – primarily in contrast to Hedonism in its various forms. Founded by Zeno of Citium (c.335–264 bce) around 308 bce, and taking its name from the painted *Stoa poikile* where he taught in Athens, Zeno's Stoic philosophy holds that the route to happiness is through detachment and the cultivation of passionlessness. Stressing a form of spiritual frugality, the Stoic School placed highest value on the notion of duty. Virtue is regarded as the only desirable goal, and being virtuous is understood as living at ease with nature.

Cynicism

In some respects, Stoicism cannot be considered without a look at the ancient philosophy of Cynicism which, like Stoicism, is a consolatory way of life. Stoicism itself presumably draws on both Cynicism and the thought of Socrates concerning rationality and the pursuit of truth. In contrast to Cyrenaicism and its ideal of a life of rational sensual pleasure, the Cynics preferred abstinence in their goal of achieving autarchy (*autarkeia*) or self-sufficiency. The most famous Cynic is Diogenes of Sinope (c.400–c.325 bce), Aristotle's contemporary, who rejected civic life for a simplistic lifestyle – in his case, by begging, wearing only the most rudimentary of clothing, indifferent to personal cleanliness, eating only the simplest of foods, living in a wine-jar and devoting himself to self-mastery. Among his “outrageous public stunts” is supposedly his “masturbating in front of a crowd to show how easily and

trivially sexual desires can be sated.”³⁴ The shamelessness of the Cynics reputedly earned them their name (from the Greek word for ‘dog’, *kuon* or ‘dog-like’ *kinikos*) and is an expression of their desire to live ‘close to nature’.³⁵

As a result, the Cynics rejected all the artificialities and luxuries of civilization. They regarded government, marriage, private property, religion and such social institutions as slavery as contrary to the simple and preferable way of life. The ‘travelers’ or vagrants of their day, the Cynics were ascetics who regarded the world and material goods as evil. They espoused a quietistic, ascetic and/or pietistic otherworldliness. As a school, Cynicism is reputedly founded by Antisthenes (c.445–c.360 bce), a companion of Socrates, who likewise believed that happiness results from virtuous living. Unlike Antisthenes and Diogenes, however, later Cynics took advantage of others by borrowing money and then relying on ‘indifference’ when it came to repayment. Nevertheless, as a student of Diogenes, Zeno of Citium was strongly influenced by Cynic ideas (self-mastery, conformity to the rhythms of nature, cosmopolitanism), and his Stoicism likewise considers virtue as the goal and highest good of life.

Stoicism

In Stoic metaphysics, the world evolved from a fiery vapor, and God is understood as a living force that is immanent in nature. Unlike both Epicureanism and Cynicism which remained essentially the same throughout their trajectories, Stoicism – the most influential ethical philosophy of the ancient world – evolved constantly. In its origins, Stoicism is to be seen as a form of non-atomist and non-atheistic materialism. In time, however, it transformed into a form of Platonic idealism.³⁶

Stoic materialism is akin in many respects to modern field theory. Matter is accepted as the sole reality, while substantial differentiation results from the varying degrees of tension that are inherent in matter. The finest degree of material tension composes *logos* ‘reason’, variously understood as ether, eternal fire, the unifying principle, nature, godhead, order, Zeus, providence or fate – the primordial force that forms and directs the cosmos. The relation of this force or corporeal God to the world parallels that of the soul to the human body. In other words, the Stoic God or Zeus is the soul of the universe. But this pantheism of the Stoics suggests a form of

³⁴Stokes (2003: 31).

³⁵Another possibility for the origin of the Cynics’ name is that it derives from ‘Cynosarges’, the name of an Athenian building where the Cynics first taught.

³⁶Beside Zeno of Citium, the key names associated with Stoicism include Cleanthes of Assos (331–232 bce), Chrysippus of Soli (c.280–206), Panaetius of Rhodes (185–c.110), Posidonius of Apamea (c.135–51), and, among the Romans, Lucius Annaeus Seneca the dramatist (c.5 bce–65 ce), the former slave Epictetus (c.55–c.135 ce) and the Emperor Marcus Aurelius Antoninus (121–180).

pre-determinism: the universe is an assemblage of fixed and unchanging laws. There is no metaphysical room or possibility for chance. The human being is, accordingly, simply a part of the universal chain of causes and effects, and the only freedom lies in one's accepting and obeying fate, that is, God's will as a universal rational principle. This Stoic God is unlike the Christian or Abrahamic God as a conscious personality; he – or it – is instead the cyclical and organic regularity of the natural world that both brings the cosmos into existence and subsequently destroys it.

As a microcosm of the macrocosm, the individual human being mirrors “the entire universe in miniature.”³⁷ Consequently, while reason guides the cosmos, so too should it direct the life of the individual. Stoic ethics, therefore, in seeking to develop *apatia* or ‘mental tranquility’, calls for one to learn to be indifferent to external influences. Like the Cynics, the Stoics were affected by the social turbulence and collapse of their times, and, against this backdrop, they turned their attentions to the attainment of personal salvation – foregoing any direct attempt toward social reconstruction. Stoics seek to cultivate a virtuous aloofness or detachment to the passions and, in this sense, stand in an opposite corner to the Cyrenaics. Evil is understood as ignorance, that is, not to possess a logical and rational understanding of the metaphysics of the universe. Stoic freedom is found in conquering both ignorance and the passions.

In this connection, the misfortunes which befall a person are to be accepted as part of the overall cosmic plan. Pain and loss are simply to be endured because the underlying principle of the universe is benevolent: as the soul is concerned for the body it inhabits, in the same way the world-soul wishes the best for the world.³⁸ Consequently, mental tranquility and self-confidence are products of one's living harmoniously with the central benevolence of nature.³⁹ For Stoics, this accord with nature is dependent on the individual's development of the four cardinal virtues articulated by Plato: prudence, courage, justice and temperance. This involves cultivating the acumen to distinguish between right and wrong as well as the bravery to know what is correct to fear from what is not. It also necessitates the development of self-mastery in the control of one's emotions and in forming proper judgments over what is really important. And, finally, through justice, one learns how to consider others both correctly and appropriately.⁴⁰

For the early Stoics, only virtue was important. They strove to be indifferent to everything else and, through indifference, to become independent of the world. The similarity of the worldly detachment as pursued in Hinduism and Buddhism is striking. Later Stoics, however, recognized that other aspects of life were

³⁷Frost (1962: 58).

³⁸In fact, for the Stoics, the human soul is itself a spark of the divine fire or *logos* that informs the entire cosmos. See http://www.novaroma.org/via_romana/stoicism.html (accessed 9 July 2014).

³⁹Grayling (2003: 52). Also <http://www-bcf.usc.edu/~sbriggs/Britannica/stoics.htm> (accessed 13 October 2014).

⁴⁰Ibid.

nonetheless desirable, such as health, wealth, honor, material comfort and the like.⁴¹ These became seen as aids for a person actually to live a virtuous life, that is, one in conformity with the cardinal virtues and the laws of the universe. Pain and illness were still to be avoided when possible as counterproductive to living virtuously.

Like the Epicureans, the Stoics were open to all peoples despite gender, economic, educational, status, belief, ethnic and other differences. Everyone was accepted as equal citizens of the world. The social conventions that divide people are, from the Stoic perspective, merely artificial impositions.⁴² While Stoicism is to be seen in part as a development from Cynicism, the Stoics do not adopt the Cynic withdrawal from social life and the community. Although endeavoring to remain indifferent to social disappointment, they nevertheless engage with the social polity and community service.⁴³ Their aim remains to transform civic life into a reflection of the underlying harmony of a cosmos that is perceived as intelligent, rational and benign. In contrast also to the Epicurean self-removal from public life, Stoics recognize the importance of the social impulse. We are, accordingly, something more than merely agents seeking our own welfare. Instead, we are social creatures and “members of a great cosmic society, the universal state” with concomitant duties and responsibilities.⁴⁴ As with the kind of pagan ethos detectable among indigenous societies, “Individual interests are always subordinate to the interest of the whole.”⁴⁵ In conformity to modern, cosmopolitan views as well as those held by many contemporary Western pagans, the Stoic ideal is the emergence of a world society that is rooted in nature.

Rejecting the ‘dog’s life’ of the Cynics, the Stoics came to accept the possibilities of pleasure and worldly goods. But they seek to remain indifferent to success and acquisition to forestall any feelings of regret over their loss. Despite their materialism, Stoic endeavor is to keep free of the material and be unaffected by changes in external events. In this effort, the Stoic places all responsibility on the individual himself/herself rather than on society or circumstances. Self-development is at the heart of the Stoic undertaking. Since the passions and appetites are natural

⁴¹<http://www.geocities.com/westhollywood/heights/4617/stoic/marcus9.html> (accessed 20 March 2006).

⁴²<http://www.myspot.org/stoic/> (accessed 20 March 2006). In fact, the Stoic Panaetius stresses an ethical cosmopolitanism of varying grades of accomplishment. Conformity to the *logos* need not be an accomplished fact for someone to be judged virtuous, but rather some demonstration of progressive development is considered sufficient. Epictetus also emphasizes the notion of progress – understanding this in terms of withdrawing from externals, cultivating modesty and fidelity, and developing an indifference to events through the strengthening of individual will.

⁴³In reference to its objective of creating or developing a ‘rational cosmopolis’ as the human extension of an ordered and beneficent universe, Grayling (2003: 53) refers to Stoicism as “humanitarian cosmopolitanism.”

⁴⁴Frost (1962: 185).

⁴⁵Ibid.

to the human being, they are not to be denied but rather understood, controlled and converted into such feelings as friendship, kindness and generosity.⁴⁶

As a later head of the Stoics, Panaetius rejected his predecessor Chrysippus' doctrine of the endless cycle of the universe. He also denied any fundamental distinction between virtue and acting in accord with nature – allowing instead the possibility of degrees of gradual progress toward the ideal of harmony with *logos*. It was in the form of these modified and more liberal ideas that Panaetius introduced a more practical form of Stoicism to Rome.⁴⁷

Virtually all the writings of the early Stoics have been lost, and what we know of them is derived primarily from various citations that appear in subsequent works by other writers.⁴⁸ By contrast, the extant literature concerning the later Stoics is relatively substantial: the recordings of Seneca⁴⁹ and Marcus Aurelius as well as Flavius Arrianus' record⁵⁰ of Epictetus' teachings. Seneca, himself, presented a representative if austere compilation of Stoic ideas – regarding virtue as the only good, cultivating indifference to all other concerns and fostering a distrust of the emotions. Nevertheless, he brings in a pragmatic quality to his approach toward virtue, reason and altruism – advising a simplified lifestyle yet in conformity with one's inner nature. Since fortune cannot bestow virtue, it cannot deprive one of it either. According to Grayling, Seneca helped to develop the humanistic potential already latent in Stoicism.⁵¹

⁴⁶Grayling (2003: 55) mentions such Stoic guidelines as honoring parents, friends, education, health and diet. As head of the Stoa, Zeno was succeeded by Cleanthes who defined virtue as living reasonably in accord with nature. His ideas were recorded in his hymn to Zeus as an expression of universal providence, a fragment of which remains (<http://www.geocities.com/westhollywood/heights/4617/stoic/zeus.html> – accessed 20 March 2006). Cleanthes promotes the pantheistic notion of the universe as a living body – with destiny designing the role and function of each part. The third head of the Stoic School was Chrysippus, known for his work in logic. He likewise adopts a materialistic understanding of the cosmos but infuses it with active spirit. In his notion of the eternal return, the universe re-plays itself over and over again through periodic destruction and regeneration. He identifies happiness with virtue and sees this last as rational wisdom. Evil is whatever is in opposition to the world reason. Both Cleanthes and Chryssipus understand the vivifying agent (God) of the universe as fire, the central element – for the former concentrated in the sun as the place where Zeus resides; for the latter as reason and extending throughout the cosmos.

⁴⁷Following Panaetius, Posidonius retracted Panaetius by reconsidering the argument that the cosmos will dissolve and then be reborn. He also reintroduced the practice of astrology and divination that had been abandoned by Panaetius. In general Posidonius holds the view that the human being, a microcosm of the universe, is a world citizen.

⁴⁸E.g., Cicero's *De finibus*, *De officiis* and *De natura deorum*. Another source of Stoic ideas is the work of Philo of Alexandria (c.25 bce–c.45 ce). For Stoic fragments, see Arnim (1903–1924). Marcus Cicero Tullius (106–43 bce) adopted a Stoic ethic but modified some of the harshness of its original asceticism.

⁴⁹E.g., *Letters to Lucilius* (especially *De Constantia sapientis*); *Physical Problems*.

⁵⁰*Discourses* and *Enchiridion*.

⁵¹Grayling (2003: 56).

Similar ideas were taught by Epictetus, an admirer especially of Chrysippus, who also stressed living harmoniously and enduring misfortune with indifference and fortitude. *Eudaimonia* is to be located in virtue alone. In the dictates of providence, the only thing that we humans can change is ourselves, and, consequently, it is upon our thoughts, feelings and appetites that we must concentrate for the possibility of development. Self-authority, therefore, becomes the key for Epictetus in attaining happiness and remaining untouched by the potential sorrows and disappointments of fate. The central feature of this process involves discerning what is within our power to change from what is not. This consists of a person's will and inner purpose and coordinating these with intelligence to the natural order as directed by God.

Similarly, Marcus Aurelius believed that human reason is a product of divine providence. The Emperor's Stoicism likewise held that the course of individual behavior is to live in accord with both one's personal nature and the universal nature of the cosmos. In this overall process that is fundamentally concerned with self-preservation, reason is preferable to reliance on the animal instincts alone since the intellect also occupies an important part of our being along with our basic bodily needs. Aurelius, the last of the great Antonines that included Trajan, Hadrian and Antoninus Pius, exemplified the Stoic reliance on self-government, reflection and virtue. He endured the calamities of plague, insurrection, invasion, fire and flood that befell the empire during his reign with a cultivated attitude of serenity. In *The Meditations*, he records not only his empathetic thoughts and practical aphoristic advice on responsible and tranquil living but also the Stoic assertion of the interconnectedness and interdependence of the living cosmos. Peace of mind is to be achieved by a life that conforms to the order of nature – curtailing the irrational aspects of the appetites and expressing one's inherent conscientious rationality. Marcus Aurelius' emphasis is placed on self-responsibility for our personal failings and the correctness of education over punishment for incorrect behavior.

Contemporary Critique

There is of course an irony with a ruler advising that people should learn to accept things as they are, but Aurelius was also concerned with social reform and the plights of prisoners, slaves and the destitute. But this very notion of acceptance of or indifference to the vagaries of life constitutes one of the chief criticisms of Stoicism. In the very least, it strikes against the essential chord of hedonic paganism which chooses instead to celebrate the passions rather than to detach from them. Life's joys, among them – friendship, love, accomplishment, aesthetic experience and so forth, are not to be encountered by lack of interest and detachment. The more hedonic tendencies of paganism call instead for an indulgence into such gifts as indeed into life itself, i.e., for their enjoyment. Moreover, indifference would certainly seem inappropriate to be the emotion expressed over the death of a friend, on the one hand, or the performance of immoral acts, on the other. What this

suggests is the limited viability of Stoicism. It is commensurate for certain times but not as a philosophy for life as a whole. In other words, Stoic resignation or *apathia* is good for bad times but not good for the good ones.

A further problem for Stoicism is that its notion of predestination conflicts with its belief that an individual can alter his or her character. The question of free will is one that has bedeviled all philosophy. While the metaphysics of Epicureanism (i.e., concerning the *clinamen*) is considered a weak and unsatisfactory justification for the assertion of freedom of choice, both Epicureanism and Stoicism share the notion of self-responsibility. The underlying suggestion is that self-responsibility entails the ability to choose, to make decisions that matter. Even if we live in a totally causal world, it is contrary to ordinary prudence and common sense to acquiesce to complete passiveness because ‘what will be will be’ and there is nothing any of us can do about it. Instead, we must act as if we have the freedom to act even if and when this is not the case. It is perhaps safer to assume that the only inevitable features of life are death and taxes and to operate along the lines that everything else is subject to change and the influence of our decisions, actions and behavior.

Arête

There is undoubtedly something admirable in Stoicism’s ‘biting the bullet’ or ‘clenching one’s teeth’ and ‘getting on with it’. As an ethical philosophy, if its doctrine of fatalism could be lessened, it offers commendable emphases on a holistic approach to and with nature as a living force rather than a mechanical entity, on a humanism of intrinsic dignity, on a rationale for social reform, and on virtue as a – if not the – fundamental manifestation of the good. An argument is often made that the Hedonistic philosophies do not provide a workable basis for an ethical system. Right and wrong, good and evil, are replaced by pleasure and pain. In a sense, such an assertion concerning Epicureanism and, especially, Cyrenaicism is a tautology – as likewise is the consideration that a philosophy that is based on virtue (such as Stoicism) provides a foundation for constructing a virtuous (i.e., ethical) system. Part of the difficulty that arises here is a confusion between ethics in a narrow sense (a *senso stricto*) and ethics as a category of axiology, the concern with value (or ethics *senso lato*). The fundamental question concerns happiness. The argument is that happiness itself cannot be defined but that everything else must be defined in relationship to it. And apart from utility which has been originally conceived in terms of pleasure though ultimately not restricted to this, the chief contenders for what happiness is or requires are: pleasure and virtue.

The Hedonists have opted for pleasure as the answer to what is *arête*. The Stoics consider instead that it consists of virtue – virtue primarily understood in terms of prudence, courage, justice and temperance. But underlying the whole issue of virtue, if not the entire issue of ethics as a whole, is the notion of obligation or duty. The Hedonist, however, might argue that it is one’s ‘duty’ to enjoy pleasure – and

perhaps even, in addition, to encourage others to enjoy as well. The Stoic, by contrast, insists that one is obliged to endure life's difficulties while assisting toward the well-being of others. In actuality, Stoicism is not necessarily altruistic and might instead concentrate on obtaining a state of personal equilibrium for the individual more in accord with the egoistic aims of Theravada Buddhism. For paganism, especially contemporary paganisms, a 'correct' ethical or axiological position might consist of a combination between Hedonist and Stoic approaches. This allows, for instance, the 'no pain, no gain' approach to exercise, that is, to engage in physical calisthenics, for the greater pleasure of health. Moreover, if Epicureanism denies the possibility of life after death, Stoicism is more open to the idea of post-mortem existence – Cleanthes entertaining the idea that the likelihood of the soul's survival is the very product of its activity in life.

Almost by default, happiness may be understood in terms of well-being. If well-being is accepted as the ultimate, the Hedonist interprets this simply as pleasure (whether bodily or intellectually or both), and there is no *a priori* restriction of well-being as pleasure to the individual alone. It can equally be the concern and effort for the collective whole. But if well-being is identified as virtue, this may focus endeavor on social parameters as with the Stoic or, instead, simply on the individual as with the Cynic. In other words, neither the pursuit of pleasure nor the pursuit of virtue entails the interests of the individual over the collective or, *vice versa*, the interests of the collective over the individual. If justice suggests obligation and duty, it may nonetheless be interpreted simply as fairness without assuming obligatory connotations as such.

Returning to happiness *per se*, however, when we recall that *eudaimonia* refers to being under the protection of a benign spirit, Stoicism appears more receptive to the possibility of interaction with deity than does Epicureanism. The favor of 'an external force' may be that which arises either through merit, that is, virtuous living, or the spontaneous chance of nature (a non-Stoic concept considering its understanding of predestination), or both. It may also be more akin to an 'internal force' – the protection of one's guardian spirit (in today's parlance perhaps one's 'higher self'; among the ancient Romans, a man's *genius* and a woman's *juno*). In the self-responsibility injunction of Stoicism, this notion that happiness is self-generated is inherent in a pagan understanding of soul-duality (self and [protecting] spirit).

In an ethics of paganism, the notion of the divine as a living, organic reality is virtually inevitable. Where and how this divine plays out is subject to a wide range of interpretation, but it is integral to paganism's spiritual ethics and values however they are understood – whether as pleasure or virtue. The mechanism of the universe in Epicureanism amounts to an odd bedfellow in an otherwise entertaining philosophy from a pagan viewpoint. For the hedonic, it is perhaps more to the Cyrenaic than the Epicurean that the contemporary pagan might look – unless one is plagued by a poor stomach or some other restriction or infirmity. Otherwise, Stoicism offers the possibility of a living universe, a sacred nature, that allows the ethical a substantial foundation. The combination of a more liberal Stoicism with a more animistic Hedonism is suggestive of the best of all possibilities – one that allows or even encourages consideration of others without sacrificing personal enjoyment of the gifts and pleasures of life.

Christian Ethics

Even though our focus in this book is on pagan ethics, in the development of ethical debate in the West, we need also to consider the role and contribution to that debate that Christianity has made. In any overall concern with global morality – not only in its growth and application in the West but for humanity as a whole, the historical position of Christianity is significant and cannot be simply discounted or dismissed. In the least, we need to understand how and where a pagan ethic differs from a Christian one.⁵²

The problem with any study of Christian ethics is the same as with any study of Christianity itself. There are countless varieties, different types and positions. Doctrinal difference throughout Christianity is the rule – with the result that there is no single, unified Christian identity. Christian history is a perpetual amalgam of contrasting theologies, emerging heresies, schisms and fissures – allowing there to be a multitude of different Christianities rather than a uniform Church with an articulated dogma and practice, both ritual and ethical, that speak for all.

Nevertheless, there are various universal features by which Christianity can be more or less recognized. These include its Abrahamic consideration of a personal yet omniscient and transcendent God who is author of the world and mankind, its notion of sin as a rupture between humanity and the divine, the understanding that Jesus Christ is a manifestation of God whose function is to atone for the sins of mankind, and the responsibility of humans to have faith in and serve the Christian God in order to avoid punishment and gain entry to heaven. In short, Christianity has articulated its own particular historical narrative centered on creation, fall, incarnation and redemption. Moreover, there is the accepted assumption that the Christian God is good and that this God's moral commands are to be obeyed. Self-independence and questioning or disobeying God's authority are condemned – as exemplified in the expulsions of Lucifer from heaven and Adam from paradise, the destruction of the Tower of Babel and the World Flood. For all the attributed benevolence of its God, the Yahweh-Jehovah figure of the Judeo-Christian traditions seems to emerge as a frequently vindictive and cruel tyrant.

The problem for Christianity is its *a priori* assumption that God is good. Those who do not share Christian belief cannot share its underlying conjecture

⁵²While MacIntyre (1998: ix) laments in the Preface to his second edition to his history of ethics that he 'sandwiched' a mere ten pages on "the distinctive moral outlook of the Christian religion" into his "overnumerous intentions," the brevity of the present section in this book stems from the author's focus upon *pagan* ethics rather than the Christian theological virtues based on "obedience to God's law." MacIntyre considers that he did not pose the right questions, but from a pagan this-worldly perspective in particular, MacIntyre's original contention that the "paradox of Christian ethics . . . [having] always tried to devise a code for society as a whole from pronouncements which were addressed to individuals or small communities to separate themselves off from the rest of society" is still valid. Even if the Pauline doctrines combine the expectation of a Second Coming with this-worldly activity as a development of natural virtues, a pagan will most likely insist that ethical behavior cannot be predicated on obedience to a non-empirical let alone nonfinite object.

without some form of convincing demonstration. Faith is a personal conviction⁵³ – sometimes inculcated from birth through the families and communities by which we are raised, and sometimes by a conversion experience, whether emotional, intellectual or both. In some circumstances, a person who is Christian by birth may come to lose his or her faith in becoming unconvinced, disillusioned or disappointed or by undergoing a conversion experience that opens the individual to a different outlook. But for the non-Christian or non-Abrahamist, the hardships and losses of life may not necessarily be suggestive of any existence of a kindly and merciful, all-powerful God. To the outsider, the Christian argument is circular: God is good because goodness is God; it is his intrinsic nature. The good is not some quality independent of God to which he conforms; the good is good because it is the word of a pre-existing God.

The Ten Commandments

For a person of Christian faith, the goodness of God is something to be accepted on trust. The same applies to the Jew and Muslim. But for the pagan, the secularist, if not also for the Hindu and Buddhist, for anyone holding a different understanding of godhead or the divine, trust in a postulated figure who makes moral demands through commandments has no basis on which to be automatically forthcoming. In his critique of William of Ockham, MacIntyre claims that basing our knowledge of God's will on grace and revelation "leaves the divine commandments as arbitrary edicts which demand a nonrational obedience."⁵⁴ Even obeying rules for fear of punishment is itself not a moral position but instead one of self-interest rather than a genuine concern for the good.⁵⁵

Nevertheless, we need to examine what Christianity itself recognizes as morality in order to assess its contribution to the human quest for happiness and the good life. Christian ethics may be understood in both the Decalogue of the Old Testament, that is, the Ten Commandments,⁵⁶ and in the Beatitudes of the New Testament.⁵⁷ I have already discussed the first two commandments in Chap. 2 forbidding both

⁵³Following Kierkegaard, Grayling (2003: 69f) refers to the non-rational basis of faith. He also considers the argument that one must love God because God allegedly loves him or her a *non sequitor* (71).

⁵⁴MacIntyre (1998: 119).

⁵⁵For Grayling's secular humanist perspective on Christianity, see especially the first sections of his Chap. 4 ("The Ordinances of God") in Grayling (2003: 63–86).

⁵⁶Exodus 20: 1–17. Note also the ten charges of the Qur'an (6.151–53) which include prohibitions against taking of life, the taking what is not given, being unchaste, and committing falsehood. Also condemned is the consumption of liquor and intoxicants; the eating of 'unseasonable meals'; dancing, singing, playing music and seeing shows; using flowers, scents, unguents, ornaments and decorations; sleeping in raised or wide beds; and the accepting of gold and silver.

⁵⁷Matthew 5: 1–13.

polytheism and idolatry. Paganism has no need or necessity to accept either of these prohibitions. The third and fourth commandments, likewise, apply more to a sectarian position than to a non-Abrahamic or pagan one, namely, the forbidding of blasphemy (taking the name of God in vain) and the insistence on honoring the Sabbath day. While paganism commemorates holy days, these celebrations are both different than the sabbatarian remembrance and not mandatory. In other words, in honoring the holy days of its gods – as well as honoring its gods themselves, the insistence in paganism is that these are voluntary acts in which participation is left to the individual himself/herself. Among the highest of emphases in paganism is that on freedom, and this freedom extends even as far as how the names of its deities are employed. There is no fundamental divide or rift between the human and the divine, and, consequently, people have the scope to criticize their deities – even to abuse them if that is their choice. As we see in Chinese folk religion, the gods are required to merit their worship. If and when the goods are not forthcoming, the idols may be thrashed, and, ultimately, the deity may even be replaced. Deity for a pagan is not something separately sacrosanct. The human is equally holy, and the holy might critique or even demean itself but not blaspheme. In paganism, there is no foundation for blasphemy.

The commandment to honor one's parents is not peculiar to Judaism or Christianity. In essence, this is a basic directive in Confucianism if not other pagan religions as well. While the question remains whether one is morally correct in honoring dishonorable parents – as may on occasion be the case, paganism as a rule places a strong emphasis on reverence to one's ancestors. These last may include the gods, or they may more exclusively focus on the progenitors of one's family, tribe, community and/or culture. In the remit of nature and natural human behavior, however, paganism remains in accord with the fifth commandment that instructs a person to respect and honor his/her parents.

The remaining biblical commandments refer to injunctions against murder, stealing, bearing false witness, committing adultery and coveting the possessions of one's neighbors. Pagans by and large have no difficulty with at least the first two of these. The irony remains, however, over the large-scale existence of war and capital punishment in a Judeo-Christian West that allegedly claims to be against killing. Corporate theft as well as economic and political imperialism present further historical and present-day ironies. The ninth commandment specifically forbids bearing false witness against one's neighbors. This implies possibly that others are fair game. It would seem that the biblical restriction is a reflection of Judaism's tribal origins. A more contemporary and pagan understanding of this ban is that it refers to lying *per se*.

The mandate against coveting the possessions of one's neighbors also appears to be restricted to a tribal scope. The right to property is a basic human affirmation from earliest times and appears to be central to the formulation and development of pagan Roman law and the legal systems that have emerged subsequently. The respect of property is largely a universal and has no particular affiliation to Judeo-Christian thought and ethics alone. For instance, property law based on contractual agreement is to be seen in the Code of Hammurabi and other early Mesopotamian legal

precedents. If, however, the gist of this restriction on coveting is the condemnation of desire, we are moving closer to dharmic forms of spirituality and further from pagan affirmations.

Finally, the commandment that forbids adultery is one, like those against polytheism and idolatry, that illustrates more clearly the Abrahamic-pagan divide. In its Old Testament presentation, a wife appears more as a possession, a form of property, something that is owned, than as a viable and equal person in her own right. It is to be granted that a monogamous relationship between two people is or at least can be something of extraordinary and unique beauty, but for a pagan at least it has to occur freely and voluntarily between and by the parties involved. It cannot be a product of intimidation or force but instead of a mutual compact and loving relationship. But at the same time, fidelity need not be an intrinsic or necessary aspect of marriage. In paganism, people remain together because they *want* to be together – with the freedom of choice preceding other arrangements and behaviors. People may and may even be encouraged to share partners without violating any fundamental marital contract. For paganism, the love of the other is all-embracing and desiring of whatever fulfillments one's beloved may wish.

Consequently, from among the Decalogue, we find pagan and Jewish-Christian agreement with the mandates against killing, stealing and lying as well as the instruction to honor one's mother and father. Coveting the belongings of others would not in itself be condemned if that want did not lead to immoral behavior such as murder, theft, deceit or manipulative cunning. Desire for a pagan is primarily a positive and motivating factor that leads to self-augmentation, enterprise and creative output. Adultery, within the bounds of decorum and respect, is a choice for the participating individuals involved alone. Beyond these, pagans choose to hold their holy days as sacred commemorations, they choose to honor their parents, ancestors and deities, and – not covered by the Ten Commandments *per se* – they choose to celebrate and revere nature and life.

The Beatitudes and Christian Ethics

Compared to the Law as set forth in the Jewish Torah, *Talmud*, *Mishna* and *Gemara*, Christian morality is more flexible, interpretive and less concerned with detailed stricture (e.g., adhering to the practice of circumcision, abstaining from pork, avoiding travel on the Sabbath, etc.) In contrast, in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, a basic set of ethical positions is suggested that are expressive of the Christian position. The Christian Beatitudes declare that those who are humble, meek, merciful, hungry, pure, mournful, unjustly persecuted, reviled and seekers of peace are to be blessed. Such blessings include comfort, mercy, completion, inheriting the earth, seeing God, being called God's children and entering the kingdom of heaven. What is more important for the Christian is having faith in God and Christ rather than rule-based practice. While the emancipation from rules and regulations is admirable enough in itself, Grayling argues that the Beatitude

morality is incompatible for the practical needs of modern life. Today's values include personal autonomy over obedience or submission to a personal deity, and successful achievement in terms of financial provision over Christian poverty and heedlessness.⁵⁸ They are not commensurate with the submission, blind obedience, resignation, groundless faith, asceticism and denial of worldly enjoyments that appear to be at the heart of a Christian ethos.

The ethics of Christianity are authoritarian – the random dictates of a supposedly infallible and transcendent God, precisely the kind of being that Abram argues could feel nothing and see nothing of the sensual world in which we humans live. The sources for Christian moral authority vary between the institutional church (e.g., the Roman Catholic pope and clergy), the word of Christian Scriptures (the Bible), the inspiration alleged from the Holy Spirit, reason, and conscience or inner conviction. To a pagan and secularist alike, the Christian narrative is a fantasy construction that does not provide a substantial or convincing basis upon which or through which to address the questions that centrally involve humanity concerning a good and/or correct way of life.

The moral tenor of Christianity is to be found further in its addition of the three theological virtues of faith (*fides*), hope (*spes*) and charity (*caritas*) to the cardinal ones of prudence, fortitude, temperance and justice.⁵⁹ Each is expressive of the distinctiveness of Christianity from paganism and other forms of spirituality. Christian faith is a confident belief in God despite the lack of logical proof or material evidence to support it. It is the opposite of reason. While reason need not be the end-all and be-all for the pagan, it is important and central to the extent that conviction includes it and as a rule is not a refutation of it. In the very least, faith is not used by a pagan to bury doubts and skepticism in some kind of irrational defiance. In the Latin origins of the word 'faith', *fides* is the honor that validates an oath or promise – personified as a goddess (Fides) or a god (Fidius – an epithet, indigitation or aspect of Jupiter). For the pagan Romans, *fides* is a numinous expression of divine agency rather than the religious allegiance it became with the Christians.⁶⁰

Hope, too, is a Latin personification – the goddess Spes to whom a shrine was dedicated by the Romans in the Forum Holitorium or vegetable-market. To a pagan, however, the Christian version of hope is suggestive of something less than full confidence or expectation. There is an implication of some doubt rather than a full trust.⁶¹ Nor does it suggest courage or fortitude but something closer to pie-in-the-

⁵⁸Grayling (2003: 78f). Grayling considers Christian ethics, if not religious morality in general, as irrelevant, anti-moral (not engaging with the central questions concerning human rights: oppression, war, poverty and excess wealth) and immoral (sponsoring fundamentalism, oppression of women, genital mutilation and terrorism).

⁵⁹I Corinthians 13: 13.

⁶⁰Fowler (1899: 341); York (1986: 251).

⁶¹As Spinoza argues, "*hope is nothing but an inconstant joy which has arisen from the image of a future or past thing whose outcome we doubt*" (*Ethics* III Proposition 18 Scholium 2 [II/155] –

sky wishful thinking. Even more, the Christian virtue of hope places concern in the future rather than in the here-and-now. There is, consequently, always the possibility of escapism and not either the enjoyment of the present or the outlay of immediate effort to rectify an imbalanced or stressful condition. For a pagan, Christian hope appears as a delaying tactic and an irrational optimism against the odds.

Finally, charity, the Latin *caritas*, the Greek *agapē*, also conveys an emotion that to a pagan is somehow out-of-sync with the natural order. MacIntyre sees the defeat of *cupiditas* by *caritas*, that is, the replacement of desire for earthly things by one for the heavenly, as simply a Christianized version of Diotima's message in Plato's *Symposium*.⁶² Used to describe the early Christian ritual meal shared by participants as an expression of solidarity and mutual love, the term *agapē* came to signify universal love throughout the human community. While translated as both 'love' and 'charity', the latter is more expressive of the emphasis on activity rather than feeling. There is here a connotation of removal from the grit and grime of the human condition for a more transcendent and/or ethereal frame of reference. For a pagan, the Mahayana Buddhist stress on compassion says it better. Rather than expressive of a platitude of abstract love, compassionate motivation is indicative of empathy and deep sympathetic feeling for others – others who are real, earthly beings. While the Christian *agapē-caritas* endeavor may be legitimate and commendable, to a pagan it often appears to be in some measure deficient. This may be because love is understood by pagans more as something private and felt rather than as something shamelessly public and preached.

Augustine and Aquinas

In the development of Christian theology and concomitant ethics, the two greatest 'fathers' of the Church are Augustine of Hippo (354–430) and Thomas Aquinas (c.1225–1274). The former has followed largely in a Platonic and Neo-Platonic mode of dualistic thought – being perhaps particularly influenced by Plotinus' understanding of evil as a diminishing privation rather than an independent and extrinsic reality. The saint considers the body and soul, along with the sensual and intellectual, as separate. He adopts an intuitionist approach to knowing the good and links the beatific or moral state with God as the essence of perfection. Aquinas, although greatly indebted to Augustine, turns more toward Aristotle and the Peripatetic philosopher's naturalism rather than Plato's transcendental idealism. For Aquinas, reason is something that is always supportive of faith as a vehicle toward truth. When it is not, an error has occurred. Knowledge of the right is a product of reason, and knowledge of what to do that is naturally good derives from

Curley 1996: 81). Wendell Berry (Kimbrell 2002: 373) likewise states that "Hope, of course, is always accompanied by the fear of hopelessness, which is a legitimate fear."

⁶²MacIntyre (1998: 117).

practical reason. Individual people are all tainted by original sin, but some people are blessed by God's unearned gift of grace and, therefore, are capable of good actions.

For both Augustine and Aquinas, God is the *a priori* blueprint of the universe. For Augustine, Plato's ideas/ideals have always been present in the mind of God. Matter, however, is something impressible that God created from nothing. Not only is material substance the vehicle for individuality, it also becomes the obstacle that prevents pure form from returning to God. In this we can see an ultimate Christian disgust and rejection of this world and hope for a better reality after death. Matter is the source of evil. Replacing love of the world with the love of God is for Augustine the means by which the Christian escapes the material and attains salvation. Aquinas, building on Aristotle, concludes that salvation is the realization of the purpose behind God's creation of us, namely, the revelation of the Creator's goodness. This can be achieved by renouncing worldly goods and seeking only God instead, God as the summit of perfection. Inasmuch as the Aristotelianism of Aquinas is not preoccupied with worldly escape but with the transformation of desire for moral ends, MacIntyre finds it much more interesting than the Platonism of Augustine.⁶³

For Augustine, in the fall of Adam, mankind lost its original gift of freedom from God. Instead, all – including salvation – is predetermined by God. But Aquinas differs here and, following Abelard, claims that the individual will has the freedom of choosing to cooperate with God's plan or not. Nevertheless, because of original sin, salvation is still dependent on God's grace. There is no guarantee that one will attain heaven and not damnation in hell regardless of how we choose to live on earth.

Pagan Reflections on Christian Happiness and Duty

In the middle ages, the classical cardinal virtues combined with the three Christian ones were considered to have a counterpart in the seven deadly sins. These last are understood as immoral conditions that express themselves in sinful behavior. They are understood as pride (*superbia*), envy (*invidia*), anger (*ira*), sloth (*accidie*), greed (*avaricia*), gluttony (*gula*) and lust (*luxuria*).⁶⁴ The worst of these, and the alleged cause of all the others, is pride – what the Christian understands as the rebellion of the individual against the Christian God. A pagan, of course, commits the sin of pride or vanity by default. Through accepting other gods or a different understanding of godhead, a pagan refuses to capitulate to the Christian faith position that does not speak to him or her. In this, and the rest of the identification of 'deadly sins', there

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴Note, by contrast, Mahatma Gandhi's list of seven deadly sins: wealth without work, pleasure without conscience, science without humanity, knowledge without character, politics without principle, commerce without morality, and worship without sacrifice.

is inevitably the notion of passing judgment on someone else's behavior that does not conform to one's own. In some cases, condemnation is legitimate as with the Jewish holocaust during the Second World War by the Nazis or the Khymer Rouge massacre in Cambodia. But the Christian labeling of pride as an excessive belief in one's own abilities – one that supposedly interferes with a person's possibility to 'recognize the grace of God' – is more clearly a sectarian faith-based value judgment and little more.

Likewise, the remaining 'sins' are seen more as degrees of extreme than as intrinsic evils *per se*. Anger may in fact be an appropriate emotion in some circumstances such as in reaction to child molestation or terrorism. Desire itself is often seen within a pagan perspective as a positive, fundamental appetite for anyone engaged with the natural world and the fruits of her offerings. Envy, greed, gluttony and lust are those occasions in which desire has become unhealthy in one manner or another – occasions to be rectified and healed rather than to be simply condemned and sequestered. Through education, the objective is to refine the will and direct it toward a reasonably organic interaction with life, the world and others. Greed, envy and the like are to be understood as the warning signals of excess that reason and wisdom should hopefully be able to address. In like manner, the same applies to sloth or dejection and the avoidance of physical or intellectual work – once again another signal of imbalance.

Despite the difficulties he encountered with the Church and his being summoned before a papal commission, William of Ockham (d. 1347) took a quasi-traditional Christian viewpoint in placing ethics within the will of God. He locates the ethical as dependent on the wish of God rather than on his command. Being opposed to Plato's abstract universals, he argues that ideal forms – including the notions of species and genera – exist only as thoughts in human consciousness without any independent existence. Ockham's nominalism holds that individual objects and things are the sole realities rather than the Platonic ideals. Moreover, while things – including moral qualities – have been posited by God but remain independent of his influence in their cause and effect operation, Ockham affirmed both human free will and moral responsibility.

The real problem with the Christian foundation of ethics, assuming its God exists, is in how to know the will and commands of God. Whether one resorts to the Bible, the institutional Church or individual conscience, there are variations, inconsistencies and contradictions that give rise to the need for interpretation. But in hermeneutics, the same issue arises: by what authority does anyone offer legitimate interpretation, and when has this occurred without disagreement and denial on the part of others? Because of these difficulties, there emerges an argument that ethical matters are independent of ecclesiastical doctrine. While there are many philosophers who have taken this position, and much ethical inquiry since the middle ages has been conducted along the lines of divorcing the ethical from the theological, the pagan is faced with the possibility that the moral questions of life must be for him or her a separate issue – as they are, or should be, for the Christian, or that the metaphysical foundation of paganism is a viable basis for the generation of ethical reflection in a way that that of Christianity is not. Paganism's corpo-

spirituality opens up a whole new ‘ballpark’ for ethical development – especially in the face of any perceived bankruptcy in Christian ethical theory and application. While the Church continues to rally in one way or another – with liberation theology being among the more credible of recent contributions to the debate, historically the most salient discussions of morality since the Scholastic tradition of the late middle ages have occurred independent of the ecclesiastical arena. Besides such figures as Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), the Earl of Shaftesbury (1671–1713) and Francis Hutcheson (1694–1746), among the major thinkers in the forum of ethics, we have Benedict de Spinoza (1632–1677), David Hume (1711–1776), Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), Henry Sidgwick (1838–1900) and Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900). In any contemporary endeavor to locate a pagan and/or universal ethic, there is more to be gained in a pursuit of understanding these figures than there is within the ecclesiastical remit regardless of the multiple parameters of specific Christian expression.

In this final section of the present chapter, we have concentrated on the Christian code or set of ethical principles, that is, on casuistry or applied ethics, rather than on ethical theory in the broader sense. In formulating an understanding of pagan ethics, this is the direction in which ultimately we must go. Each of the major religions formulates its own list of the principles that direct moral conduct, and with Christianity such a list is predicated on the assumption that God has mandated an ethical system of rules that must be obeyed. The sectarian divisions of Christianity differ on what exactly these rules are, but for the most part they agree on the theory behind them.

Ethical theory is concerned with the two questions: how ought people behave, and what is the good life? These questions are applied to both the individual and everyone. The general answers to what is the good are happiness, pleasure, utility, virtue, duty, success and fame. As already mentioned in Chap. 1, teleological moral theories are concerned with the purpose of life and the ends toward which we humans aspire both individually and socially. Moral theories that are deontological are those which address the rightness or obligations of our actions. While Greek ethics are teleological for the most part, deontological elements are to be found in Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics. With Christian ethics, we find both types present. For such teleologists as Augustine and Aquinas, the end of life is happiness in the goodness and perfection of God. More usually, however, the inscrutable will of God is simply accepted as the source of one’s duties as a Christian. The moral code concerning these responsibilities is regarded as both objective and infallible. It is a given that is beyond question. A Christian has no choice but to accept the will of God.

Consequently, the Christian position on the purpose of life is primarily the development of selfless love (*agapē*). Whether Christians for the most part demonstrate this love or not is not our question here. Instead, we are interested in the goal of Christianity concerning the good life and how people ought to behave accordingly – what they want for the record as opposed to what they actually do. Paganism desires to reflect on all the possible options and then measure these against its own values and understandings. As the dominant religion of the planet, the Christian objective is important and must be taken into consideration. Selfless love is an

opening to others – ultimately to the possibilities of altruism. To the degree that this might be a worthy endeavor, paganism wants to ask why is it worthy, what is the basis for its worthiness and how might it remain a valid undertaking even if and when the Christian foundation for it is found wanting and is rejected. We must note, however, that *agapē* is not necessarily the only Christian goal. Following more in the tradition of Socrates who understood wisdom as the optimum route to happiness, Augustine values philosophy and emphasizes reason or self-knowledge as an important Christian aim. One who shares in this broad understanding, although representing a radically different foundational outlook – one that in general is more compatible to a pagan worldview – is the philosopher Spinoza. It is to him that we now turn.

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Chapter 5

The Western Philosophical Tradition

Benedict Spinoza (1632–1677), David Hume (1711–1776) and Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) are each, in different ways, important in the development of ethical thought in the West. They interface with paganism and the issue of idolatry in diverse and interesting ways. For the pagan, Spinoza's contribution is to be found in his pantheistic understanding of godhead and/or the cosmos. In this, he follows in the tradition of Xenophanes and Parmenides – if not also Democritus, Epicurus and the Stoics. The importance of these thinkers and especially Spinoza is that they oppose what has become the prevailing theological view in the West of God as a transcendent and totally separate or distinct being from the manifest world. Pantheism ('all-God') stresses the identity of the divine with the universe. Both Hume and Kant, by contrast, are theists though in substantially different ways. Hume may be variously described as a hedonist, utilitarian, phenomenalist and, above all, as a skeptic, but even as a Christian he draws knowledge of God from nature, and theism for him is accepted on a basis of probability rather than empirical observation. Hume raises questions that challenge pagan understandings of the miraculous or magical, but he does not deny belief in the extraordinary and marvelous – seeing it instead as something natural to the human. In contrast to the abstract achievement of Spinoza, Hume offers to a pagan a refreshingly liberated approach to ethics that is grounded despite a concomitant epistemological uncertainty. Like Hume and Spinoza, Kant dismisses ritual behavior as worthless. He is closer to the latter in formulating a metaphysically based ethics, but for him nature is something secondary. Unlike with Spinoza, for Kant the physical is no part of or a vehicle for the divine. Nevertheless, though his thought has much less affinity with paganism than does that of Hume and Spinoza, Kant is still important for both understanding pagan ethics and ethics as a whole.

Spinoza

Spinoza's basic argument is that a substance is an exclusive aggregate of attributes. None of its properties can be shared with another substance. Since God is the substance with an infinite number of attributes (including extension and thought), God is and can be the *only* substance there is.¹ This is the basis of Spinoza's pantheism: everything we see and think is God; God is all that is; God is everything, the all of the universe. Consequently, for Spinoza, God and nature are one and the same.² From his standpoint, he dismisses the contended possibility that God transcends all substance. Further, he claims that any consideration of nature as the product or purpose of God is one "that turns Nature completely upside down."³ The very idea that nature could have a goal or that there are final causes is, for Spinoza, simply a human fiction.

For Spinoza, the greatest happiness comprises our knowledge of God.⁴ This and virtue, or perfect actions in conformity with the divine nature that we share with God, are what allow complete peace of mind as well as our greatest freedom. Spinoza adopts essentially a Stoic position that calls for expecting and bearing "calmly both good fortune and bad."⁵ Since the world is to be understood in terms of absolute determinism, all that happens is beyond our control and is a product of the inexorable laws of nature. Spinoza argues that behavior that is based on this understanding, that is, on reason, avoids disrespect, mockery and the emotions of anger, envy and hatred toward others. This becomes the very basis of social life.⁶

¹*Ethics* I Proposition 14 [II/56] (Curley 1996: 9): "Except God, no substance can be or be conceived."

²Spinoza (*Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-Being* 1.8. See further, *Ethics* I Propositions 29 & 31 [II/71f] and II Axiom 5 [II/86] {Curley 1996: 20f & 32}) draws on Thomas Aquinas' distinction between *natura naturans* and *natura naturata* to consider the former as nature as a self-contained being and the latter as the dependent modes and substantial things of nature. Basically, *natura naturata* is understood as passive nature (Corrington's 'nature natured'), while *natura naturans* is used to express active or creative nature – the vital process of becoming in contrast to the actual forms and qualities of all things that exist (Corrington's 'nature naturing'). But continuing more in the direct line of Thomistic thought, by the High Renaissance, *natura naturans* is identified as God *per se*.

³*Ethics* I Appendix II [II/80] (Curley 1996: 28). Mackie (1990: 43) says the same: "We get the notion of somethings being objectively good, or having intrinsic value, by reversing the direction of dependence . . . , by making the desire depend upon the goodness, instead of the goodness on the desire."

⁴*Ethics* II Proposition 49 Scholium IV-A [II/135-6].

⁵*Ibid.* Scholium IV-B (Curley 1996: 68).

⁶Spinoza considers that the fundamental 'affects' are joy/pleasure, sadness/pain and desire/human appetite – with everything else from gladness to remorse, from hope to fear, from pity to indignation, from pride to scorn, and so forth arising from these three basic affections. For Spinoza's 'Definitions of the Affects', see the *Ethics* III [II/190–204] (Curley 1996: 104–113).

According to DesJardins, “Spinoza is thus the first philosopher to make central to ethics two concepts which are defined to express the distinctively new values of modern society, those of freedom and reason.”⁷

Nevertheless, a major criticism of Spinoza is the same that we see with the Stoics. While a serene and detached life based on reason may have its advantages, it may also be a life that misses much of the very *raison d'être* of life, namely, the experience of deep and creative feelings. Spinoza, instead, takes a reductionistic view of life and judges all action simply in terms of self-survival. In his understanding of moral relativism, something is worthwhile only to the degree that it is conducive to human happiness – whether wealth, health, success, fame or sensual pleasure. Placing this value relativity into Spinoza’s framework of rigid determinism, human well-being allegedly results from rational-emotional development, that is, from recognizing and accepting that we are not free to determine events. Accordingly, the good life consists in not being an emotional slave to life and losing energy in the vain attempt to change things that we cannot change and that are beyond our power to do so.

Consequently, the other chief criticism of Spinoza’s philosophy concerns his denial of free will. For many critics, a life that is predetermined infers a life that can have no motivation let alone basis for morality. Instead, it is argued, without freedom of will we can only be passive and submissive to all that life has to offer. But this argument does not follow. Even if all events were to be predetermined and our feeling that we have choice is only an illusion, the net result in terms of the *sensation* of either determinism or freedom is nil. At the end of the day, as well as on a day-to-day basis, we are obliged to proceed *as if* we have the freedom to make whatever choices that appear before us or at least seem so to appear. Life is a navigation. If we make mistakes in its steering or whether those ‘mistakes’ are simply causally preordained events, we will never know the difference within this empirical realm in which we live out our lives. In other words, *it makes no difference* whether our lives are completely predetermined or whether we are exercising free will in the living of our lives. Our only ethical responsibility on this score is to live and pursue whatever goals we have *as if* these are still within our power to shape to the best of our own abilities. Even the pursuit of a Stoic or Spinozan ‘peace of mind’ is one that we must approach in the acceptance that we freely so choose to do. A contemporary pagan would take this as fundamental and defines magic, for instance, as simply change in conformity with will. Therefore, while in accord with Spinoza’s identity of deity and nature, and possibly in accord with his efforts to restrain destructive passions for an interpersonal life of satisfaction and virtuous nobility, pagan pragmatism operates without the notion of any totally mechanistic pre-determinism.⁸

⁷DesJardins (1999: 145).

⁸Note that as much of a materialist as is Hobbes, he does not consider free will and determinism as incompatible. This became known as the doctrine of Compatibility. While the human is restricted by natural law, there nevertheless is the freedom to follow natural inclinations in the same way that

Instead, Spinoza's freedom is not one of the will but in the intellect's potential power over the emotions. Once we have a clear idea of a passion, it ceases to be a passion. Freedom for Spinoza is the discovery of our true nature as the totality of the universe; it is not an escape from causal determinism. While much of contemporary paganism is more predisposed toward the experience of passions and emotions, there is still much to be said for the kind of judicious moderation if not control that Spinoza advises. In considering once again Aristotle's doctrine of the golden mean, we are inclined to reflect on a midway compromise between Cyrenaic and Epicurean hedonism, on the one hand, and a liberal form of Stoicism, on the other. Spinoza, of course, leans more in the direction of the Stoics than the Epicureans. Tenacity and nobility are first in importance. He rejects the vernacular belief that freedom consists in yielding to pleasure. "*Blessedness is not the reward of virtue, but virtue itself.*"⁹ Blessedness, salvation or freedom consists in the love of nature, and the power to curb one's passions results from this love. It is, for Spinoza, virtue itself.

Spinoza, however, is not presenting a pagan philosophy *per se*. Certainly his feeling that any bond with the "lower animals" is "based more on empty superstition and unmanly compassion" is not part of the current Western pagan consensus.¹⁰ In related manner, Spinoza can consider that, apart from human beings, whatever else there is in nature we may feel free to exploit.¹¹ Despite Spinoza's identity of God with nature or nature with God, his argument for a pantheistic God is Euclidean and highly rational. As a result, his universe-God is mechanical – becoming understood finally as a superb machine. By contrast, paganism in general and contemporary Western paganism specifically are more emotionally intuitive in their apprehensions and inferences or deductions. Consequently, their universe-god is more flexible and organic. Nevertheless, Spinoza's detailed geometrical demonstration of nature's divinity and totality fills a *lacuna* in the pagan register and allows both a philosophical argument for pantheism as well as a presentation of a code of conduct that is based on reason, freedom and friendship. Even more, as witnessed through Spinoza's winning an inheritance lawsuit against his stepsister but then yielding virtually all his material possessions to her, we have in this philosopher an instance of someone who actually lived according to the virtues he espoused.

It is significant that Spinoza entitled his chief work *Ethics*. In dealing with morality which he predicates on the claim that God or nature is the only substance of the universe, Spinoza denies the existence of evil. Perfection concerns only things *sui generis* and their own intrinsic nature and power. It has nothing to do with human reaction or judgments based on taste or even human utility. Using self-

water, though pulled by gravity or contained by banks, otherwise flows freely. See *Leviathan* Part 2 Chapter 21 Paragraph 1 (Hobbes 1651).

⁹*Ethics* V Proposition 42 [II/308] (Curley 1996: 180).

¹⁰*Ibid.* IV Proposition 37 Scholium 1 [II/237] (Curley 1996: 135).

¹¹*Ethics* IV Appendix XXVI [II/273].

evident definitions and logical deductions, Spinoza concludes that the highest good consists purely of knowledge of godhead or nature. His position is actually more theopantic (God is all) than pantheistic (all is God) in that God is not simply the sum of existence. Among the infinite qualities of divinity, there are only two that we as humans can perceive let alone appreciate, namely, thought and extension. In other words, godhead or nature is infinitely more than what we can perceive, rationalize or imagine. And for Spinoza, in understanding this and knowing divine nature for what it is, we can comfortably resign ourselves to destiny and at the same time be liberated from the disrupting influence of fears and passions.

Like the Stoics, Spinoza aims for serenity as the highest of human goals. This consists in knowing the metaphysical construction of the universe, the intellectual love of God *or* Nature. Through such rational and logical understanding, something akin – if not identical – to the Stoics' *apathia* is to be obtained. But at the same time, this mental tranquility is as much a product of the integral powers of the individual's mind, and in this Spinoza is in agreement with the Epicureans. Moreover, he approximates to some extent the sort of possible compromise mentioned already between Stoicism and Epicureanism in that he is not advocating an abandonment of all emotions for some state of mental sterility but instead is calling for a rational enjoyment of both intellectual activity and bodily passions.¹²

While the emotional and intuitive rapture of pantheistic indulgence is missing from Spinoza, he nevertheless assembles a remarkable argument and rationale that is in itself divinely intoxicating. Spinoza is of course emerging from an Abrahamic system of conceptual thought¹³ – in this case one infused and reinterpreted from the perspective of Cartesian rationalism. In understanding humanity as directly a part of the natural world and that nature is animated deity herself, Spinoza contends that there is no need for clerical intermediaries. He opposes both ecclesiastical institutionalism and the dogma concerning a personal transcendent Creator who is motivated by will. Despite the shortcomings and questionability of some of his arguments and, especially, the lack of the experiential in his approach, the amazing feature of Spinoza's work remains in its closeness to a fundamentally pagan worldview. If Spinoza is to be understood in some respect as a philosopher belonging to the tradition of paganism, he is a pagan in a geometrical rather than an environmental sense.

¹²For Spinoza, all thought and action that relates to God or godhead (*Deus sive Natura*) constitutes religion. Morality itself concerns the desire to do good under the auspices of reason. And, finally, the joining together of reasonably moral men and women is true amity. Spinoza equates friendship with honor (ibid. IV Proposition 37 Scholium 1 [II/236] – Curley 1996: 134f).

¹³In the *Ethics*, Spinoza moves away from any projection of human attributes to God (e.g., I Proposition 8 Scholium 2 [II/49] – Curley 1996: 4). For Spinoza's presentation of the Mosaic fall of Adam and the subsequent recovery of freedom through "the patriarchs, guided by the Spirit of Christ," see IV Proposition 68 Scholium [II/261–262] (Curley 1996: 152).

Hume

In contrast to Spinoza's mathematical/geometrical analysis, David Hume is understood in many senses as a 'father of empiricism'.¹⁴ But even more, he adopts and develops the position of skepticism by insisting that we are unable to have any *a priori* knowledge of cause and effect concerning things and events in the empirical world. In other words, Hume follows in the skeptical attitude that is not against the empiricism of the senses but holds that this cannot lead us to any reliable knowledge. What we do is only to assume things, but these are things we never know with certainty. In this, Hume follows Locke who insisted that the study of nature allows opinions but not knowledge.

The Skeptical Humean position poses two possible answers for the human situation: (1) do we accept the lack of security and 'go with it' as the gift of life itself? Or (2) do we opt for the certainty of a closed system – as Islam appears to be among others? Human insecurity may be seen as the causal factor behind the development of religious convictions that brook no opposition and no non-conformity. But such religions block us from what a pagan is able to conceive and affirm as the fundamental openness of life. While we might not be happy without security and certainty, in the nature of paganism, one can submit to the unpredictable and seek to learn to navigate with it.

Consequently, Hume's skepticism is akin to much within the pagan spirit in general and the contemporary Western pagan outlook specifically. The philosopher's theological perspective is not all that different from traditional Abrahamic faith positions that hold to the inscrutability of godhead albeit accepting some kind of anthropomorphic nature of the idea of God however incomprehensible that God remains to human inquiry and understanding. On this front, the pagan position is also not much different. It accepts the interplay between the human metaphor and nature but admits the final unknowable nature of nature itself/herself. For Hume, skepticism precludes a rational answer to the enigma of God – an enigma that a pagan is happy to apply to her/his understanding of nature as divine.

¹⁴While still in his twenties, Hume published his authoritative three volume *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739). Because this work was not received well by the public, he was forced to abandon his hopes for an academic career. He worked variously as a librarian and a diplomat (Austria, Italy and France) and eventually became Under-Secretary of State in London. Continuing to write as a political essayist and historian, he gained some success with his *Essays Moral and Political* (1741–1742) as well as *Political Discourses* (1752) and even greater renown with the *History of England* in six volumes (1754–1762). He recast Book I of the *Treatise* as *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748) and Book III as *An Enquiry Concerning the Principle of Morals* (1751). In 1757, he produced *The Natural History of Religion*, but the complementary *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* did not appear until 1779, 3 years after his death, because his friends had persuaded him not to publish it. Martin Bell tells of the visit 7 weeks before Hume's death by James Boswell, the biographer of Samuel Johnson. Boswell found the philosopher "calm and cheerful" despite holding to the prospect of there being no afterlife. Bell (1990: 1). See also MacIntyre (1998: 171).

But while Hume wishes to denigrate the miraculous as incapable of being understood rationally and, hence, as belonging to the domain of superstition, as something that can be affirmed only by the individual and not through collective empirical consensus, for most pagans the miracle – whether originating from a natural (e.g., birth) or supernatural (e.g., magic) provenance or both – is at the heart of divinity. A pagan seeks epiphany, but he/she can find the ‘darshanic’¹⁵ as much within and through nature as in any numinous revelation or vision. For a pagan, life itself is miraculous and is not to be cast aside into some dismissed dustbin of superstition.

Nevertheless, if a pagan utilization of the imaginal and divine other is pragmatic and functional, there is still an underlying empathy with the skeptical argument concerning the metaphysical and ontological. The ethical question that arises, then, concerns proper behavior in the face of endemic uncertainty. While paganism may and does on occasion partake of the kind of religious certitude that we see in other religions, it is always more ready to doubt and question the very nature and existence of its deities. In fact, the nature of paganism is primarily to examine everything – everything from the actual world to transcendent possibility. For a pagan mind, this is itself considered a healthy and natural undertaking. In an ultimate sense, while there are exceptions as there are with just about everything, conviction is precluded, although paganism remains comfortable with trusting and living in conformity to the rhythms of nature as they are encountered and experienced. These last are accepted without guarantee but simply as superhuman patterns that we as individuals, groups and societies endeavor for the most part to be in tune with and adjust our actions and wishes to – all as part of the many-layered reality of the miraculous itself.

Hume recognizes the supreme importance of values in human life and considers these more important than rationality. In this, he differs from the classical Greek perspective as embodied in Plato and Aristotle that exalts reason. In Hume’s understanding, reason is to be “the slave of the passions.”¹⁶ The philosopher’s position is actually hedonistic. The human being possesses, as he sees it, a natural predisposition toward the pursuit of pleasure. Hume’s empiricism is constructed from our sensations that he understands primarily in terms of pleasure and pain. We seek either to avoid uneasiness or embrace satisfaction. Our more complex emotions such as joy, pathos, maliciousness and kindness arise from our further reflections on our fundamental sensory impressions relating to aversion or propensity. Nevertheless, along with our hedonic fundamentals, Hume considers that we as humans possess a natural sentiment of sympathy for others. Combining the two, he argues that benevolence is the product of conforming our personal delights and empathy to the social – concern for others and the greater good.¹⁷ Moreover, and as Bron

¹⁵*Darshan* is the Hindu term for experiencing (literally ‘seeing’) the divine.

¹⁶*Treatise on Human Nature* 415 (II.3.3).

¹⁷Hume adopts what amounts to a utilitarian criterion for determining the good and social approval. Along with Francis Hutcheson, he apparently follows Shaftesbury’s ‘moral sense theory’ that holds that human beings retain a natural ability to differentiate between right and wrong (*An Enquiry*

Taylor considers, Hume's thoughts on the ethical life "were ultimately rooted in our affective lives" and are in accord with today's "main streams of a pagan ethics."¹⁸

To the degree that both the abrahamic and dharmic theological positions are gnostic in the sense of ascribing a transcendental understanding of godhead, both the secular and pagan perspectives may be understood as agnostic. The agnosticism of the secular outlook is agnostic or skeptical in the traditional sense. Paganism, too, is agnostic but here more in the sense of largely turning away from supernatural claims to special knowledge. Instead, a pagan finds the principle source for metaphors, ideas and spirituality within the workings and rhythms of nature.

While it is true that classical paganism as well as various indigenous traditions of today were or are centered on secret societies and the mysteries, we cannot be certain to what degree the mysteries of the Orphics, Cybele, Mithras, Isis-Osiris, Dionysus and even those of Eleusis and the Cabeiroi may not have been essentially gnostic rather than pagan. But whatever the role and/or spiritual orientation of the ancient initiatory schools might have been, it is certainly true in today's world, at least in the West, that the mysteries could no longer flourish in contemporary paganism. For one, no government would allow them. With the all-intrusive Foucauldian eye-of-the-state, private rites of passage concerning adolescent initiation into adulthood and collective cultic ceremonies – entheogenic or otherwise – are not possible. But even aside from the pan-optic restraint, it is highly unlikely that in a world buffeted as ours is today by relentlessly investigative journalism and individual profit seeking there could ever be the kind of well-kept secret that in the ancient world successfully managed to keep the mysteries of Demeter and Kore an inviolate bastion. In the entire duration of their long history, the initiation secrets were never revealed.

Consequently, the paganisms of today are increasingly open knowledges – faiths and practices that belong in the public domain. In this sense, they contrast with the privileged preserves of the kinds of esoteric and hermetic knowledge of traditional gnosticism. They are 'not-gnostic' or (literally) *agnostic*. The agnostic in the traditional sense, however, is someone who believes that there is insufficient knowledge to ascertain either the existence or non-existence of the gods. This belief amounts to the skeptic's position, namely, through proper inquiry and doubt (Greek *scepsis*), certitude is impossible, and, therefore, judgment on matters of truth should be suspended. But in opposition to 'hard' or early Academic skepticism, general skepticism or agnosticism neither affirms nor denies the gods' existence. It simply cannot be known either way.

Concerning the Principle of Morals V Part II 187–190; Selby-Bigge 1975: 230–232). Moral sense theory distinguishes between the spectator, the agent and the receiver. The spectator observes the acts performed by the agent and judges them in terms of approval or disapproval according to the feelings of pleasure they arise in the spectator. The receiver of the act also responds on the basis of the agreeable or disagreeable feelings it occasions. When Hutcheson speaks of 'the greatest happiness for the greatest numbers', he is concerned with how many receivers are beneficially affected by the conduct of the agent.

¹⁸Personal communication (7 March 2014).

Hume takes this ‘not knowing either way’ as the foundation for purely secular moral formation – one not subscribing to the origin and support of moral values in the supernatural domain. In other words, Hume does not connect morality with the will or commands of God or with life after death and the possibility of divine rewards or punishments. It is nevertheless Hume’s skepticism that is the pivotal issue in his philosophy. Much of this concerns epistemology or how we know what we do know or think we know, but it has ethical implications as well. While Hume’s natural theology ridicules belief in miracles as irrationally superstitious, it is still possible to read the concluding words of his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* or the conclusion of his essay “Of Miracles”¹⁹ as an affirmation that belief is natural to humanity and is as valid as confidence is in sense impressions.

Hume’s skepticism is a form of agnosticism as opposed to atheism in which the denial of godhead is regarded as an accepted fact. There are, in actuality, two common understandings of agnosticism today. One asserts that it is objectively impossible to know whether the gods exist or not. The other refers to individual opinion in which the agnostic himself/herself cannot affirm personal belief in the gods because of insufficient evidence. Both differ from the meaning ascribed by Thomas Huxley (1825–1895) who first coined the term to indicate a rationally and scientifically based methodology used to determine religious truths. In essence, Huxley delineates skepticism as a tool of inquiry.

However, especially in connection with paganism, there is an additional sense of agnosticism. This has more to do with a pagan propensity to suspend rational/empirical belief for the role-play akin to shamanic flight and vision quest. The knowledge or *gnosis* that results from ritual activity, the trance state and/or the walking between the worlds that is at the heart of much pagan effort is the intuitive understanding embedded in myth as opposed to information of the external world obtained normally through the senses. We could designate the knowledge acquired through a pagan’s ‘spiritual pragmatism’ as a form of ‘agnostic *gnosis*’. This presents us with a different interpretation of agnosticism than that of Huxley or conventional modern usage, but it is one that relates to the skepticism as articulated in the classical schools of Pyrrhonic and Academic Skepticism as well as the skeptical undercurrent detectable throughout much of paganism as a whole.

Hume’s skepticism is based on opposing and counterbalancing rational argument against “the more solid and more natural arguments, derived from the senses and experience” to achieve a mental suspension between them.²⁰ Without trust in reason

¹⁹In *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* X (Selby-Bigge 1975: 118), Hume refers to “the strong propensity of mankind to the extraordinary and the marvelous . . . This is our natural way of thinking . . . to believe and report, with the greatest vehemence and assurance, all religious miracles[.]”.

²⁰*Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* I (Bell 1990: 45f).

itself, there is, according to Hume, no access to religion. Our sole reasonable resource is the complete suspension of judgment. *Vis-à-vis* all religious system, Hume defends the skeptic, because

If every attack, as is commonly observed, and no defence, among theologians, is successful; how complete must be *his* victory, who remains always, with all mankind, on the offensive, and has himself no fixed station or abiding city, which he is ever, on any occasion, obliged to defend?²¹

Short of skepticism, one should be at least cautious and reject any hypothesis – religious or otherwise – especially if it does not at least appear to be probable.²² While Hume admits that “momentary amazement and irresolution and confusion” are the results of skepticism,²³ he nonetheless can affirm that “To be a philosophical sceptic is . . . the first and most essential step towards being a sound, believing *Christian*.”²⁴

But if this last were true, it is all the more the case for a pagan – especially inasmuch as paganism is intrinsically not about belief but instead about experience and action, i.e., *what is done*.²⁵ In other words, paganism already adopts what is largely a Humean skeptical position. Belief itself becomes incidental to the rites and experience of paganism, and these last include – if they are not already centered upon them in the first place – both humanitarian and ecological ethics. As Hume puts it, the moral attributes as well as benevolence, power and wisdom of the godhead are what we must discover through faith rather than reason,²⁶ and, for a pagan – who might consider herself/himself already as part of godhead – confidence in moral behavior is grounded in trust in the intrinsic integrity and goodness of a humanity that faces an uncertain and insecure cosmos but nevertheless aims for a tranquility that would be both undisturbed by cosmic anxieties and untainted by and uninvolved with wrongful deeds toward the earth and others. A pagan position is often wise enough to know that this last is not automatically the case. Indeed, even a skeptic need only look casually at the twenty-first century world about us in terms of pollution and dis-equality, deceit and violence, to be certain that any fulfillment or manifestation of humanity at its best has a long way yet to go before actualization.²⁷ But if pagans are to share at all in the fideism of Hume, despite his skepticism and

²¹Ibid. VIII (p. 97).

²²*Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* XI (Bell 1990: 115).

²³*An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Selby-Bigge 1975: 155 n. 1).

²⁴*Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* XII (Bell 1990: 139).

²⁵Adler (1986: 20f, 441). See further, York (1995: 102).

²⁶*Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* X (Bell 1990: 112).

²⁷Hume himself clearly recognizes human iniquity: “Man is the greatest enemy of man. Oppression, injustice, contempt, contumely, violence, sedition, war, calumny, treachery, fraud; by these they mutually torment each other: And they would soon dissolve that society which they had formed, were it not for the dread of still greater ills, which must attend their separation” (*Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* X [Bell 1990: 105f]).

Christian bias, it must be in the faith of a human potential that is ultimately rooted in an awareness of telluric sacredness and individual dignity.

As someone who holds to a natural theology (drawing knowledge of God from nature), Hume opposes both the rationalism of the deists and the superstitious enthusiasm of popular religious ceremony.²⁸ He venerates ‘true religion’ but abhors what he considers the “vulgar superstitions” of ordinary men and women.²⁹ His non-pagan puritanism, however, precludes his ability to see superstition and enthusiasm, if not immoral in themselves, as anything but impediments to or diversions from the pursuit of justice and humanity.³⁰ But what Hume has chiefly in mind here, and what he takes to be the purpose of virtually all activity that we understand as cultic, is that any preoccupation with ‘eternal salvation’ becomes a focus that eliminates compassion or benevolence for a ‘narrow, contracted selfishness’.³¹ Unlike a Christian, however, a pagan is not as a rule obsessed with transcendental immortality. His/her interest is instead on recycling – whether the seasons, material goods or one’s personal mortal life. ‘Everything she touches changes’, and it is this flux and flow of nature – with all its uncertainties and terrors but also all its gifts and joys – that a pagan might endeavor to accept as the sacred given in and of itself. The otherworld, whether ephemeral or permanent, can wait its turn against all that is here and now.³²

²⁸Hume. ‘Of Superstition and Enthusiasm’ in *Essays: Moral, Political and Literary*. Elsewhere, Hume states that perhaps “no view of things are more proper to promote superstition, than such as encourage the blind amazement, the diffidence, and melancholy of mankind” (*Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* XII (Bell 1990: 123)).

²⁹*Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* XII (Bell 1990: 131).

³⁰*Ibid.* (133). “Thus the motives of vulgar superstition have no great influence on general conduct; nor is their operation favourable to morality in the instances, where they predominate.” (134). For MacIntyre (1998: 174f), not only is Hume “notoriously inconsistent,” his weakness lies precisely in his moral conservatism. Apart from his defense of suicide, Hume is mostly interested in explaining – rather than criticizing – the rules behind the moral *status quo* that he accepts.

³¹*Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* XII (Bell 1990: 134). In referring to the self-referential altruism that is part of the good life, Mackie (1977: 170) employs Hume’s term ‘confined generosity’ and claims that this, along with self-love, is not only the best “we can reasonably hope for” but is an important ingredient in the inevitable social arena of cooperation, competition and conflict.

³²Hume’s skepticism is twofold. It is both an epistemological approach to all knowledge and, specifically, it is an argument against both the notion of an *a priori* transcendent yet inscrutable deity and the argument by design for an *a posteriori* ‘anthropomorphic’ God. For Hume, polytheism is as credible as either theism or skepticism. But more broadly his epistemological skepticism seeks to establish an all-pervasive philosophical uncertainty. We can never have definite knowledge of cause and effect. At best, we can only presume on the basis of probability that the sun will rise tomorrow or that if I hit the tennis ball with my racket it will ricochet. Hume considers matters of fact simply to be empirical probabilities, whereas conceptual relations (e.g., between numbers or ideas) constitute *a priori* knowledge (refer to Hume’s *A Treatise of Human Nature* I, Part III, Section I ‘Of knowledge’ and Section II ‘Of probability; and of the idea of cause and effect’). All experience is phenomenal in “that everything, which appears to the mind, is nothing but a perception” (*ibid.* 243).

For Hume, however, if skepticism represents a suspension of judgment, skepticism itself is suspended as soon as we go out the door – for we proceed *as if* we have probable if not certain knowledge. In other words, our understanding of causal relationship is a product of habitual thought rather than perception of causality in the external world itself. Nevertheless, since our ideas are nothing more than copies of our sensory impressions from whence they originate, we can have no idea of God because we have no sense experience of God. Even for a pagan, consequently, while there is acceptance that nature is divine, our sense impressions of the tangible can only accept that tangibility as divine by definition, as an ‘operation of mind’, and at best a conclusion that is based on what Hume calls ‘probable reasoning’ or a kind of instinct.³³

While Hume dismisses idolatry as atheism (namely, as paganism has itself been understood as atheism from a theistic perspective), rejects superstition as the foolish beliefs of the ignorant and intimidated vulgar masses, and discounts miracles as affirmations of deceived or deceitful individuals, even his skepticism is framed by a contrasting religious framework to that of paganism, i.e., by his Christian religion. His skepticism, however, remains important as a pervasive tenor throughout the world’s various paganisms – especially those of the West. A pagan’s bias toward exploration and discovery rests on ceaseless investigation, and any proper investigation in turn rests on considering all possibilities skeptically. From the schools of Pyrrho and the Academics through to Hume and beyond, skepticism is an important tool in the process of developing understanding and acquiring reliable information.³⁴ At the same time, the *epoche* or suspension of judgment between alternatives is also the agnostic stance that a pagan can and does take in his or her encounter with the miraculous as expressed through myths, narratives, metaphors, idols and superstitions, that is, miracles as a revered form of agnostic *gnosis*.

³³A *Treatise of Human Nature* I, Part III, Section VI ‘Of the inference from the impression to the idea’. See also, ‘Of the Reason of Animals’ in which Hume claims: “To consider the matter aright, reason is nothing but a wonderful and unintelligible instinct in our souls” (228). Nevertheless, Hume argues that the soul itself is simply a collection of varying impressions in constant movement (300).

³⁴In addition to the skeptics already mentioned, some others who have used skepticism concretely in the development of their thought include Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494), Desiderius Erasmus (1467–1536), Henry Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim (1486–1535), Marin Mersenne (1588–1648), René Descartes (1596–1650), Pierre Gassendi (1592–1655), Blaise Pascal (1623–1662), Joseph Glanvill (1636–1680), Pierre Bayle (1647–1706), François Voltaire (1694–1778), Gottlob Ernst Schulze (1761–1833), William Kingdon Clifford (1845–1879), Josiah Royce (1855–1916), George Santayana (1863–1952) and Stanley Cavell (b. 1926). Kant is to be included here as well. Indeed, Reese (1999: 709) contends that the modern concern of philosophy with epistemology is invariably a concern with, if not endorsement of, skepticism.

Kant

As a theist, Kant affirms the concept of absolute being and, consequently, agrees with the Exodus commandment that forbids the making of graven images or likenesses. Nature, with Kant, is always something secondary. Nature itself is without purpose or design – both of which are given or determined through art. Although beautiful, nature must sacrifice itself to become art. In Kant's terminology, it is *de*-formed by understanding, and its purposiveness (as distinct from its purpose) is revealed.

In Kant's anti-idolatrous position, the transcendental and corporeal comprise a fundamental duality – one that he understands in terms of noumena and phenomena. The noumenon is the 'thing-in-itself', something that cannot be known. By contrast, the phenomenon is the thing as it is perceived, as it appears to perception.

Kant builds his ethics on the foundation of his metaphysical speculations – a technical argument in which reason plays a key role.³⁵ The *Critique of Pure Reason* could be seen to be as much a critique of reason as it is a critique of knowledge that uses reason to accomplish its critical task. However, in the first *Critique* that deals with 'how we know', it is understanding that is the central faculty. But in as much as understanding requires *a priori* knowledge, that is, knowledge that is not furnished by the senses but instead from the rationally and logically independent transcendentals of soul, cosmos and god, these 'ideas', according to Kant, *must* exist in order for us to know anything. The role of understanding is to categorize the input we receive from our senses, and in this function, it mediates as it were between reason and sensible intuition.³⁶

³⁵Kant develops his understanding of epistemology in his *Kritik der reinen Vernunft (Critique of Pure Reason; 1781, revised 1787)*. See Smith (1978). A shorter version of Kant's first *Critique* is to be found in his *Prolegomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik* or *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics that Will Be Able to Come Forward as Science* (1783). See Beck (1950). This was followed by the *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft (Critique of Practical Reason; 1788)* in which Kant is concerned with morality. See Beck (1956). As an initial sketch of his key ideas in the second *Critique*, Kant published *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten* in 1785. See Ellington (1981). In his *Kritik der Urtheilskraft (Critique of Judgment; 1790)*, Kant turns to aesthetics. See Pluhar (1987). Some of the other important works by Kant are *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Naturwissenschaft (Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science; 1786 – see Ellington 1975)*, *Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der blossen Vernunft (Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone; 1793; Palmquist 1992; etext:3–5, however, argues that a more accurate translation of the title of Kant's book on religion should be: Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason)* and *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Rechts- und Tugendlehre (Metaphysics of Morals; 1797)*.

³⁶For the possibility of predication, Kant borrows from Aristotle the notion of categories: substance, quantity, quality, relation, place, time, position, possession, action and passivity. These are the concepts by which understanding organizes the data acquired through the senses. Kant considers that there are four 'types' of predicative conditions upon which a concept depends: quantity (unity, plurality, totality), quality (reality, negation, limitation), relation (inherence/subsistence, causality/dependence, community) and modality (possibility-impossibility, existence-nonexistence, necessity-contingency). Modality refers to whether the predicate is already contained within the concept or not.

With Kantian ethics, however, reason moves to the center of the stage, and in this role, it is no longer abstract or ‘pure’ but now ‘practical’ in terms of reasonableness. In a word, Kant’s *Critique of Practical Reason* is concerned with being morally reasonable. Kant is no longer interested with whether something is true or false but instead with ‘shoulds’ and ‘should nots’. The language of practical reason is in terms of ‘ought’ rather than ‘if’. It focuses on a realm of behavioral duty that is *always* applicable. For Kant, ethics is not conditional and never relative. It is known to understanding as categorical imperative(s), and the maxim for rational human behavior – for what Kant refers to as the ‘kingdom’ of autonomously rational human beings as ends in themselves, never simply as means – is in truth the ‘golden rule’ of doing unto others as you would have them do unto yourself. In its general sense, Kant’s categorical imperative declares that one ought never to act other than as if his/her actions should be a universal law. In one form, the categorical imperative informs us to “act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end.”³⁷ While this may sound like an anthropocentrism, the notion of personhood may be expanded, as Graham Harvey has done, to include ‘other than human’ persons as well.³⁸

Kant rejects Aristotle’s notion that humanity’s goal is to seek happiness. Ultimately, even beyond moral duty, our aim is freedom – a freedom that Kant understands as the ability for unconditioned thought. His teleological aesthetics supersedes the bases of knowledge and morality. Kant allows that in relation to the whole everything has a purpose, but he disallows any overall intentionality – thereby affirming chance. However, as a product of nature, humanity is concerned with culture. It is culture that enables us to make judgments about the sublime, and culture finds its foundation in human nature. Through sublimity, we humans are allegedly able to develop superior feelings to both internal and external nature. Kant argues that the ‘purpose’ of culture is to produce rational beings who are receptive to reason and transcendental freedom.

Kant, Pagan Critique and Idolatry

As a theist, Kant is not a pagan thinker in most senses. However, he cannot be simply rejected as a transcendentalist or idealist, and many of his ideas find resonance even with paganism. He is particularly important in the development of Western meta-ethics, and any location of a pagan ethic must take into consideration Kant’s

³⁷*Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* 429. Nevertheless, MacIntyre (1998: 198), referring to the logical emptiness of Kant’s universalized moral precept in terms of verification, claims that “in practice the test of the categorical imperative imposes restrictions only on those insufficiently equipped with ingenuity.”

³⁸Harvey (2005).

perspective and particularly where the position of paganism differs from the ideas of the greatest and most profound of modern philosophers.

Although Kant is almost invariably hailed as an important resource for much of contemporary Christian theology, he appears to have placed no particular value on Christian worship over that of any other faith. All cultic behavior from his perspective is equally servile and worthless.³⁹ Pure practical reason is sufficient, and morality does not need religion for it to be moral. Instead, Kant holds that reverence of the moral law is itself worship of God. And just as practical reason exceeds understanding, faith surpasses belief. However, although Kant's ostensible faith is in rationality rather than an ultimate being itself/himself, he nevertheless manages to incorporate something akin to traditional theological claims. His God is one of supreme reason, a logical necessity to reward virtue and punish iniquitous behavior – more or less the adage that if there were not a God, it would be necessary for us to invent one. Kant does not go this far but is content to argue that the categorical imperative affirms, or at least indicates, that there is an objective moral law since there is a universal sense of ethical obligation – the source of which must be God.⁴⁰ On the basis of the moral 'ought', there *ought* to be a supreme being. In other words, and as Tolstoy argued, moral necessity requires the existence of God.

The logic of this argument, however, largely escapes the pagan and the modern skeptic alike. Moral laws or principles are seen instead as contextual and primarily as individual social constructions that enable respective societies to function. In the least, there is nothing to suggest that such social devices are dependent on a supreme lawgiver. Even Kant would be likely to agree with A.J. Ayer who seeks to demonstrate that moral standards must exist independent of God. Otherwise, the situation would be that whatever God commands would arbitrarily need to be 'good'. Instead, God's actions are 'good' because they conform to moral standards and not just because they issue from God.⁴¹

Kant is convinced of a transcendent *a priori* world, and he considers that it is our aesthetic judgment that enables us to apprehend this realm. This apprehension is mirrored, so to speak, by our innate sense of practical reason – the only source for moral behavior. The *a priori* ideas of reason – God, freedom and immortality – manifest in our consciousness as practical reason and aesthetic experience and,

³⁹*Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* 5.4.2.2 [161] (1793): "... whatever be substituted for the moral service of God, it is all one and all equal in value" [vide <https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/ethics/kant/religion/religion-within-reason.htm> (accessed 14 July 2014)]. Nevertheless, in the *Critique of Practical Reason* (Chapter II), Kant affirms that "The doctrine of Christianity ... alone satisfies the strictest demand of practical reason." While he allows that the Cynics are concerned with simplicity of nature and common sense, Stoics with wisdom and Epicureans with prudence, for him Christian morality is distinguished by its 'holiness'.

⁴⁰Miller (1995: 83). See in particular Chapter II ("Of the Dialect of Pure Reason in defining the Conception of the 'Summum Bonum'") in Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason* for the necessity to assume the immortality of the soul (IV) and the existence of God (V) if the moral law is to be achieved and harmonious with happiness.

⁴¹Ayer (1973: 225f). See also, Ewing (1953: 112).

according to Kant, compel us to “*think* nature itself in its totality as a presentation of something supersensible . . .”⁴² We are here, however, not particularly far from Plato and Plotinus. By contrast, the default pagan position entertains the supersensible realm as the product of nature and not nature’s transcendent source or underlying reality.

Kant’s nature, as with Spinoza’s, is something to be dominated and used. It may suggest the sublime, but it is reason which is primary. The second part of the *Critique of Judgment* concerns the teleological. Through beauty we are able to ascertain the purposiveness of nature, but it is our experience of the sublime that supposedly suggests to us the origins of nature in the transcendent. A pagan, however, tends not to separate the beautiful and the sublime in the way that Kant does. Sublimity can be found in the aesthetic, and the beautiful can itself be sublime. Whereas aesthetic pleasure for Kant is contemplative, for a pagan it is *also* sensuous. For Kant, contemplation leads to abstraction in the same manner as practical reason leads to the categorical imperative, and Kant prefers contemplation because it curtails desire and purpose and supposedly allows the realm of the supersensible and transcendent design to be approached. By-and-large, however, a pagan has no ‘preference’ for a world beyond or to transcend the limits of possible experience. She/he works within the infinite bounds of nature without the desire to escape them. Nature is divine, and if there are any *sui generis* ethical principles, they find their origin within and because of nature and the natural – rather than in any denial of them, whether implicit or explicit or both. In other words, freedom is not a denial of nature or to be located in some excess from her but occurs as the experience of full engagement. For both the pagan and modern skeptic, freedom is part of the empirical, and imagination is illustrative of freedom *par excellence* more than it is something to be sacrificed for the more abstract condition of unadulterated and unconditioned reason.

In typical transcendental language, Kant conceives in terms of ‘higher degrees of moral perfection’ against which he posits both ‘fanatical theosophic dreams’ and indulgent convenience. Morality for Kant has no necessary and proportionate connection to happiness. It is obvious that the Pietistic theism of Kant and its accompanying moral stricture could little countenance Cyrenaicism, but Kant also rejects the more moderate form of hedonism, namely, Epicureanism. He categorically denies that happiness can be “the supreme principle of morality [but is instead] a wholly false . . . maxim of arbitrary choice according to every man’s inclination.”⁴³ As a result, he finds human prudence – including Epicurean temperance and moderation of the appetites – wholly wanting. But Kant is also critical of Stoicism, for, though it chooses its “supreme practical principle quite rightly,” it falls into error by assuming that virtue is fully attainable within the present life. He also denies the serenity or detachment sought by the Stoic because it

⁴²“Critique of Aesthetic Judgment” B.29 [268] – “General Remark” under “The Dynamically Sublime in Nature”: <http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/1217> (accessed 14 July 2014).

⁴³*The Critique of Practical Reason* Chapter II.

denies “the second element of the summum bonum, namely, [personal] happiness, to be properly a special object of human desire.”⁴⁴ For Kant, the Stoic wise man is expected to be the impossible: a divinity independent of nature and untouched by the evils of life. Because of his transcendental idealism that enshrines reason in the noumenal realm as opposed to the empirical, Kant finds that all the Greek philosophies are deficient because they seek ethical attainment through natural powers alone and not in a framework that deprives the human being of confidence.

In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant seeks to prevent the unity of understanding and reason, of representation and freedom, because, he argues, only when these are not conflated is the moral law possible. Kant insists that freedom is transcendental and separate from the causal laws of nature, and without human subjects being free, no moral practice is possible. If the unknown or transcendental cannot be represented, any formation of concepts through understanding is, according to Kant, doomed to ultimate failure. However, by contrast, for the empiricist, that which cannot be represented simply does not exist; for the pragmatist, that which cannot be represented is simply useless. A pagan herself/himself tends to adopt a pragmatic empirical approach and, if not denying the transcendental or supernatural outright, envisions no viable reason why it cannot be represented even to whatever degree it might not be understood or may not even exist. As the sublime for Kant is not dependent on any object but on the self or subject alone, he upholds the biblical commandment prohibiting the making of graven images as the most ‘sublime passage in the Jewish law’ and as a prevention of the kind of fanaticism or delusion that wishes to see beyond the limits of the senses.⁴⁵ But even quantum science ‘represents’ things it cannot encounter such as quarks, photons, leptons, gluons, bosons and gravitons, and the pagan aspect of spirituality is likewise comfortable to represent the unmanifest and other as a means of expressing adoration, of experiencing the dynamics of awe and wonder or of accessing the miraculous. The real irony in Kant’s *Lectures on Ethics* argument is that the iconoclastic Abrahamic traditions have consistently produced a ‘reverse fanaticism’ – but a fanaticism nonetheless – that in terms of ethical consequence appears indefensibly immoral.

Kant’s anti-idolatry position is one that categorically dismisses the tangible as a legitimate vehicle for the divine. Idolatry for a pagan, however, represents the occasion for ecstatic affirmation of divine materiality. Not bound by any Kantian obligation to preserve a transcendental realm as absolutely other, a pagan may seek the divine principally as immanent rather than transcendent – at least as the posited transcendental in Kant’s *a priori* or non-experiential sense. Instead, in pagan non-theism, the divine can manifest through or even *as* the corporeal. Once again, the pantheistic understanding of the cosmos as god/goddess in and of itself is what provides the persistent rationale behind pagan proclivities of idolatry. In other words, Kant’s Platonic ideas of subject, cosmos and God become for the pagan

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵*Critique of Judgment* 4 B. 29 – vide Bernard (1892/1914).

transformed into something more reminiscent of Bryan Wilson's humanity, world and the supernatural in which the human and the cosmos are now substantial and concrete presences and the supernatural or, better, the preternatural/co-natural is understood as an intrinsic awesome other.

The idolatry question and its place within Kant's philosophy also form a part of the philosopher's understanding of religion itself. Kant distinguishes between 'natural religion' and 'revealed religion' but rejects the first as too skeptical and the second as too dogmatic. His 'true empirical' or 'universal' religion is one in which the natural and revealed become complementary.⁴⁶ As Stephen Palmquist points out, Kant distinguishes between two types of natural religionists: the 'naturalist', who denies the supernatural, and the 'pure rationalist', who recognizes the supernatural but does not see it as central to religion.⁴⁷ While not an exact fit, these types correspond to two kinds of pagans, namely, those who reject the supernatural as an unnecessary fiction, and those who entertain the supernatural along with the natural – working with both. We invariably find that throughout paganism, both its contemporary and indigenous forms, personal attitudes toward the gods range from understanding them as metaphorical and/or non-existent to numinous presences, living material entities and/or capable of visionary and epiphanic disclosure. It could be pointed out here, however, that an atheistic form of paganism in today's world does indeed exist as well and constitutes a school of thought behind some but not all contemporary naturalistic paganism. By contrast, while there are also pagans – both indigenous and modern – who (perhaps through emotional need) insist on the ontological reality of the gods with the same existential status as empirical objects, the majority of contemporary Western pagans accept the gods and goddesses as significant archetypes, metaphors and/or magical agents for reasons of aesthetic desire and choice rather than dogmatic conviction. Much if not most of this majority would consider themselves to be no less naturalistic pagans.

However, to the argument that Kant wishes to postulate the existence of a transcendental god *beyond and outside* humanity in order for human beings to be able to aspire toward the ethical, a pagan is in principle in accord – albeit for slightly different reasons and in slightly different manners. While Kant has been (unjustly or inaccurately) viewed as humanistic, paganism too is a form of humanism. The humanism ascribed to Kant, however, is humanism in its classical and narrow understanding as centered exclusively on reason. Pagan humanism is neither rational nor irrational but a valuing of the human as a central concern for which no apologies are necessary. This is not to be taken as a form of anthropocentrism but, rather, as the recognition that the human species as with all species is concerned primarily with its own preservation. In the human case, conservancy includes both its own advance and evolution along with its essential kinship with non-human organisms and the cosmos as a whole. If morality for Kant necessarily extends beyond itself –

⁴⁶Palmquist (1992; etext:12). In his *Lectures on Ethics* (83f), Kant claims that “supernatural religion is not opposed to natural religion, but completes it.”

⁴⁷Ibid. pp 10f.

thereby invalidating his philosophy as strictly a form of humanism, so too does it do the same for the pagan, but here, not to the idea of an ideal God, but to the interpretive actuality of the cosmos as an interdependent and animate divine reality. If Kant's God shares with us a common goal toward which he/it seeks to guide us, a pagan's gods and goddesses share the same cosmos of which the human being is herself/himself a part, and the moral goal is now the unending teleological unfolding of the cosmos as an ontological and self-reflecting process. A pagan places his/her trust in the dynamic cycles of natural and organic corporality over that in any abstract postulation. Consequently, along with its celebratory humanism, paganism understands that humanism within the context of an axial and all-encompassing naturalism. Nature is the all that is, and pagan humanism is not to be confused with traditional and historic humanisms but instead, and in accord with the idiomatic saying of not throwing the baby out with the bathwater, as a *new* understanding of humanism – a pagan humanism.⁴⁸

For Kant, religion is the recognition of all duties as commands of God. Apart from the necessities involved with maintaining the indigenous community (both local and global), contemporary paganism tends to eschew the notion of ethical *commandments*. Its ethical principles are part of what is seen as a 'positive morality' and are understood as chiefly suggestions and participatory advice. Kant understands revealed religion as that in which the divine command precedes recognition of duty, whereas in natural religion one first comes to know proper duty before acknowledging it as divine injunction.⁴⁹ In paganism as a natural religion and religion of nature, god is an emergent teleological goal rather than an *a priori* source of commanding ethical will that is to be known through revelation. But where Kant imagines a true religion as one in which the revealed and natural compliment each other and allow the inner and outer to be grounded in the transcendental, paganism seeks to *complete* the veracity of natural religion through reason, common sense and instinctive intuition. In this, it grounds its ceaseless effort toward completion in the open and unending givenness of nature – a presence known through tangibility and the human emotions. Where a pagan would tend to agree with Kant is in placing morality as the primary basis of his/her religion and theology only as the secondary consideration.

Kant advises that one always does his or her best as if it were to be a universal law. His 'one for all; all for one' maxim, however, discounts the great variety and difference in people. A pagan, by contrast, endeavors to celebrate pluralism and allow, as did the Dalai Lama in his plenary address to the 1993 Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago, that we are all different – this difference being

⁴⁸See also "Humanism – Confucian and Western" in Chap. 14 *supra*.

⁴⁹Kant (1793: 153f; 1960: 142f). Palmquist (1992; etext:28n15) points out that the same definition of religion as the performance of duties as divine commands also appears in all three *Critiques* as well as elsewhere within Kant's writings.

something that *ought* to be honored.⁵⁰ In Kant's common sense but narrow and 'no fun' ethics, reason is an end, but in paganism as in Hume's skepticism reason is a means and not the end in itself. Kant's categorical imperative insists that people are not to be considered as means but simply or at least primarily as ends. This 'sounds' good, but in human and natural interaction, we always *use* one another as means if not also as ends. The grocer supplies us comestibles, the tailor provides clothes, our parents furnish love and emotional nourishment, teachers education, sexual partners gratification and so on. Human exchange is a give-and-take process, and the mutual use of one another as means is a natural part of this process.⁵¹

A pagan would agree with Kant that human beings must not be exploited or used exclusively as the means to some further and selfish end, and this entails respecting one another as well as the earth as being intrinsically valuable. In place of Kant's abstract reason as the end and rationale for all moral behavior, a pagan substitutes honor. And part of a pagan's understanding of honor is to pursue pleasure legitimately – at least the legitimate pleasure that does not reduce or harm another against his or her will. In honoring sensual and intellectual pleasure as a moral form of happiness, a pagan honors life and the gods. Even virtue must ultimately be a pleasure. Not a sensual pleasure necessarily but at least an aesthetic pleasure at that *locus* in which a pagan's sense of the beautiful and the sublime intersects with a pagan's sense of the 'right' thing to do. If we were to replace Kant's reason with honor as the teleological end, we would have a viable, this-worldly spiritual morality that is no less focused on freedom. In other words, we would have paganism.⁵²

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⁵⁰Bron Taylor, however, comments that "Religion-legitimated imperialism, misanthropy, and homophobia, and antipathy toward 'vermin' and 'pests' among non-human beings, I hope, pagans will not want to honor" (personal communication of 7 March 2014).

⁵¹In contrast to Kant's moral law as unobtainable without God's grace (*vide* Palmquist 1992; etext:17–19), in his *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* V Part II 187 (Selby-Bigge 1975: 230), Hume appears almost to be obliquely discounting the remoteness of Kant's ethics: "Virtue, placed at such a distance, is like a fixed star, which . . . is so infinitely removed as to affect the senses, neither with light nor heat."

⁵²Pagan freedom includes the ongoing search for the honorable in social philosophy, environmental ethics, biodiversity, animal welfare, humanitarian toleration and the necessities of compromise. Being honorable involves more than snap decisions but instead and much more often great patience, sincere contemplation and honest sensitivity in order to find the winnowing rod for an ethical solution. One focus entails determining whose freedoms are being abrogated and why along with determining the necessity for the loss to any party involved. Of course in some types of emergency situations, a prolonged reflection is not commensurate to the making of the decision at hand. In such cases, the decision-makers might be allowed the privilege of choice and even the freedom occasionally to make honest mistakes.

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Chapter 6

Friedrich Nietzsche

Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844–1900)¹ is *the* maverick as well as most-misrepresented and most-misunderstood within the West’s philosophical tradition. He dares to say things most others before him would not venture to express. Particularly in his unmitigated criticisms of Christianity, he becomes important for contemporary Western paganism in its struggle to emerge from Christian historical and social repression. He is not a pagan himself but can be seen nevertheless to interface significantly with pagan ideas and thought. Nietzsche rejects Kant and his world of noumenal abstraction. Most importantly, as this chapter endeavors to make clear, Nietzsche offers to the individual something different than the bourgeois ethos of Aristotle. He caters to the margins and shamans of society. For Nietzsche, humanity has the potential to supersede even God/the gods. While there are indeed mistakes and incorrect assertions to be found with Nietzsche, I wish to include discussion of parting from him as well as rehabilitating him. Additionally, I will further focus on his notion of aristocracy and his relation to idolatry.

While much has been claimed for the influence of Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) on Kant, in many respects the Swiss-born French philosopher’s Romantic piety, concern with will (both particular and general or moral) and understandings of the state of nature vis-à-vis the social contract of democracy read as predecessors to the ideas of Nietzsche.² It is to Nietzsche that we must look for a pagan-type

¹For Durant (1953: 440), Nietzsche was “the last great scion of the lineage of Rousseau.” Nevertheless, in “Expeditions of an Untimely Man,” *Twilight of the Idols* 3 (Hollingdale 1968: 79), Nietzsche refers to Rousseau’s instinct for revenge placing him among the plebians. Later, discussing George Sand, he compares her to Rousseau as “false, artificial, fustian, exaggerated” (6 [81]). In ‘Progress in my sense’, 48 (113), Nietzsche is explicit in expressing his hatred of Rousseau with his vanity and self-contempt: “this first modern man, idealist, and *canaille* in one person.” But as Solomon and Higgins (2000: 59f) point out, “His use of parody does not necessarily indicate Nietzsche’s hostility toward a predecessor; it is also an acknowledgment, even a gesture of admiration while moving onward.”

²For Rousseau, see also Chap. 7 footnote 52.

philosophy that contrasts with both Bergsonian vitalism and a Schopenhauerian voluntarism to accept ultimate value or the world-substance as objectified will itself. Nietzsche, however, is among the most ambiguous and controversial of thinkers. He is both deplored and praised in equal measure.³ Nevertheless, as William Barrett contends, “to praise Nietzsche properly we have also to say the worst possible things about him.”⁴

Nietzsche is known primarily for his perspectivism, the distinction between the Apollonian and Dionysian artistic spirits, the ‘death of God’, the notion of the eternal recurrence, the superman, the will to power and his contention that Christianity is a slave morality. He stresses the creation of value, life-advancement over truth, celebration and the affirmation of nature both as all that is and as what must be ceaselessly combated.⁵ Concerning philosophy, Nietzsche, unlike Kant, Hume, Aristotle and, in fact, most philosophers, is as much a poet. His real predecessor is perhaps Plato, but Plato rejects the very thing that Nietzsche is,

³S.E. Frost (1942: 74, 204f), for instance, dismisses Nietzsche in two brief passages that mention only a contended argument for the unfriendliness of nature vis-à-vis humanity and that the natural state of man is dis-equality. Therefore, enforcing equality through the state is unnatural. Bertrand Russell (1961: 736f), on his side, feels that Nietzsche’s aristocracy is superior on grounds of biology rather than education and environment. In other words, aristocratic superiority is biological superiority. And according to Russell, “the only practicable form of aristocracy [based on Nietzsche’s philosophy] is an organization like the Fascist or the Nazi party.” But while Russell (739) claims that “Nietzsche despises universal love,” in “The Child with the Mirror,” *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* 23 (Common, u.d. [1962]: 89), Nietzsche’s protagonist Zarathustra claims “How I now love every one unto whom I may but speak! Even mine enemies pertain to my bliss.”

Often considered the rationale and foundation behind German fascism, Steven Taubeneck attributes the prevailing understanding of Nietzsche in Europe and America to the interpretations of, respectively, Martin Heidegger and Walter Kaufmann: See Taubeneck’s *Afterword* in Behler (1991: 159–77): “Nietzsche in North America: Walter Kaufmann and After.” However, Michael Tanner claims unabashedly that Nietzsche is “a very great thinker” who “attacks modernity by analysing the perennial tendencies that it manifests” – Hollingdale (1973/1990: 7, 9): Michael Tanner’s Introduction (pp. 7–26).

⁴Barrett (1958: 181). Nietzsche’s major works include *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872, third edition 1886), *The Gay Science* (1882, second edition 1887), *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* I & II (1883), III (1884) and IV (1885, published 1892), *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886), *Zur Genealogie der Moral* [*On the Genealogy of Morals*] (1887), *Götzen-Dämmerung* [*Twilight of the Idols*] (1888, published 1889), *Der Antichrist* [*The Anti-Christ*] (1888, published 1895), *Ecce Homo* (1888, published posthumously in 1908), and *The Will to Power* (a collection of notes written between 1883 and 1888, published posthumously in 1901 with an expanded edition in 1905).

⁵Nietzsche met and befriended Richard Wagner in 1868, but their friendship ended 10 years later – in particular over Nietzsche’s objections to the Christian emphasis on renunciation in the composer’s opera *Parsifal*. In 1869, Nietzsche was appointed to the chair of classical philology at Basel University. Perpetually plagued with poor health, he frequently is forced to take leave from teaching and eventually retires on a pension in 1879. Ten years later, in Turin, he collapsed and was admitted to the psychiatric unit at the University of Jena. He spent the rest of his life insane and paralyzed under first the care of his mother until her death in 1897 and then his sister Elisabeth until his own death in August of 1900.

namely, the artist.⁶ Nevertheless, as a poet, we have with Nietzsche a much greater hermeneutic license for interpreting and understanding him. We are entitled in part to see Nietzsche as pagan, but in truth he is something more than simply pagan; he is foremost of all human and, as such, encompasses all the joys and suffering that being human entails.

Despite his contention that God is dead (killed by humanity's insatiable desire to know reality and to replace God as a creative cause behind reality)⁷ – a contention that launched a significant Protestant theological school in the 1960s and survives in some of the ideas of Don Cupitt, Nietzsche's superman *par excellence* is Jesus Christ. Apart from this Christian role-model, Nietzsche's 'God is dead' theology differs in consequence little from the absent God of the Deists. The null result of a *deus mortuus* and a *deus absconditus* is the same.

As far as humanity is concerned, this alleged non-intervention of God applies equally to the period during which the pagan gods enter into sleep, but the difference here is that the pagan gods will regenerate and awaken; they return. This re-awakening begins with the earth, the *terra mater*, and the present-day shift of perception fostered by Goddess spirituality may be reckoned as the beginning of the end of the modernistic paradigm that understands the earth in purely mechanistic terms and as the start of humanity's re-enchantment of the world.

Paganism, in fact, is the answer to the Nietzschean dilemma.⁸ Nietzsche wants to reject Kant's noumenal world of abstract ideals, but for him the noumenal is the static, unchanging world of insanity. The impossibility of shouldering the burden of the transcendental and its incompatibility with our real world, the world of nature, is the ultimately enervating state that allows only the response of a deranged mind. The hero, the supermind, the only one who could confront the horror of eternity is God, but with God dead, then for Nietzsche it can only be Christ, the superman. Consequently, while Nietzsche rejects Christianity itself as a slave morality, he is unable to reject Jesus Christ as his superman.⁹ The psychotic condition that Nietzsche comes to face is the impossibility of being Christ, of being the superman.

⁶*The Genealogy of Morals* 3.25 (Golfing 1956: 290): Plato is "the greatest enemy of art Europe has thus far produced."

⁷*The Gay Science* 125. See further *Thus Spake Zarathustra* 25 (Common u.d. (1962): 96), 66 (289f), 67 (297) & 73.1f (320).

⁸Barrett (1958: 205) argues differently that the answer to Nietzsche's existential deadlock is to be found in Heidegger.

⁹See in particular Nietzsche's *The Anti-Christ* 32–36 & 39f (Hollingdale 1979: 156–60, 163–5). Jesus, the Evangel, the Nazarene, is described not as a redeemer but as a 'free spirit', opposed to dogma, a world-affirmer rather than a world-denier, an abolisher of the concept of 'sin', a demonstrator of how one ought to live, one who stood against the social order and one who was completely emancipated from all feelings of resentment. In short, Jesus is for Nietzsche the one and only true Christian.

As Michael Tanner virtually implies, the superman must be and can only be mediocre if she is to survive at all.¹⁰ Despite all his paradoxes and contradictions, what Nietzsche misses is what paganism offers: sleep and belly-up laughter.¹¹ His fear of the eternal return is a terror of entropic psychic exhaustion, the bifurcative turn toward endless chaotic entropy, against a universe in which everything reoccurs forever. However, in either a cosmos in which matter continues to come into being or a cosmos that expands eternally, the re-combination, the eternal recurrence, will always be different. This is what Nietzsche was unable to see when he became instead lost in an all-engulfing transcendental fiction.¹² With paganism and the celebration of divine immanence, by contrast, perpetual change is embraced; the eternal return, the great round of nature, becomes rather the progressive, all-expanding spiral dance rather than an abyss of inescapable terror.¹³

The more correct translation of the ‘superman’s’ German original, the *Übermensch*, is ‘overman’.¹⁴ However, Nietzsche himself is much too much the individualist to exalt collective humanity as herself the overman, the champion who alone can accept and swallow his/her cowardliness and forge his/her way against the noumenal but cosmic dragon of static madness. In other words, and in place of Nietzsche’s lonely vanquisher, it is humanity itself as a unified and coordinated species who is the hero who can conquer the cross of Christ.

Consequently, paganism is the response to any eternal round of insanity. It is ultimately the transformation, affirmation and celebration of the psychic hell of madness into nature. In *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Zarathustra the shepherd bites the head off of the serpent in order to break the endless cycle of the uroborus, and in this he is motivated by his own cosmic thirst.¹⁵ It is water, the water of life, that

¹⁰Tanner’s 1990 “Introduction” to Hollingdale’s republished 1973 translation of Nietzsche’s *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 21.

¹¹But while we may appear to be missing an integrally laughing Nietzsche, he nevertheless declares laughter to be holy and, in *Zarathustra*’s Part IV (“The Higher Man”), suggests to those who aspire to greatness to learn first how to laugh (73.15 [328], 73.18 [330] & 73.20 [332]). And concerning sleep, the lord of virtues, Zarathustra informs in “The Academic Chair of Virtues” 2 (26) that “Few people know it, but one must have all the virtues in order to sleep well.” Laughter also is admonished as necessary. In 1.24 of *Will to Power*, Nietzsche tells us that because of the intensity of our suffering, it was necessary for humanity to invent laughter.

¹²In identifying sin as “the ethico-religious interpretation of physiological distemper” and asceticism as a sublimation of suffering, Nietzsche nevertheless adds that despite these attitudes, he can still be “an enemy of all materialism”: *The Genealogy of Morals* 3.16 (Golfing 1956: 266).

¹³A similar, more positive, notion is expressed by Behler (1991: 95f) concerning Nietzsche’s *Übermensch* who, being free from nihilism and resentment, approaches the world “as worthy of infinite repetition.” Likewise, following Nietzsche, Freud and Marx, Foucault argues that self-reflexive interpretation has now “become an infinite task” (ibid. 79). This endlessness of repetition and interpretation is no longer a horror but, as it is for a pagan, a ceaseless possibility of joyous affirmation.

¹⁴MacIntyre (1998: 225) translates the *Übermensch* as “the man who transcends.”

¹⁵*Thus Spake Zarathustra* 46.2 (Common u.d. [1962]: 175f). See further “The Convalescent” 57.2 (244f).

he is after. Through water he is able to live, and it is within the waters of sleep that he is also able to rest and regenerate. Nietzsche appears to be suggesting that it is the contradiction of water as sleep that allows the break of and escape from the eternal recurrence. This, in turn, leads to the re-birth, the eternal rebirth of the will, the will to power, the power of will, the will to will, the will to energy. The pagan and Nietzsche the would-be pagan posit this over and against any wish to flee into a noumenal transcendental 'out there'. In paganism, following a 'Levinasian' manner of speaking, there is ultimately no ultimate beyond, there is no ultimate other – despite whatever personalizing the Abrahamists and Levinas seek to give it.¹⁶ In paganism, there is only 'all this' – the all this of nature, a nature that includes we humans as well as all that is, was and will come to be.

The fullest expression of Nietzsche's own understanding of ethics is to be found in his *Thus Spake Zarathustra* – with the subtitle: "A Book for Everyone and No One." This work he considered to be his masterpiece. More poetry than philosophical narrative, there is, as Barrett puts it, "Perhaps no other book [that] contains such a steady procession of images, symbols, and visions straight out of the unconscious."¹⁷ Nevertheless, and despite Nietzsche's recognizably pagan outlook, he conveys in this work what at times amounts more to a gnostic than a pagan philosophy.¹⁸ This is a theme that runs throughout *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, and, within the gamut of pagan possibility, it conveys a lonely heroic humanism rather than a convivial and hedonistic form of paganism. Nietzsche's hero, his

¹⁶In other words, from the human perspective, as the absolutely transcendent, the Abrahamic 'God' is beyond the empirical and constitutes an ultimate abstraction, but the Abrahamic tradition personalizes this ultimate abstraction and renders it anthropomorphic and, despite the Genesis reversal, is essentially creating (or transforming) 'God' in (or into) man's image.

¹⁷Barrett (1958: 187).

¹⁸For example, Zarathustra complains to the disillusioned youth that sensual pleasures are simply the shameful recourse open to the hero *manqué*: "The Tree on the Hill," *Thus Spake Zarathustra* 8 (Common u.d. [1962]: 44). Nevertheless, in "Voluntary Death" (Section 21; p. 77), Zarathustra advises that it is immaturity that is the cause of youthful hatred of humanity and the earth. In maturity, there is less of melancholic youth and more of the understanding child. Consequently, Zarathustra/Nietzsche counsels suicide if and when the time is right for it – but not as a rejection of humanity and the earth but as an affirmation of one's virtuous and spiritual love for them. Nietzsche's downward progression itself is presented as spirit to man to populace in "Reading and Writing," *Thus Spake Zarathustra* 7 (Common u.d. [1962]: 39). But in contrast, Nietzsche's Zarathustra also proclaims that the heavenly world is an invention of those who despise both body and earth (3 [30]).

As a caveat, I wish to point out that I am conceiving a distinction between paganism and gnosticism *even though* the contemporary Western pagan movement is a bricolage that includes what the sociologist could consider gnostic/theosophical elements along with what we might then term 'green' or 'deep' pagan essentials. In my, hopefully forthcoming, manuscript on Pagan Mysticism, I distinguish between 'gnostic paganism' and 'pagan paganism'.

superman, is preferably abstemious, puritanical and Spartan. The masses, the herd, the superfluous many-too-many, are those who do not “despise pleasant things, and the effeminate couch.”¹⁹

Nevertheless, as a whole, the philosophy expressed in *Zarathustra* is ambivalent with regard to gnostic-pagan distinctions. In “The Preachers of Death,” the section that immediately follows Zarathustra’s discourse with the disillusioned youth, the sage, in no uncertain terms, proclaims that those who pursue renunciation and consider lust, birth and possessions as negatives are spiritually consumptive – people who are at heart opposed to life itself. Instead, they long for death and advocate the same to others. This condemnation on Nietzsche’s part is pagan, and, throughout much of *Zarathustra*, he advocates the affirmation of life rather than its denial. In fact, he concludes the first part of *Zarathustra*, with the section on “The Bestowing Virtue.” Here we find generosity identified as the highest virtue – a generosity that becomes possible through accumulation of treasure, wealth and everything of value. Zarathustra considers such accretion to be healthy and holy when it is not done by the person for himself/herself but through an unquenchable wish to give to others.

In all of Zarathustra’s advice, there is the consistent chord of remaining true to the earth – of being practical and of finding a human meaning within the earth herself. In the heroic quest of Nietzsche, humanity must always endeavor to surpass herself. Nevertheless, much of Nietzsche’s prediction of the ‘overperson’ carries a biblical and messianic thrust.²⁰ When Zarathustra departs from his disciples, he proclaims to them that because they have chosen themselves rather than earth-denying virtues, they will engender a ‘chosen peoples’ and from these the ‘superman’ will emerge.

The ‘superman’/‘overman’ is among the more controversial of Nietzschean concepts. The ‘chosen people’ idea – along with that of the messiah or super-hero – can have and has acquired unpleasant connotations of a pure Aryan race with its Führer.²¹ But at the same time, it is important to note that Nietzsche loathed the state.²² Only beyond the borders of the political unit begins that which is not superfluous. It is here where the overperson’s rainbow and bridges are to be found. In the evolutionary transformation of animal to humanity and humanity’s will to surpass even that which humanity is, it is the overperson that marks what is to follow.

¹⁹“The Bestowing Virtue,” *Thus Spake Zarathustra* 22.1 (Common u.d. [1962]: 80). However, in “The Pitiful” 25 (94), Nietzsche makes the claim that our original sin is humanity’s inability to enjoy, and, later, in “The Three Evil Things” 54.2 (209), voluptuousness is identified as innocence and freedom, “the garden-happiness of the earth” to those whose hearts are free. See also 56.13 (228).

²⁰See also *The Genealogy of Morals* 2.24 (Golffing 1956: 229f) in which Nietzsche proclaims that the “true Redeemer” will appear in the future.

²¹Ibid. 3.26 (294) in which Nietzsche declares his impatience with anti-Semitism and those “Christian-Aryan worthies” who employ the cheapest of propaganda’s tricks, namely, a moral attitude, in order to stir up racist attitudes.

²²In “The New Idol,” he denounces the state as the “coldest of all cold monsters . . . , [that] whatever it saith it lieth; and whatever it hath it hath stolen . . . the state, where the slow suicide of all – is called ‘life’”: *Thus Spake Zarathustra* 11 (Common u.d. [1962]: 49, 51).

And with the birth of the overperson at the great noontide of the future, humanity is to achieve an atheistic freedom expressed in the wish: “*Dead are all the Gods: now do we desire the Superman to live.*”²³

But the ambiguity of the overperson is such that he/she may be the ‘superior person’ of Confucianism or the lonely hero of Nietzsche who stands apart and separate from the rabble of the masses. Over and over again, Nietzsche would appear to have Jesus Christ in mind as the exemplar of the overperson *par excellence* – except for his not having remained in the wilderness where he might have learned to live, love the earth and laugh.²⁴ From a contemporary pagan perspective, Nietzsche’s overperson only makes sense as collective humanity. This would be a collective humanity that is a self-reflective and self-conscious entity – with the earth-loving and humanity-cherishing pagan both its forerunner and ‘chosen peoples’. In the hermeneutical freedom for a pagan of today, Nietzsche’s philosophy may be interpreted or reinterpreted as an important contribution toward an earth-based collective humanism – one in which, through virtue, the body is ‘elevated’ and enraptured with spirit “so that it becometh creator, and valuer, and lover, and everything’s benefactor.”²⁵

Bertrand Russell contends that Nietzsche “despises universal love,” that Nietzsche’s is an ethic that has its basis “in a complete absence of sympathy.”²⁶ But it is also possible to understand Nietzsche’s thrust as directed not to only the few, the supposedly superior aristocrat, and against the masses, but as an appeal to what he feels humanity has the potential to become. His heroic humanism is opposed to whatever retards mankind, and his condemnation of vulgar superstition is an expression of his wish for humans to be no longer dependent on psychological crutches or escapist fantasy. Nietzsche’s ‘overperson’ represents the transformation of the worst characteristics into the most admirable and noble. He refuses to pander to the maudlin and obsequious and exalts the military conqueror not because of any craving for war or imperial power, but because he champions the victorious over the emotionally subdued and spiritually defeated. Nietzsche daringly suggests and encourages the potentially best in humankind – one that is liberated from

²³Ibid. 22.3 (83). Both the chosen people and the overperson as people of knowledge possess the capacity not only to love their enemies but as well to hate their friends (82).

²⁴Nietzsche’s Zarathustra rejects Christian piety and, rather than becoming like children to enter the kingdom of heaven, proclaims, “But we do not want to enter the kingdom of heaven: we have become men, – so we want the kingdom of earth” (“The Ass-Festival,” *Thus Spake Zarathustra* 78.2 [Common 1962: 355]). See also 21 (77), 35 (127), & 73.15f (328f). For Nietzsche’s thoughts on Christianity, see especially 26 (98f), 55 (217), 56.12 (227), 57.2 (244f), 66 (290f), 67 (296f) & 69 (307).

²⁵*Thus Spake Zarathustra* 22.2 (Common u.d. [1962]: 80).

²⁶Russell (1961: 738f).

fears, cowardliness, hypocrisy, illusion and deceit, and in his vision of full human emancipation, he risks the claim that with the emergence of the ‘overperson’, no longer will we have need for even the gods.²⁷

Between Nietzsche and Aristotle, we have two ends of the ethical spectrum of pagan possibility. Whereas the Greek philosopher is concerned with a doctrine of the mean for the people at large – an ethic for the middle class, Nietzsche is looking instead to the margins of society, to the non-conformist, to the exception. Both positions can be – and often are – fully pagan. Aristotle is closer to folk needs, concerns and aspirations. Much of both indigenous paganism and contemporary Western paganism centers on the community and community interests such as the raising of children and general health and pleasures. Aristotle focuses on happiness or the *eudaimonia* of being under the protection of a benign spirit. His interests are predominantly those of the ordinary person, the commoner, and his person of virtue is perhaps closest to the ‘superior man’ of Confucianism as well as Aldo Leopold’s “plain members and citizens of the biotic community.”²⁸

Nietzsche’s focus, instead, is on the ‘superman’ – the person who stands outside the norms of society, the person who dares to be different, the artist and the shaman who seek personal, spiritual and social change. Nietzsche is interested in where society is or should be heading – not so much, as is Aristotle, in how society is. His *Zarathustra* reads virtually as a shaman’s manifesto – apart from its poetic and narrative format. Here, we are confronting the metaphysics and ethics of human aspiration and transformation, and not the simple and pleasant life that is the quest of the ordinary citizen, the bulk of society. With his stress on an extreme individualism, Nietzsche’s Zarathustra condemns the masses, the ‘many-too-many’, as simply the ‘rabble’.²⁹ But if this condemnation sounds elitist and cruelly unsympathetic, it is only because Nietzsche is committed foremost to life – a life that cannot be without change. Otherwise, for him, life is pointless without a heroic endeavor that reaches out and past the abyss that would otherwise engulf it. Between them, Nietzsche and Aristotle encompass the full range of possibility that allows both kinds of paganism: a paganism of the people that is organic, centered, uncomplicated and gently affirmative, and a paganism that is heroic, often lonely and at home in the margins of existence. Nietzsche’s great rant and rejection is directed against mediocrity in all its forms.

²⁷Thus Spake Zarathustra 22.3 & 24 (Common u.d. [1962]: 83 & 90–3).

²⁸Leopold (1970: 204).

²⁹Masquerading as the ‘good and just’, Nietzsche lambasts the non-imagination of the ordinary who “So alien are ye in your souls to what is great, that to you the Superman would be *frightful* in his goodness!”: Thus Spake Zarathustra 43 (Common u.d. [1962]: 158). Zarathustra/Nietzsche understands that greatness is perceived by vain humanity as the devil himself/itself. Moreover, as Nietzsche has Zarathustra proclaim, he is a law only for himself and not for everyone (72 [319]). For the small-mindedness of the common people, see also 49.2 (185–8), 52.1 (199), 53 (205), 54.2 (212), 56.21 (234), 73.8f (324), etc. In “Talk with the Kings” 63.1 (272), the peasant is exalted over the hodgepodge populace. Today’s leaders are identified as the overperson’s greatest danger 73.3 (321). Moreover, the populace has an evil eye for the earth (73.16 [329]).

In contrast to obedience (that Nietzsche understands as the instinct of the herd), Nietzsche's focus is on the art of commanding.³⁰ For this, it is necessary to have an aristocracy of the best philosophers, the best thinkers, comprising those who have learned to command themselves, to surpass themselves, and to become magnanimous rulers out of their own fullness. As Nietzsche insists, the noble human being does indeed come to the aid of the unfortunate – not through pity but through a superfluity of power. Consequently, Nietzsche strenuously denies that there can be one morality for everyone, and the utilitarian 'greatest good for the greatest number' is for him an anathema. The 'general welfare', as he sees it, is not a goal or an ideal but an emetic.³¹ Different moralities are necessary to produce superior people – ones capable of ruling and capable of creating and excelling. Having an 'aristocracy' of more complete human beings (both physically and psychically) becomes vital because it alone has the capacity for perspective or, as Nietzsche phrases it, to look down from above rather than seeing things only from below. Nevertheless, the aristocrat or ideal scholar is never the end but only an instrument toward the justification of the rest of existence.³² It is such a person who determines the "Wherefore and Wither of mankind."³³

Parting from Nietzsche

Like Aristotle, Nietzsche holds that democracy is a mistake. Both see it as allowing the worst rather than the best to prevail. But whereas Aristotle advocates the golden mean for the populace and the good life, Nietzsche favors the suffering individual and the value-determining aristocracy. To be sure, community allegiance, like democracy, functionally works not for such situations as the super-state but rather within the indigenous tribe, the Greek *polis*, and the local entities that operate independently – essentially as anarchical achievements. For Nietzsche, the democratization of Europe will increasingly produce the slave-type, but simultaneously and ironically also the breeding of tyrants. And, of course, it is exactly the spiritual tyrant that Nietzsche argues we want to produce.³⁴ He refers to "the continual 'self-overcoming of man' . . . in a supra-moral sense."³⁵

³⁰*Beyond Good and Evil* 199 (Hollingdale 1973: 120).

³¹*Ibid.* 228 (158).

³²*Beyond Good and Evil* 207 (Hollingdale 1973: 134f).

³³*Ibid.* 211 (142). It is important in understanding Nietzsche that he is not referring to an aristocracy as constituting the highest social class of a society – the traditional understanding of the term – but as those people within a society who are the most courageously innovative. See further, note 42 below.

³⁴*Beyond Good and Evil* 242 (Hollingdale 1973: 173).

³⁵*Ibid.* 257 (192).

At bottom, however, what Nietzsche is really saying is that one must have the power of personal convictions. If one is a member of the herd, then he or she must have the courage and will to affirm it. But to the degree that we feel ourselves unsupportive of the herd, we must be honest and willing to distinguish ourselves from it as individuals. Nietzsche is certainly correct that we need to develop – if not ‘breed’ – real leadership. This comes down to the question of leaders possessing both the will to power (*der Wille zur Macht*) and non-dissemblance. As is clear for most of the world today, there is little if any *bona fide* direction and even less any competent and imaginative people who can direct it.

While much of Nietzsche’s descriptions of the aristocracy are questionable, he nonetheless presents a challenge to the moral smugness and hypocrisy that is characteristic of our current times. Durant, in fact, includes a citation from Georg Simmel, namely, Nietzsche “introduced a value hitherto practically unknown in the realm of ethics – namely, aristocracy.”³⁶ But part of the problem with Nietzsche’s aristocracy is the allegation of eugenics and racism. As he phrases it, the European problem of his day and ours rests on “the breeding of a new ruling caste for Europe.”³⁷ He does indeed see racial hybridization as productive of degeneracy and sickness in the ‘freedom of the will’.³⁸ But at the same time, Nietzsche recognizes that a ‘people’ itself arises whenever humans live together for a substantial duration under conditions of similarity concerning climate, soil, danger, necessities or work. Rather than biology or race, the group consciousness develops through mutual understanding.³⁹ Nietzsche’s quest for the aristocrat or overperson is, instead, for a supra-national nomad who possesses the maximum art and power for adaptation. It seems unlikely that he ever had in mind the notions of ‘Aryan purity’ and ethnic cleansing that became the holocaustic legacy of the Second World War.

While much of Nietzsche is ‘paganic’, not all is – or at least is expressive of only particular types of paganism and not paganism as an overall generic. Where we begin to depart from Nietzsche is on two principle counts: that which relates to the herd and that which relates to pleasure. First, the herd need not be

³⁶Durant (1953: 445). And, as Solomon and Higgins (2000: 21) explain, what Nietzsche means by nobility is not privileged birth but people who are distinguished by “style and refinement.” As Cameron (2002: 2) puts forward, Nietzsche’s “foremost ethical concern [is] the production of exemplary individuals.”

³⁷*Beyond Good and Evil* 253 (Hollingdale 1973: 183). See also 213 (145f), but note that among the decisive things behind the right to philosophy – namely, one’s origin, ancestors and ‘blood’, the last is placed in inverted commas.

³⁸Ibid. 208 (136f). The semi-barbarism of Europe has been unleashed, according to Nietzsche, by the democratic mingling of classes and races: *Beyond Good and Evil* 224 (Hollingdale 1973: 152); see also 261 (199). He deplores the resultant plebian type that is characterized by intemperance, jealousy and ungracious and persistently tiresome self-expression: *ibid.* 264 (203).

³⁹*Beyond Good and Evil* 268 (Hollingdale 1973: 205). Nevertheless, in his quest for “the voice for the soul of Europe” rather than merely a national affair (*ibid.* 245 [178]), Nietzsche would have rejected the Third Reich as much as he opposed the Bismarckian Reich of his own day which he considered “destructive of what was best in Germany and [demanding] of the Germans that which they were least fitted for”: Hollingdale (1973: 234n241).

disparaged as totally as Nietzsche does. Following the inner dynamics as delineated by complexity or chaos theory, the process that makes the herd a herd is both magical and inexplicable – one in which the whole, through spontaneous self-organization, becomes something more than simply the sum of its parts. But because Nietzsche's interest is in the individual and sorely needed leaders, ones who are emancipated from bourgeois conformity and petty constrictions of supposed morality, the masses, the many-too-many, become the mire and mud of Nietzsche's disgust. However, despite his condemnation of Platonic escapism, Nietzsche still speaks vertically – in terms of higher laws, higher conscience, higher viewpoints and so forth. From a pagan perspective, though, Nietzsche's love of earth is not complete. While mountain peaks are lovely, few can live on them. Their space is limited, and they are without sustainable resources. But along with the mud, muck and filth of the planet, there are also valleys and meadows, rivers and lakes, forests and oceans. The pagan, in contrast to Nietzsche, chooses to celebrate the earthly in all her variations. She/he deals with what there is and attempts to make the best of it. A pagan may love the ideal of an ideal or utopian world – perhaps even hope for it, but this always remains a wishful motivation rather than an inviolate citadel refuge of escape and fantasy. It is an ideal that is not predicated on a supposedly religious stance that deprecates the here-and-now of the terrestrial but one that works with it and, when possible, endeavors to improve it.

Secondly, focusing more specifically on contemporary Western paganism – though generic paganism follows the same general path, the legacy of the counter-culture is one that is unequivocally hedonistic.⁴⁰ Whether our pleasures are middle class or singularly voluptuous, we affirm happiness as a legitimate goal – whether it be a gregarious delight or the private bliss of the solitary. Freed from Abrahamic pressures of verticality, there is nothing 'higher' that we are constrained to reach. Beauty and sublimity are our aims, and the contentment, joy or ecstasy in these is pleasure – a pleasure that pagans envision and understand as valid, celebratory and, above all, aesthetically worthwhile. Moreover, it is that which is to be found as much in the depths as in the heights, and as much around us as within.

Nietzsche's inconsistency is that at one point his aristocrat is the sufferer, the greatest of sufferers, but at another point the brave, optimistic, beautiful and happy one. One wonders, however, whether it is possible to have it both ways. In addition, if humanity has the power, the will-to-power, the power-to-will, why not direct this toward an aesthetic best – a best that includes everyone? Why cannot the aesthetic best include compassion even if and when it is not constrained by it? Why cannot we have – or at least aim for – a utopian world that has a place for both diversity and

⁴⁰In *Beyond Good and Evil* 225 (Hollingdale 1973: 154f), Nietzsche specifies hedonism, utilitarianism, eudaimonism and pessimism as derisory from the perspective of creative abilities or the conscientious artist.

number? In the end, it must be taken as insult – the herd accusation of Nietzsche’s – and refuted.⁴¹ Nietzsche could not see humanity’s collective dream that allows space for one and all.

The group is not only organized by command and obedience but may be something much more spontaneous and naturally flowing. While Nietzsche may be spot-on accurate in delineating the foibles, lies, deceits and weaknesses of the mob, he fails to register that even the herd is composed of individuals, that everyone has at least the potential to make a worthwhile contribution, that moral value can accrue to anyone and everyone. And especially within paganism, there are outsiders as well as insiders – the wanderer and the community participant. As we see with any bona fide shaman and his or her host community, both mainstream paganism and the Nietzschean individualist need each other. Symbiosis is an organic part of nature’s naturing process, and with a human community that possesses future viability both the vernacular and the spiritual elite of nobility have complimentary functions to play out together. The reality is much less black-and-white than Nietzsche either sees it or wishes it to be.

In a sense, it is my argument that Nietzsche is speaking about ideal-types – in this case, the ideal-types of slave-morality and master-morality. But what he conjures through his evocation of aristocracy is a cult of the best, and, as such, the development of a mental state of sacredness. This he posits over and against the non-imagination of ordinary, daily life. Nietzsche is in love with the special, the unique, the exceptionally different. And from this love, he has named and formed a life-affirming spiritual consciousness, namely, what he calls the ‘aristocracy’.⁴²

⁴¹Questioning whether Nietzsche understood humans as animals, Bron Taylor asks what is wrong with a herd? “Herd animals increase their survival by being herd animals.” (Personal communication 8 March 2014).

⁴²It is, however, important to differentiate Nietzsche’s aristocracy from the priestly. Although he recognizes the religious specialist – especially the professional religious specialist – as an outgrowth of the aristocracy, he understands when, where and how the former ceases in time to be part of the latter. Nietzsche is clear about the divide between the priesthood and the aristocracy. While some contemporary Western pagans assume the title and role of priests, as a rule they do not function in a proverbially priestly sense. They are instead playing with and challenging a long-standing ‘war’ throughout Indo-European culture, if not others as well, between the nobles and the brahmins, between the aristocracy and the priesthood. As is everyone, pagans are part of Nietzsche’s triad between the heroic type, the ecclesiastical type and the people at large. While this last has opted for a route to power through commerce, it is in itself one more tyranny of the mob and by the mob. The greatest horror for Nietzsche was the prospect of an alliance between non-spiritual spiritualists (his false spiritual-ethical pretenders) and the masses. This can and does occur under capitalistic guises but no less under socialist ones as well. For Nietzsche, the sole product of Marxism is the “autonomous herd” (Hollingdale 1973: 202 [125]). In either case, whether capitalist or communist, the mob has dominated – either on its own or through the support of a clergy. For much of the world, in fact, Christianity has become irrevocably influential through competing systems for power – the totalitarian one-world-government approach as expressed and exemplified by the Roman Catholic Church (the largest single ecclesiastical organization globally) or the ruse of internal fission and ‘pretend’ war into a multitude of quasi-competing components or parts. Either way, Christianity as an ethos has managed to dominate the world.

But while Nietzsche's aristocracy is a valid and vital concept if not also a much-needed reality, we have moved historically beyond a 'purist' times into an irretrievably cosmopolitan state of affairs. Nobility is no longer a prerogative of class let alone of ethnicity or literacy. Indeed, for Nietzsche, it is to be found today among the "lower orders and especially among the peasants."⁴³ But what he cannot fathom behind the aristocracy, regardless of whatever strata of society in which it is to be found, is what many pagans celebrate as the telluric *mater*, the earth mother, mother nature – one in whom the world and nature are understood as loving expressions of a compassionate and maternal goddess. What is absent from Nietzsche and explains much of the shortcomings of his philosophy is a generous appreciation of the feminine.⁴⁴ Nietzsche is still too much a part of a traditional paradigm to be able to understand women as anything but caricatures and secondary but beguiling helpmates. But without the softening touch of the feminine – something Nietzsche is all too quick to condemn as herd mentality, Nietzsche has been unable to connect with the fullness of a sacred and spiritual world as commensurate, even possible, in place of a degradation of the entire human miracle that leads to gratuitous and greed-inspired artificialities, callous maiming and wasteful destruction.

Nietzsche also remains ambivalent with regard to the pursuit of pleasure. If his noble ones are good, beautiful and happy,⁴⁵ then the great suffering they must endure seems out-of-place. Nietzsche's position on Stoicism likewise seems to be ambivalent,⁴⁶ but as we suggested earlier, the stoic attitude toward pain and difficulty appears to be the reasonable course when there are no immediate alternatives. Apart from coping with distress when it is inevitable, however, those who are good, beautiful and noble would be fools not to pursue happiness as much as it is available and commensurate with the range of possibilities before one. The superior person is a brave person, and it takes the self-sufficient audacity of such a person to embrace pleasure as a good without feeling shame or guilt for having done so. To follow Nietzsche to the fuller implications of what he is suggesting, the hedonic quest is the pinnacle of courageous affirmation. In Nietzsche's understanding, the herd mentality is poisoned by rancor and jealousy to such a degree that it is unable to indulge in and enjoy sensual pleasures. This is precisely the counterpart of his aristocrat who is instead emancipated from the need for petty revenge and, hence, is not blocked against the bliss of gratification. Consequently, it may be seen to be a pagan position that draws Nietzsche to a logical conclusion – one that affirms pleasure as a legitimate goal and means for honoring the gods for the gifts they are credited for having given. Happiness and delight are the prerogatives of the emancipated – ones that remain beyond the tenable grasp of

⁴³*Beyond Good and Evil* 263 (Hollingdale 1973: 203).

⁴⁴For Nietzsche's comments on 'woman as such', see in particular *Beyond Good and Evil* 84, 145, 147, 232–239 & 261, although, in 231, he makes clear "these are only – my truths" (Hollingdale 1973: 163).

⁴⁵*The Genealogy of Morals* 1.10 (Golfing 1956: 171).

⁴⁶In *Beyond Good and Evil*, compare 9 & 198 with 44, 188 & 227.

the small-minded with their ascetic ideal.⁴⁷ From a pagan perspective, not to enjoy the pleasures of the world and life is a fundamental disrespect and mistaken non-appreciation. It runs counter to the entire pagan *raison d'être*.

Rehabilitating Nietzsche

Consequently, much of Nietzsche requires modification in varying degrees for it to fit with – or fulfill – its underlying pagan potential. The bearers of his ‘aristocratic consciousness’ in today’s world are primarily pagan thinkers and practitioners who, despite their many contrasting hues, endorse a theological position that is neither Abrahamic or dharmic. They dare to treasure sensuality and make no apologies for it. And, whether they are bourgeois members of society or independent outsiders, they still seek primarily to think for themselves. In fact, the acceptance of this mandate of self-sufficiency and independence of thought and practice, is – at least in the West – a virtual requirement for assuming a pagan identity. With Christianity and Buddhism specifically in mind, Nietzsche is nevertheless more broadly thinking of Abrahamic and dharmic religion in general when he prognoses the future redeemer, the “anti-Christ and anti-nihilist, conqueror of both God and Unbeing.”⁴⁸ But what the philosopher appears at heart to be invoking is not a singular hero-messiah who will arrive in anything like a Second Coming but the pagan-sensitive hero that lies dormant within each and every one of us. The redeemer is every individual and is within every individual. She or he is the pagan soul that belongs to each of us, and it is this pagan soul that Nietzsche appeals to and longs to see awaken and resume its aristocratic heritage and rightful position as the determiner of values. For him, the aristocratic free spirits are in themselves a “revaluation of all values.”⁴⁹ Moreover, as social groups become increasingly functionally integrated through their inclusion of awakened, evolving and magnanimously noble spirits, “they become higher-level organisms in their own right.” Further to this, David Wilson sees evolution continuing from “groups *of* organisms to groups *as* organisms,” and he adds, “the fact that most of the recent evolution is cultural rather than genetic does not change

⁴⁷For the self-inflicted cruelty of the ‘ascetic ideal’ with its slogans of poverty, humility and chastity and its hatred of sensuality, see in particular Nietzsche’s Third Essay (“What Do Ascetic Ideals Mean?”) in *The Genealogy of Morals*. Overall, Nietzsche understands “the use of the ascetic ideal as a safety valve for pent-up emotions” (3.20 [Golffing 1956: 276]). In its most radical form, it constitutes the belief in truth as an ‘absolute value’, and Nietzsche counter-cites the innermost maxim of the Society of Assassins, namely, “Nothing is true; everything is permitted.” He concludes that the ascetic ideal in all its disguised and undisguised forms signifies a “will to nothingness, a revulsion from life, a rebellion against the principle conditions of living” (3.28 [299]).

⁴⁸*The Genealogy of Morals* 2.24 (Golffing 1956: 229f).

⁴⁹*The Anti-Christ* 13 (Hollingdale 1968: 135).

the fundamentals.”⁵⁰ Nietzsche’s ‘overman’, when able to function viably in an evolving corporate unit, is one who has the adaptive self-restraint to favor the furtherance of shared communal goals – including those that are advantageously ecological such as the stewardship of nature and the community’s environment.

Of course, whether Nietzsche would have ever agreed with me in my interpretation or re-interpretation of him is doubtful or at least uncertain. As Michael Tanner discerns in Nietzsche’s rejection of the Utilitarians, the idea of equality – especially any egalitarian distribution of happiness – is for him not only absurd and unnatural but is an infringement on any individual, a lessening of the happiness any particular person might possess.⁵¹ Christianity becomes seen as a morality of taming that opposes a morality of breeding: it is “the *anti-Aryan* religion *par excellence*.”⁵² For Nietzsche, it is a blasphemous mutiny against life itself – one that seeks not a spiritualization of the passions but their eradication.⁵³ Even Kant he considers to be a ‘cunning’ Christian let alone the “most deformed conceptual cripple there has ever been”⁵⁴ who divides the world likewise into ‘real’ and ‘apparent’ in which the former is given the characteristics of nothingness. Christianity’s morality of improvement is labeled an illness inasmuch as it employs rational consciousness against the instincts – a formula for decadence.⁵⁵

Certainly, as harsh, devastating and obliterating Nietzsche’s attacks on Christian metaphysics and ethics are, there is much for the pagan and secular thinker to countenance in them. The idea of feeling guilt because of advantage is, according to Nietzsche, among the worst legacies of Christianity. However, in his attack on the masses, the general populace, what he did not or would not or could not recognize is that humanity is a social people. We are a human organization with all its inherent organizational weaknesses and dangers but foremost an association – something more than simply the aggregate of our individual and separate parts. And our world of today, despite the striking similarities one finds between it and the world of his day against which Nietzsche rants, is yet a different one from Nietzsche’s. Between the extremes of Christianity’s herd intimidation and concomitant morality

⁵⁰David Sloan Wilson in Taylor (2005: 628 – author’s italics).

⁵¹Hollingdale (1968: 10). See also, *Beyond Good and Evil* 228 (Hollingdale 1973: 158): “the demand for *one* morality for all is detrimental to precisely the higher men.”

⁵²*Ibid.* *Twilight of the Idols*, “The ‘Improvers’ of Mankind” 4 (page 69).

⁵³In *Twilight of the Idols*, “Expeditions of an Untimely Man” 5 (Hollingdale 1968: 80f), Nietzsche contends that Christian morality falls with the fall of Christian theology. Morality in Christianity is transcendental in origin and is based on the command of God – presupposing that the human being cannot determine or know what is good and evil without God. Moreover, Christianity is “an antithetical condition, a specific anti-artisticity of instinct – a mode of being which impoverishes and attenuates things and makes them consumptive” (*Ibid.* 9 [83]). For Nietzsche, a Christian artist is an oxymoron.

⁵⁴*Twilight of the Idols*, “What the Germans Lack” 7 (Hollingdale 1968: 77).

⁵⁵Note David Sloan Wilson’s comment that “Rational thought is not the gold standard against which all other modes of thought must be judged” (in Taylor 2005: 628). For him, the gold standard is adaption.

and Nietzsche's usurping aristocracy and elitist morality, a more middle way is required. We must learn to balance such extremes – honoring each and giving them their due but then moving on and forward between them. And that for the most part is how our world actually is and operates. People in their daily lives are much less circumscribed by Christian belief today than perhaps in Nietzsche's time – although, certainly, the influence of Christian moral culture is, as Nietzsche stresses, pervasive and virtually ingrained. While Nietzsche calls for Christianity to be 'abolished', a more feasible solution is careful exposure to what its hidden assumptions and agenda are. In this educational process and uncovering, we ought to feel no less intimidated by Nietzsche than we ought by the Church. While we have to allow for Nietzsche, and, now as well, we must allow for the Church, in a pagan world of today, there is room for everyone, and when there is not, the pagan onus is to seek growth toward the possibility for accommodation – while still affirming all the positive ideals of Nietzsche's.⁵⁶ But in the century or more since his death, our vision has become greater and wider; we have additional perspectives that Nietzsche did not have.

In Nietzsche's attack on all anti-worldly religion, Buddhism is specifically included along with Christianity.⁵⁷ In the mental discipline that is stressed for the attainment of nirvana, it would appear that the Buddhist seeks to train himself/herself to have exactly the thoughts he or she wants – whether this is 'no thought' or a particular *idée fixe* focus. The Buddhist argument is that one can attain the nihilistic state only by wanting nothing, but a pagan might ask what if we were able to trans-direct that same energy into re-setting our minds not only to want but to achieve *what* we want? This is a stance of affirmation and non-intimidation. A pagan's agreement is with this world. Essentially, the Christian is making a contract with his vision of the afterlife. Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, etc. are doing the same, each in their own way and understanding. While the 'other side' may be important for pagans, theirs is much more simply a spirituality about being rather than a religion as such or the making of contracts with something other than the here-and-now.

Each of the pagan gods embodies some vice or virtue – depending on how one looks at it. For instance, the Roman Ops, the goddess of abundance, could be conceived today as having Naples, Florida – the community with the highest per capita income in the United States – as one of her capital residences. The question for any pagan is where do we find the virtue to counterbalance whatever vice (such as luxurious extravagance) Ops may represent? Among Nietzsche's aristocracy, the highest virtue is abundance because, out of abundance or plenty, one is most naturally generous and magnanimous.⁵⁸ Generosity is a pagan virtue – one not exclusive to paganism of course, but still a pagan virtue par excellence.

⁵⁶Cameron (2002: 4) examines love of one's fate (*amor fati*), the eternal return, giving *style* to one's character, and becoming what one is as the examples of Nietzsche's positive/affirmative ideals.

⁵⁷See *The Anti-Christ* 20–23 & 42 (Hollingdale 1968: 141–5, 166).

⁵⁸*Thus Spake Zarathustra* 22.1 (Common u.d. [1962]: 78f).

Nevertheless, as Nietzsche continually drives home, good and evil require each other for their very being, for they alone allow the distance between the noble and the ordinary to emerge. All the same, he makes the daring claim that to discover ‘untruth’ as the foundation to life is to renounce traditional value-sentiments and locate the wished for realm ‘beyond good and evil’.⁵⁹ Pagan gods are ‘beyond good and evil’, and in paganism, humanity’s place is understood as among the gods. As Nietzsche reveals, the ultimate issue is not morality but aesthetics. And the place that is ‘beyond good and evil’ is this-world, the world of nature. Man is a natural animal but no less one of the gods – not in the sense of Abrahamic hubristic projection but in that of the special sacredness contingent upon animistic being.

Aristocracy and Idolatry

This section is focused on both aristocracy and idolatry – not because there is any particular connection between them, but simply because these are two issues that come to the heart of interfacing Nietzsche with paganism. Doubtlessly for Nietzsche, the notion of prostrate catharsis before an idol such as is typical within Hindu *pūjā* would be ludicrous and totally incommensurate with his understanding of the noble aristocrat. Nietzsche deplores cultic worship and sees it as belonging to the herd, the collection of dwarfed, intimidated and frightened people who possess no will to power, will to life, no distinctive sense of honor, but are instead expressions of degenerative decadence. Such behavior for him is cowardly and little more than fain whimpering.⁶⁰ Devotional worship is only for superstitious old women and for children.⁶¹

Nevertheless, the dynamics of idolatry may be discerned within Nietzsche’s writings even if the specifics of such are not intended. In his work *Twilight of the Idols*, the philosopher employs the term ‘idol’ to refer to empty falsities against which he employs a hammer in the sense of a tuning fork to sound out the hollowness of which the idols consist.⁶² The metaphor of hammer also suggests the ancient Abrahamic practice of smashing idols, but Nietzsche sees his idols as eternal, misdirected and entrenched beliefs – recognizing not only that their believers do not consider them to be idols at all but also that they cannot be destroyed – at least easily.⁶³ Nietzsche does not expect to annihilate such idols with

⁵⁹*Beyond Good and Evil* 4 (Hollingdale 1973: 36).

⁶⁰*Thus Spake Zarathustra* 49.3 (Common u.d. [1962]: 188f).

⁶¹*Ibid.* 77.2 (350). See further 78.2 (355). In “The Apostates” 52.2 (200), Zarathustra condemns religious congregations: “wherever there are closets there are new devotees therein, and the atmosphere of devotees.”

⁶²*Twilight of the Idols*, “Foreword” (Hollingdale 1968: 31f).

⁶³Among these, Nietzsche singles out Socrates’ equation of reason, virtue and happiness, the anti-corporality of what Nietzsche calls the rational ‘monotono-theism’ of grave-digging philosophy,

his hammer but merely to expose them. As embedded errors of belief and practice, Nietzsche's idols are what the complexity theorist of today refers to as 'lock-ins'. Nietzsche allows that the real idols of the ancient world no longer exist. Instead we have puffed-up 'conceptual idols'. In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche tells us that by 'idol', he means 'ideal'.⁶⁴

Nevertheless, there is an undercurrent detectable within Nietzsche's writings that is compatible with – even expressive of – paganism. Referring to his preferred heroic writer Goethe and the poet's Renaissance instincts that he used to overcome the prevailing Romantic idealism or escapism of his own time, Nietzsche identifies what he calls Goethe's nature-idolatry.⁶⁵ But while Nietzsche sees 'untruth' as the condition for life, in paganism by contrast, nature, the body, the perpetual expansion of nature and, even, the perpetual contraction of nature are instead the foundational 'truths' of actuality. It is here where paganism diverges from Nietzsche and his ungenerous condemnation of human compassion as a collective concern. A pagan 'aristocrat' need not be under any of the Christian illusions and decadent resentments that Nietzsche deplors but can still have a sacred concern for humanity that is not simply an other-world imperative.⁶⁶ Concern, compassion and response to others in need may, in fact, be a fundamental human instinct – recovery and championing of the instincts being the very objective in Nietzsche's deconstruction of Christianity. A 'noble' pagan also need not be hungry, fierce and lonesome, "redeemed from deities and adorations," but can be comfortable in the oasis where "there are also idols."⁶⁷

All the same, even Nietzsche himself understands the resurgence of pagan idolatry. His Zarathustra ridicules the folly of destroying an idol. To the iconoclast and "o'erthrowers of statues," the sage says that out of the "mud of your contempt," the statute's "life and living beauty grow again."⁶⁸ Moreover, in speaking of the unadulterated use of the will, Zarathustra determines that beauty as "an image may not remain merely an image."⁶⁹ He here suggests the living animation and presence the idol becomes for a divinely intoxicated pagan. And Nietzsche himself is not far

the insistence that true worth is *a priori* and *causa sui*, the anti-nature moral spiritualization of the passions, the contention that there are moral facts of any kind, religion as love, modern 'objectivity', revenge wearing a religious mask, art produced from a state of non-intoxication, art subordinated to morality, idealizing, altruism, pity, faith with no place for skepticism, democracy, and intra-human leveling as a fundamental moral principle: *ibid. et passim*. In *Thus Spake Zarathustra* 11, the state itself is acknowledged as "The New Idol." He denounces "the idolatry of the superfluous" (Common 1962: 51).

⁶⁴*Ecce Homo* "Foreword" 2 (Hollingdale 1979: 4). In the section on "Twilight of the Idols" 1 (86), the idol is "quite simply that which has hitherto been called truth."

⁶⁵*Twilight of the Idols*, "Expeditions of an Untimely Man" 49 (Hollingdale 1968: 114).

⁶⁶*The Anti-Christ* 12, (Hollingdale 1968: 135).

⁶⁷*Thus Spake Zarathustra* 30 (Common 1962: 111).

⁶⁸*Ibid.* 40 (144). Nevertheless, Zarathustra expresses his grudge against the warming "pot-bellied fire-idol": "Better even a little teeth-chattering than idol-adoration!" 50 (191). See also 78.1 (352).

⁶⁹*Thus Spake Zarathustra* 37 (Common 1962: 134).

from an understanding of cultic veneration when, in his section on “What is Noble?” he discerns the instinct of reverence toward sacred vessels, enshrined objects or holy books that we must not touch, before which we remove our shoes and that we endeavor to protect through sanctity and ritual hygiene.⁷⁰ The delight in such “nuances of reverence . . . reveals a noble origin and noble habits.”⁷¹ It is in these more rare moments, almost slips on his part, that Nietzsche discloses an appreciation of the earthy expression of pagan veneration.

Nietzsche has more to say about nature than idolatry per se. Much of *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, in fact, reads like a paean to the natural world. The prophet specifically speaks of his preference to live in forests and on mountains. However, in his attack on the Stoics whom he accuses of attempting to re-fashion nature according to their own wishes and wants, Nietzsche describes the natural world as prodigious, indifferent, purposeless, random, merciless, unjust, both fruitful and barren, and ambiguous.⁷² He concludes that life is the wish to be other than this nature. He even argues that the arbitrariness and tyranny of man’s laws are themselves what is natural,⁷³ though, at another point, he dismisses the notion of an original natural contract by which humans socially organized to protect themselves against the whims and vagaries of an untamed environment.⁷⁴ Instead, the human polity reputedly began through military conquest. But as ‘natural’ as the human laws of constraint and moral repression may be, Nietzsche still advises a ‘return to nature’ and naturalness with all their risks and terrors.⁷⁵ It is by being ‘natural’ – either living within nature or remaining true to one’s own unconditioned inclinations – that a person is able to recuperate from unnatural forms of spirituality.⁷⁶ Nietzsche’s formulated principle is that only natural morality is healthy, namely, that which is dominated by the instincts of life.⁷⁷ In this way, one is to resist the lure of super-earthly hopes and “remain true to the earth.”⁷⁸

In all, for Nietzsche, the natural is the actual. But once it was conceived as an antithetical concept to ‘God’, it became a synonym for ‘reprehensible’.⁷⁹ In Nietzsche’s wish to re-invert the historic inversion of values, he identifies the traditional dichotomy of ‘real world’ and ‘apparent world’ as one between a fabricated

⁷⁰*Beyond Good and Evil* 263 (Hollingdale 1973: 202f).

⁷¹Ibid. (202).

⁷²*Beyond Good and Evil* 9 (Hollingdale 1973: 39).

⁷³Ibid. 188 (110–112).

⁷⁴*The Genealogy of Morals* 2.17 (Golffing 1956: 219).

⁷⁵*Twilight of the Idols*, “Expeditions of an Untimely Man” 48f (Hollingdale 1968: 113f).

⁷⁶Ibid. “Maxims and Arrows” 6 (33).

⁷⁷*Twilight of the Idols*, “Morality as Anti-Nature” 4 (Hollingdale 1968: 55).

⁷⁸*Thus Spake Zarathustra* “Prologue” 3 (Common 1962: 6f). See also 35 (127): “laud all that is earthly!” Further: 78.2 (355): “. . . we want the kingdom of earth” – rather than that of heaven.

⁷⁹*The Anti-Christ* 15, (Hollingdale 1968: 137).

ideal world (the former) and reality (the latter).⁸⁰ He attributes the devaluation and de-sanctification of nature to the Jewish and Christian priesthoods.⁸¹ To shift the gravitational center of life to the transcendent ideal that Nietzsche equates with nothingness is to deprive life of its very center of gravity. His ‘aristocrat’ is one who does not deny God – “either in history or in nature or behind nature” – but one who simply finds the established and worshiped God as ‘un-godlike’.⁸²

For Nietzsche, man is clearly an animal, and in a statement that would surely resonate with most if not all contemporary Westerners pagans and indigenes he proclaims that “Man is absolutely not the crown of creation: every creature stands beside him at the same stage of perfection.”⁸³ What he does not appear to have an appreciation for is that the very phenomenon that distinguishes humanity from the rest of the animal kingdom is the magical metaphorical quality of our collective consciousness and its various cultural expressions. While all this is still *nature*, it is an ‘other-nature’ – the preternatural/the supernatural. In short, for the pagan, it is magic that is the very thing that makes us special and able to encounter realms that defy empirical and rational understandings. It is magic that makes us more than merely the sum of our individual parts – both individually and collectively.

Consequently, through the subtleties and intricacies of magic or enchantment, the pagan comprehends humanity as a whole as a god – as, for the proto-Indo-European, one god among a heptatheonic matrix of the sun, moon, earth and so forth. While for and among ourselves, our individual quest may be to attain demi-god status (such as Peggy Lee, Albert Einstein, Aldous Huxley, Ella Fitzgerald, etc.),⁸⁴ it is via the synchronic patterns that emerge through our historic progress that the magical is witnessed and our collective place among the gods becomes assured. In all this, for a pagan, and I contend for Nietzsche as well, growth and realization must be organic, part of nature and grounded in nature, for the process to be divine. It is the joy in nature and any part of nature representing either the whole of nature or some special aspect of nature that constitutes the essence of pagan idolatry. Nature is the great and endless parade of idols, nexi of the sacred, that guarantees not a Kafkaesque eternal return but a perpetual spiral of growth, discovery and, accepting the challenge of Nietzschean heroism – but with a pagan twist, ceaseless revelations of *eudaimonia* or happiness.

It is, in all this, that a pagan aristocracy is required – the emerging clique of ‘overpersons’ who share Nietzsche’s vision, bravery, independence of will and discernment, freedom from guilt, above all laughter, and ground the *aristos* (the ‘best’)

⁸⁰*Ecce Homo* “Foreword” 2 (Hollingdale 1979: 4).

⁸¹*The Anti-Christ* 38, (Hollingdale 1968: 162). See also 26 (150).

⁸²*Ibid.* 47 (174f). See also 43 (167).

⁸³*The Anti-Christ* 14, (Hollingdale 1968: 136).

⁸⁴The obtainment of demi-godhood occurs when one becomes himself or herself a metaphor – a cultural figure of speech.

in a resounding appreciation of tangible and natural existence.⁸⁵ Nietzsche opens the door for a full discussion of morality and helps a pagan along in her/his quest to locate ethical behavior and to act ethically – in other words, to become the noble aristocrat in a new, radical and expanded sense. Nevertheless, one of the major hurdles in appreciating Nietzsche stems from his occasional allusions to the aristocracy as a development of ‘pure’ blood.⁸⁶ The ‘lower, plebian orders’ he refers to as permanently intemperate, envious, obstinate and clumsily self-assertive – characteristics that education and culture only serve deceptively to mask.⁸⁷ Let alone that such a contention has never been substantiated, in today’s irretrievably cosmopolitan world, an idea like this is as obsolete as are Nietzsche’s archaic gender stereotypes concerning men and women.

Nietzsche’s accusations of decadence sound more like a personal value-judgment, although he employs the term to describe a situation in which an organism (e.g., humanity) “neglects even to the slightest degree to assert with absolute certainty its self-preservation.”⁸⁸ Nietzsche seeks to elucidate the actual cause-and-effect mechanics behind the actions and consequences of Christian priests, Christian theology, Christian morality and the like, and the reader must decide for herself/himself whether such elucidations are valid or are instead simply subjective and biased assessments. If the latter, we are not bound by them. We may still value all people, despite whatever particular criticisms are possible. And, most importantly, we may still value all people even if they have been seduced by transcendental escapism and feelings of resentment and revenge.

Nietzsche could be quite correct with regard to the priest and the philosopher (the concealed priest), but his understanding of the aristocracy is founded upon outdated mores and expectations. We are in need of a new type of nobility – one that is both innovative and yet also archetypal. The aristocrat of today is no longer superior to the whole, as Nietzsche would have it, but integral. He/she is someone who makes a contribution to the whole – furthering the evolution of the full species toward flower-

⁸⁵Much of Nietzsche’s own portrayal of nobility carries something akin to Arthurian chivalry – despite the philosopher’s condemnation of Romanticism: *Twilight of the Idols*, “Expeditions of an Untimely Man” 6 (Hollingdale 1968: 81). The Knights of the Roundtable in Thomas Malory’s *Le Morte d’Arthur* simply attend matinal mass as normal routine and then get on with being chivalrous and gallant heroes in an essentially Nietzschean format (though Nietzsche would criticize any readiness to help the weak). The Christianity here is almost incidental. But whether an emerging pagan nobility of today would conform to anything close to the medieval institution or not, it will express the sacred because it recognizes the sacred in and of the earth wherever else it may also be.

⁸⁶Nobility is to be specially bred: *Beyond Good and Evil* 213 (Hollingdale 1973: 145f); but, as noted previously, Nietzsche places here the decisive word ‘blood’ in inverted commas. Nietzsche considers the mixing of classes and races to be an error: *ibid.* 208 (136f); see further 224 (152), 244 (174) and 261 (199) and also *The Genealogy of Morals* 3.17 (Golffing 1956: 267) – but note Solomon and Higgins (2000: 9) who claim that what Nietzsche really “praised most was miscegenation, the mixing of the races, not the ‘racial purity’ idealized by the Nazis.”

⁸⁷*Beyond Good and Evil* 264 (Hollingdale 1973: 203). But compare what Nietzsche says about the Germans (244 [174]) vis-à-vis the Europeans (*Genealogy of Morals* 1.11 (Golffing 1956: 176).

⁸⁸*Ecce Homo*, “Daybreak” 2 (Hollingdale 1979: 67).

hood. Nietzsche's mankind is without purpose other than its own self-preservation and growth to the extent that the latter ultimately furthers the preservation. But what is vital to glean from this is that being without a goal other than the self suggests an unconditional freedom for aesthetic goals: to become a beautiful flower that emerges not just out of the dung of itself but a full all-encompassing human flower that grows out of and is nourished by the organic muck of its natural environment and socio-cultural history of mistakes and advances. The flower of Nietzsche's Javanese *sipo matador* vine above the oak-tree jungle through which it grows is not an exclusive class constituted by superseded customs but the living reality of the whole human organism itself.⁸⁹

From Nietzsche's perspective, one who cannot agree with his insights into the origin of *décadence* morality is someone who is "infected."⁹⁰ Drawing from their understandings of magic, however, today's pagan is more apt to consider Nietzsche's 'infection' to be a historic spell. Paganism does not seek to convert others to its way of seeing and understanding.⁹¹ Vis-à-vis the wider world, if it wants anything, it is simply to explain itself and protect the earth. Consequently, apart from the self-dehexing that contemporary Western pagan individuals have undergone to emancipate themselves into a pagan understanding, paganism may search for methods to *remove* the collective hex that it considers the Abrahamic half of the world to exist under at present.⁹² It is not that people are infected as Nietzsche puts it but that they have been cursed. With her/his proficiency in the arts of magic, today's pagan works to remove that curse – not so that the dehexed or disenchanting might necessarily become pagans but so that they might become here-and-now loving aristocrats who, out of their own surplus generosity, share with and for the all of humanity.⁹³ Today's pagan will leave it to Nietzsche to proclaim that "pagans are all who say Yes to life, to whom 'God' is the word for the great Yes to all things."⁹⁴

A pagan is someone who replaces the ideal that Nietzsche condemns with the metaphor. The empirical and the metaphorical or imaginal are two separate but interrelated realms of being. Pagans can understand the metaphorical as an independent ontology along with the observable: the latter perhaps as the *natura*

⁸⁹*Beyond Good and Evil* 258 (Hollingdale 1973: 193).

⁹⁰*Ecce Homo*, "Daybreak" 2 (Hollingdale 1979: 67).

⁹¹It is perhaps important to distinguish *conversion* from *recruitment*. Yes, pagans may seek to expand pagandom to others, but they do not endeavor in the process to have the recruit abandon any other beliefs she or he may have. In sociology of religion, conversion refers to the exclusion of other beliefs in the adoption of a new and exclusive way of seeing and believing.

⁹²This removing or de-hexing attempt is not to annihilate or critically undermine the beliefs of others but to open up and awaken the person. Of course there are exceptions to this, and some pagans may indeed seek to *convert* another, but the general feeling among contemporary Western pagans is that this is something they do not do.

⁹³On the magnanimity of the overperson, see once again "The Bestowing Virtue" in *Thus Spake Zarathustra* – especially 22.1 (Common 1962: 78f).

⁹⁴*The Anti-Christ* 55, (Hollingdale 1968: 187).

naturata; the former as the *natura naturans*. In general, these may be approached as unconnected – with some people concentrating on the one, some on the other. The intersection of the two occurs usually as a synchronicity but also within the metaphor and instance of the idol.

Nevertheless, as empirical the one and non-empirical the other, we are still permitted to describe situations in which one dimension ‘influences’ the other. When and if the imaginal affects the empirical, this is understood as a miracle, as an instance of the miraculous. When and if the empirical influences or produces the imaginal, this is the very dynamics studied and appreciated by complexity theory – such as when the whole becomes more than simply the sum of its parts. For instance, there is no leader at the head of a flying flock of birds saying to the others, “O.K., guys, turn left now!” There is instead a super-mind that allows the whole to move and turn without the individual birds bumping or colliding into one another. The advance of humanity can likewise be something that will be occasioned without the aid of political and ecclesiastical leaders. A flying and advancing humanity can itself be an aristocracy in which each individual plays a contributing part.

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Chapter 7

Post-Nietzsche

After Nietzsche, we may no longer simply assume that compassionate charity is automatically correct, that is, that it in itself constitutes virtue. This is especially the case if and when, as Nietzsche contends, pity and the helping of others are underscored by feelings of resentment and vengeance. In other words, altruism is insincere when it is performed selectively and excludes those toward whom we do not feel kindly. The call to hear the voice of the other, of the marginal and dispossessed, must also include the aristocratic soul – those people who excel and overcome and surpass themselves. If achievers are rejected out of a childish sense of envy masquerading as righteousness, not only is humanity as a whole impoverished, but also such rejection on the part of herd conformity is immoral.

While Nietzsche has divided humanity into masters and slaves, nobles and the bourgeois masses, the truth is that if we are to be likened to an oak tree, *we are all* acorns – not a mixture of acorns and mustard seeds – whether slaves or masters. The reality is that we are always something of both the servile and the ruling. But, following Nietzsche, it is to our excellence, to our self-overcoming, that we are ultimately dedicated. As Solomon and Higgins put it, “master morality – albeit in refined and more artistic form, far from its primordial brutishness – is not only good but, in an important sense, natural.”¹ By contrast, unconditional and universal altruism is anti-natural and deadly to human flourishing.² The point that comes across in all this is that nobility is an aspiration that is latent in each and every one of us, but likewise, so are mediocrity and shameful traits that we all possess to one degree or another.

Moreover, especially from a pagan perspective, whether our championing best or our submissive worst, there are no guarantees. Life itself is precarious and uncertain. However, even if in time all our idols, ideals, goals, resonances and repositories become shattered, the pagan way is still one of affirmation, even

¹Solomon and Higgins (2000: 116).

²Cameron (2002: 47f).

dogmatic affirmation. If the ultimate cosmic confrontation is acceptance of God and/or Jesus Christ for salvational release in contrast to acceptance of everlasting damnation, Nietzsche's eternal return, the pagan – to be a pagan – will and must reject Christian escapism. This last can only be seen by the pagan as finally some bewitching hex or cosmic joke. It need not matter if such a hex has been engineered by a priesthood, a cabal, the magi or Church Fathers or even by God himself for, in the final analysis, we must accept that the hex is a self-creation. Only by accepting that we are self-cursed have we any viable chance of escaping the spell, of becoming and being free. It is for this reason that self-overcoming, self-growth and real development in the realms of value and beauty are first and foremost a personal undertaking but also, though secondary and no less important, a collective goal and wish – even if humanity itself were to become and remain a doomed idol.

The pagan ultimately accepts that all behavior, all action, even that that is considered altruistic for the benefit of others, is egoistic. It is pleasure that motivates us and encourages us to do what we do.³ We help tsunami victims because, first, it assuages whatever guilt or shame we might feel for our own good fortune in the face of the misfortune and bad luck of others, and, second, because it is simply a pleasure to help others. Nevertheless, inasmuch as we act through pleasure – and especially when we act for reasons of altruistic pleasure, we are in no position to condemn others for whom charitable concern is not their pleasure. We are all different, and the hedonic motivation belonging to one person may not be the same for the next. On the basis of pleasure alone, we are precluded from making moralistic judgments.

In our struggle for aristocracy, for the best, we must always heed Nietzsche's warning over the dangers of leveling human differences – both innate and acquired – and concentrate principally on our own personal navigations and encounters in this game of life. Our challenge is always to aspire to the aristocratic within our own self or soul while continually *wishing* for the noble success of the collective human venture as a whole. In her heart of hearts, the pagan will declare, “Let us at the moment of Armageddon and final judgment reject any and all abrahamic intimidation. Let the 144,000 be our surrogate sacrifice to go off where they will so that the rest of us may get down to the task of converting endless hell into as perpetual a human paradise as possible.”

Following Nietzsche, the arena of moral discussion has changed and taken on different parameters. While a later part of this book will attempt to address the conflicting issues of virtues and values – especially as the pagan might wish to articulate them, Nietzsche has thrown down a gauntlet concerning the legitimacy of compassion for others in our ethical navigations. Perhaps, if we desire to hold to some semblance of altruistic behavior as a morally worthwhile activity, we must accept that we are indeed members of Nietzsche's loathed herd. Perhaps the pagan and others will have to accept that valid self-identity and ethical aspiration

³This egoistic pleasure drive is applicable even to such basic and non-sensual needs like procuring water, food, shelter and security since the absence of any of these would be unpleasant and lead finally to death.

shall indeed launch themselves from within the domain of mass conformity. With Nietzsche as a guide, however, we can be certain that this need not be the whole of the picture, that we are not constrained by such limitations, but nevertheless within the present-day world of population acceleration and diminishment of radical horizons or their possibility, we must begin with the status quo of current realities – however fragile and volatile they be sandwiched between political, imperial and bureaucratic might, on the one hand, and the persistence of myopic vision with its corollary of violence that refuses negotiation and compromise, on the other.

Consequently, to contextualize the specifics of virtue ethics that focuses on the person in his or her pursuit of individual excellence – whether as exemplary behavior or the acceptable desiderata of life,⁴ it is important to be aware of some of the post-Nietzschean contributions to ethical debate. At this point, I have John Mackie, Alasdair MacIntyre and Anthony Grayling specifically in mind. Indeed, however, there are countless others we could and perhaps should consider as well – as the questions concerning ethics, what is happiness and what is virtue produce endless and endlessly varying answers, but short of an exhaustive exploration, let us seek to see some of the salient suggestions that have been made in the wake of Nietzsche and within our rapidly changing world before we turn to any attempt at a pagan formulation concerning how we might choose to live our lives in line with pagan values.

Despite the irony, there appears to be an Abrahamic constraint that forces it likewise to accept the world – however reluctantly – as the gift of God. The basic logic is that since God is good, whatever he creates must be good as well. This is the cognitive dissonance of the Abrahamic gnostic position. However, a historical understanding of the Abrahamic God would allow that this god could have been evil enough to have created a physical world as an impediment to man.⁵ While Nietzsche claims that God is dead, is it not that only the good seem to die – or at least die young – while the bad live on and on? The dharmic approach is to escape the material world altogether. The pagan, however, denies God as anything worth the bother. The pagan could or might accept the gnostic-understanding that God is at best the demiurge – a flawed creator or one who thinks he creates or even a master but sinister magician, but, rather than the world being either the gift or curse of God, it is recognized by the pagan – and especially the pagan as the descendent of Nietzsche – as the source, matrix and mother of all aspiration.

In the pagan search for moral values – one that is grounded in and through nature in all her tangible existence, the development of ethical thought after Nietzsche must take on board the key affirmations that the German philosopher developed, namely,

⁴Solomon and Higgins (2000: 177). Jorge Garcia (Audi 1999: 960) explains virtue ethics “also called virtue-based ethics and agent-based ethics” as “conceptions or theories of morality in which virtues play a central or independent role.” In contrast to deontological ethics as well morality based on subjective preference, the various forms of virtue ethics tend to be more substantial and connected to human nature and culture as they are rather than as wished-for abstractions. Aristotle is most frequently identified with virtue ethics, and Nietzsche, by some, may be as well.

⁵See *passim* York (1995).

amor fati, eternal recurrence, ‘gay science’, moral psychology, perspectivism, revaluation of values, music as spirituality, the ‘overman’ and the will to power.⁶ In understanding this last, it is claimed that it is human nature to be motivated by non-self-determined instinct and impulse.⁷ Solomon and Higgins argue that Nietzsche’s will to power refers essentially to self-mastery, self-expression and self-realization. If this is so, Nietzsche’s exaltation of power is not a goal in itself but rather the instrumental means to some further virtue, value, creativity or end. When all is said and done, it seems as if Nietzsche’s notion of power is that of energy – the very fuel that allows life to be and flourish. As the pagan might see it, the nature of energy is to re-birth. Every species loses its grasp on reality ultimately. Can the moss that grows on the oak survive once the tree has been sucked dry; can humanity survive without the earth? Does the moss that kills the oak tree advance in terms of consciousness? Is this the final fate of man – to become pure consciousness once the nourishing source for our human bodies has been depleted completely? Whether our individual and collective wills to power are ultimately doomed, the onus for us at the present juncture of time is to govern our planet, that is, to land-manage our earth. This is and must be the decisive concern for species humanity – making the ethical response to life a pragmatist approach, whatever else it may also be. Following in the wake of Nietzsche, the great ‘hippy revolution’ – a parent to contemporary paganism – was the collective realization that there are no *a priori* values. Values are instead whatever one wants them to be. This throws the moral question into an aesthetic issue in which the aesthetic is always up for negotiation.

The lynchpin, then, between Nietzsche and more recent understandings of ethics – including the pagan – is existentialism. Taking much of its cue from Nietzsche, namely that a person must live his or her own life to the fullest and create his/her own values, that the spontaneous and irrational are positives, and that the quest for happiness (eudaimonism) is rejected as the pursuit of the bourgeois herd, existentialism differs from Nietzsche in its stress on freedom of the will. While Sartre sums up its distinguishing feature as existence preceding essence, existentialism has also been strongly influenced by the pessimism of Nietzsche’s teacher, Schopenhauer. This pessimism leads to existentialism’s bottom line that the cosmos is absurd. But be that as it may, this cosmic absurdity is no reason for the existentialist not to pursue the responsibility of freedom and self-becoming. The individual’s essence is, therefore, something to find or develop. We are back already with Nietzsche’s implied stress on self-realization.

Without any *a priori* natural essence for the human being, the individual has no stable nature. Consequently, it follows that there are no intrinsic or natural human values. Value is something we are obliged to create and determine for ourselves. Our central activity then depends on the making of decisions – decisions for which

⁶This list is developed from Solomon and Higgins (2000: 200–15).

⁷Ibid. 217.

we, and we alone, are responsible.⁸ In the context beyond good and evil, there is for the existentialist no right or wrong, but simply better or worse. The existentialist recognizes, therefore, the ambivalence of all things in terms of the positive and the negative. He or she endeavors to avoid the fundamental pitfall that arises from the emotional situation of cosmic precariousness – the abyss of anxiety. Those who are and remain anxious are those who are encouraged as a result to seek self-deceiving refuge in the inauthentic. This last is anathema to the existentialist who values individual development against whatever nihilist absurdities life, the world and nature may be in reality. It is clear, then, that the existentialist is in full accord with Nietzsche and his overcoming or surpassing of self regardless of the ateleological situation in which we all find ourselves.

Existentialism's persistence in the face of its pessimistic take on the universe constitutes a form of heroism. Again we can detect a Nietzschean contribution – here in the form of the 'overperson'. This is not an *Übermensch* who is determined by genetics and selected breeding but virtually a person who augments himself/herself both spiritually and culturally through self-genesis. Existentialism's ethics are those of humanistic individualism, but, like Stoicism and unlike most forms of ethical individualism, one that has no central concern with the eudaimonic. Instead, the existential ethic is preoccupied with the unqualified freedom for self-becoming.

There are, however, two codicils to the existentialist's preoccupation. One concerns his or her readiness to compromise with the conditions of life and a person's present political situation. In this, and it is a debatable and ambivalent point, there appears to be a divergence from the unremitting position of Nietzsche. While the existentialist advocates choice and the freedom of will, he or she nevertheless recognizes that there are constraints of all kinds that we cannot change but must learn to live and cope with within the range of limitations we find ourselves.

A second consideration, and again a deviation from Nietzsche, is a readiness to recognize the other as the complement of the self. Simone de Beauvoir, while making the claim that ethics represents victory over the facts of life, insists that the human finds justification for existence only in the existence of other people. Mutual concern between self and other – the me-others relationship – is for her an irreducible truth, and she admits that "one of the concrete consequences of existentialist ethics is the rejection of all the previous justifications which might be drawn from the civilization, the age, and the culture."⁹ In this, existentialism is anti-authority to a fault. The other is to be treated with the other's freedom always in mind. In this way, the existential onus "is not solipsistic, since the individual is

⁸"For Sartre, . . . Authentic existence is to be found only in a self-conscious awareness of an absolute freedom of choice" (MacIntyre 1998: 269).

⁹de Beauvoir (1948: 74–155). <http://www.webster.edu/~corbette/philosophy/existentialism/debeauvoir/ambiguity-3.html> (accessed February 20, 2005).

defined only by his relationship to the world and to other individuals; he exists only by transcending himself, and his freedom can be achieved only through the freedom of others.”¹⁰

This consideration of the other, itself not something supported by Nietzsche, is echoed eventually in the deconstructionist/postmodern social project of Jacques Derrida, namely, to hear the voice of the neglected other – the person or people disenfranchised by issues of race, creed, gender, gender-preference, poverty, physical deformity and so forth.¹¹ As Derrida understands, whoever is marginalized by majority outlook and conformity standards becomes invisible within mainstream social conditions. Such a person is not seen, and his or her problems of powerlessness are not even noted. Derrida and other postmodernists, taking their cue from the existentialists, oppose the modernist logic of Hegel that promotes the reduction of all difference in the overriding concern for ‘sameness’.

The contemporary pagan, more often than not, understands that we do not all share the same dream. In line with existential sobriety, all we can ultimately hope for is accommodation. Nevertheless, the pagan is uncomfortable with whatever can be recognized as secularization – the diminishment of the role of the sacred in public if not also private life. For the pagan, the secular is the condition in which it becomes increasingly difficult for divinity to communicate with us. Secularization applies equally to the Christian with his God as it does to the pagan with her gods. While private spirituality evolves continuously toward something akin to a beleaguered and isolated bastion, the effect of technological and rational advance is to deprive our world, our shared and public world, of participation with and as the sacred. To some extent, this is in itself a positive – for the separation of church and state prevents dominance of any one religiosity over the others. The forum remains open and accessible, at least in principle, to everyone. But the loss of the magical or darshanic within the arena of our shared world becomes a diminishment for us all in terms of the aesthetic quality of life. Effervescent wonder no longer plays a public role.

The existentialist is, of course, far from the pagan on this front. What they do both have in common is the stress on self-responsibility – responsibility for one’s decisions, responsibility for whatever purposes are determined and responsibility for the health and ecological balance of the planet. Along with accountability, the existentialist in particular places importance on authenticity. For Heidegger, authenticity refers to critical reflection on one’s values – whether those derived from cultural, familial, social and political conditions or those we consciously select through self-reflection and personal consideration. As Heidegger sees it, the awakening factor for the authentic individual is anxiety or *Angst*, but the key outcome is the responsibility that one must assume in forging a valid self-identity.

¹⁰Ibid. 156. <http://www.webster.edu/~corbetre/philosophy/existentialism/debeauvoir/ambiguity-4.html> (accessed February 20, 2005).

¹¹See Martin (1992). “To answer the call of the other is to begin negotiation with the other” (Champagne 1995: 74).

But while Heidegger feels that there is always a degree of the inauthentic to our behavior and evaluations, he appears to be alone among existentialists in presupposing that salvation or existential redemption depends on something beyond our own efforts. The issue here turns on the notion of authenticity. The postmodernists would appear to dismiss the authentic altogether in their acceptance of the simulacrum, the recycled and mass produced copy. Postmodernity itself appears increasingly to be little more than a vapid chaotic jumble of all previous styles and attitudes. In the current rush to reproduce the superficial image and proliferated article in increasing numbers, authenticity itself is more and more a lost and forgotten value. The simulation has become the norm.

It is, instead, within the realm of religion – and perhaps such related areas as art and philosophy – that the search for the authentic remains a primary preoccupation. This of course pits religion – virtually any religion – against the secular and commodity-oriented tempo of present-day concern with pastiche and image. But while the Christian and gnostic might seek the authentic in an *a priori* noumenal realm of the ideal and abstract, the pagan – to the degree that she places value on the real at all – will most likely find the genuine elsewhere. The question then becomes: how does the pagan differentiate the corpo-spiritual from materiality in general? What distinguishes the authentic from the inauthentic? Moreover, if pantheistic sentiment accords value or the sacred to all tangibility, what is acceptable as special vis-à-vis what is not?

At this point, we aim simply to raise such questions. Inasmuch as the authentic (and for the pagan this means the sacred) is a concern, the pagan follows in the footsteps of the existentialist. If the authentic is not something that matters, then there is a divergence with the existentialist – although, as a rule, such non-mattering is more characteristic of the secularist than of the pagan. Nevertheless, in today's forum of axial ferment and issues of meaninglessness, in order to locate an ethic we need to determine what is valuable as the basis for that ethic.

Standing before the window of a furniture shop, we might question whether a seemingly antique-looking chair, table or cabinet is 'genuine' or not. Is it a reproduction made to look old, or is it *real*? In this sense, we are differentiating the authentic from the modern. If it is old, it is real; if new, it is not. Beyond this, what we are actually getting at is whether something is trustworthy – being that which it purports to be. It is not counterfeit. But in the postmodern revaluation of values, simulacra are often not pretending to be anything other than what they are – simply cheap, tawdry and mass produced reproductions: nothing more, nothing less. Paganism, by contrast, in its valuing of the old, already places itself out-of-step with modern postmodernism – the very pluralism that accepts paganism as one more legitimate expression within a ceaseless and pluralistic celebration of difference. This may amount to a biting of the hand that feeds.

Be this as it may, the link between paganism and postmodernism may be none other than the idol. In general, the idol – as with the simulacrum – makes no pretense to being anything other than what *it* is. Idolatry and authenticity: here is the matrix within which the genuine is to be sought and, if one so desires, cherished. The one maxim that must apply in the differentiation that this matrix permits is to remember

how easily something, anything, is dismissed as idolatry when and if it does not belong to the assessor's own value system. The pagan, keeping that tendency in mind, is then free to determine what is possibly a false idol (e.g., the nation-state) vis-à-vis the genuine idol (e.g., the numinous *lingam* of Shiva Vishvanath). But at the same time, inasmuch as the idol may be an idea and/or an idea represented by the physical object, old or new does not come into the equation. Paganism may rest comfortable in that it often cherishes the old as genuine – it honors the *old* gods and goddesses, the old shrine, the ancient festivals, and so forth, but it no less cherishes the new as liberating from stasis and repetition. And even when paganism reveres its Neo-pagan Goddess, though perhaps a relatively recent development, she becomes expressive of something much older, something organic and something genuine and trustworthy. When postmodernism is employed as a value-judgment, paganism is apt to be condemned as inauthentic by those who do not consider themselves to be pagan. But when postmodernism is considered a sociological fact or condition, in this case one that has blurred any utilitarian boundary between the authentic and the inauthentic, paganism and existentialism are both likely to distance themselves from the postmodern. For existentialism, the real is the personal identity that is based on critical assessment of values (essentially Nietzsche's revaluation of all value). For paganism, more often than not in today's West, the authentic is not the old so much as it is the natural. Nature herself/itself is the genuine.

Nevertheless, Baudrillard, in a brief footnote to his miniscule book entitled *Simulations*, stated simply that along with Plato's consideration of the real, the symbolic and the imaginary, we must now also add the virtual as a fourth ontological category.¹² Despite the brevity of Baudrillard's statement concerning these fundamental categories, he has perhaps circumscribed the parameters of all human dialogue in its encounter with itself and the cosmos. But consideration of the real, the symbolic, the imaginary and the virtual, or what Baudrillard himself refers to as the hyperreal,¹³ allows that the authentic itself cannot be simply allocated to one category to the exclusion of the others. True enough, the authentic almost by default cannot be imaginary – though imagination itself is increasingly recognized as something *bona fide* and healthy in today's mechanized and instrumental world. We might also place the authentic as other than the symbolic – that conundrum of arbitrary or conventional signs and representations. Here, of course, when it is the genuine that is symbolized, it is the element, quantity, quality, relation or operation *behind* the symbol that is the authentic. This leaves authenticity itself to be located primarily as either the real or hyperreal or both. In other words, we have two qualities of authenticity: one that is located within empirical reality; the other,

¹²Baudrillard (1983: 157).

¹³I would want to add a possibly fifth category, the mnemonic, although, considering that Plato's reality as the ideal is largely different from what we understand today as reality (Nietzsche's 'apparent' reality), I am not certain that the mnemonic might not be a third fundamental aspect of the real itself – along with *eros* and death. (Perhaps a fourth component of the real along with love, death and memory might be the inevitability of taxes).

as the imaginal. Pagan idols may be of either kind. But at the same time, what most of the world refers to as God is an inauthentic idol for the pagan. Unlike even for the Christian whose mission is in part a searching of soul, there is no room for the Abrahamic God to question itself/himself and/or the values that are mandated. As absolute omniscience, there is nothing for this God to query – rendering the figure the supreme example of existential inauthenticity.

If idolatry forces departure from the existentialists, however, the pagan will still carry with her the legacy of the existentialist's values of responsibility and authenticity – albeit formulating perhaps new and innovative understandings of the genuine that transcend the existentialist's. But where the pagan also departs from the existentialist is in the latter's rejection of the hedonic and/or eudaimonistic. If existentialism is a humanistic form of individualism, a brand of ethical individualism, it differs from other similar moralities in its denial of happiness as a, or the, primary goal. However, for the discerning pagan, this aspect of existentialism is abandoned or, if not discarded completely, retained in a restricted sense as is Stoicism. What this suggests is the limited viability of existentialism as we have already seen with Stoicism. There is a commensurability for certain times such as those chiefly characterized by *Angst* or *ennui* but not for life as a whole. In other words, as with Stoic resignation or *apathia*, existential individualism and pessimism are good for bad times but not appropriate for the good ones. The more workable ethical philosophy, I contend, is pagan – in both its ethical individualism and ethical collectivism manifestations – which manages to hold on to, if not combine, *both* aesthetic dignity *and* pleasure and, if not at the same time, at least within a juxtaposing rhythm of cyclic time.

Paganism in its moral dimensions perpetually dialogues with existentialism, Stoicism, hedonism and eudaimonism as varying forms of ethical naturalism, ethical individualism and ethical collectivism. In one sense, the collective can be considered an extension of the individual herself/himself. The community may be the individual's family, neighborhood, society, ethnic culture or the world village itself. The problematic negotiation for everyone lies within the dynamic between self and other. The liberal thinker takes on board the welfare of others as, following Kant, each person being an autonomous end in himself/herself. But the libertarian sympathizer rejects overtly humanitarian sacrifice and concentrates on the intrinsic and natural worth of the self alone. Both are types of individualism, but even with the libertarian, the question can vary with what are accepted as the limits of the self: person, family, community. Is it conceivable that there could be libertarian welfare? The answer to this question will inevitably return to Kant's stress on duty and obligation. The possibility remains that self-responsibility in our shrinking, increasingly crowded and complicated world entails global responsibility in both ecological and humanitarian terms. This is perhaps all the more the case if we adopt Heidegger's understanding of the person as a *field of being*. The individual self is not simply a human body but also that body's relations with others – proximate others, the immediate environment, planetary ecological well-being and humanity. The pagan, as most theological religiosities do, would include the relationship one has with the preternatural as well, that is, allowing one more community to become an extension of self.

Utilitarianism has been an approach developed on its own understanding that happiness is most attainable and successful when it is possible for greater numbers of people. The more the merrier. It is an attempt to bridge personal hedonism with the aesthetics of social concern. On the basis on which I am presenting utilitarianism here, it cannot be denied that it is essentially a form of egoism or ethical egoism. The utilitarian's incorporation of other-interest is still fundamentally one of self-interest. The wider question in this and related developmental matters is on locating value. For individualism as an ethical decision, value is primarily moral value. But not all human values are moral ones. Ethical naturalism is one attempt to return to axial considerations and work out the range and bases of values – both ethical and extra-ethical.

The Argument

There are two ways to understand ethical naturalism. The more conventional view is that moral facts are facts of nature, that some of our human values are determined by the nature of the human organism itself, while others find their basis in our wider terrestrial situation. Together these include our need for food, water, shelter, warmth, security, emotional intimacy, development of human potential, growth of knowledge and understanding and so forth. The gist of ethical naturalism from this viewpoint is the contention that the moral facts of nature are observable and verifiable in the same manner as are scientific facts. In general, inasmuch as existentialism is a humanistic form of individualism that stresses the unique and unrepeatable person, it denies an ethical naturalism that does not focus on the individual himself/herself. But ethical naturalism shares with existentialism the avoidance of any ethics based on rules.

Another understanding of naturalism, however, approaches the term virtually as a synonym for paganism itself. The argument proceeds as follows. On the one hand, there is vernacular paganism which is essentially a spontaneous and almost universal response to things in terms of veneration.¹⁴ On the other hand, there is what we might refer to variously as aristocratic, noble or elite paganism – despite the current political incorrectness of such adjectives. Vernacular pagans are apt to worship whatever they wish to worship as a natural and unreflective act. A classic example is what we find within Hinduism. Hindus have a marvelous propensity to express ritual devotion in any place of cultic worship – including tombs of Muslim saints or within Christian churches. We can find this same tendency in a multitude of different forms across the world. I argue that this is a natural expression of the human being *qua* human. And, like nature itself/herself, this automatic response on the part of the human is amoral. It has little to do with ethics *per se*.

¹⁴I have attempted to develop this understanding of vernacular or behavioral paganism in the third chapter of my *Pagan Theology* (York 2003).

But to be differentiated from this vernacular form of pagan religiosity and behavior is that which we can designate further as philosophical, shamanic or reflexive paganism. Here we are approaching paganism as something much more deliberate and conscious. In a word, I would designate this as ‘ethical paganism’. It is a development of the vernacular – a natural development, and, as such, the pagan ‘herd’ and the pagan ‘aristocracy’ are not sundered and opposed as irreconcilable opposites as are Nietzsche’s herd masses and aristocratic elite. Instead, the more refined, conscious and ethically aware are to be understood as a cultivated development of the more spontaneous – one that develops as a continuum rather than a rupture.

A major difference between pagan nobility and vernacular pagan behavior is the greater selectivity exercised by the former in contrast to that free range non-discrimination of Afro-American spiritists, Christo-pagans, Spiritist Catholics, crypto-pagans, Jew-witches and the like. For instance, even if the Abrahamic God existed, the discerning respondent refuses to worship or honor the entity. A pagan might even *believe* in God but defiantly reject what this God represents and demands. Here the pagan aristocrat is in virtual accord with Nietzsche’s denunciation of Christianity. Such a God and the conniving priest types that serve him and seek to spread and ensure his worship cater to, and capitalize from, the submissiveness of the mindless herd. The life-thwarting and life-denying exercise becomes little more than one concerning power and domination – by a scheming few over an unthinking and accepting many. For the pagan, the God behind this type of theology is at best the deluded Demiurge who believes he has ‘created’ the world and has absolute dominion over it. But, at the end of the day, he stands for everything that is anti-human. Even in the face of everlasting fear and punishment, the pagan aristocrat remains insubordinate – opposed to both submission and resorting to a *deus ex machina* proxy alike. He has perhaps come a long way from the vernacular foundations of atavistic religiosity to the point where paganism becomes stubborn by principle, but the ties that link him to his native, regional and demotic cousins remain nonetheless non-severed and intact.

But the key thing is that both forms of paganism are natural. They are organic expressions of what it is to be human, naturally human. And this allows that both vernacular and cultivated paganisms are naturalistic – that paganism itself is a kind of naturalism. Rather than there being a dichotomy or conflict between culture and nature as Freud and others might have it,¹⁵ human cultivation – beginning perhaps with husbandry, agriculture, the domestication of fire and the emergence of spoken and written language – is a natural progression of what it means to be human. And as the etymology behind the word itself reveals, cultivation is a religious/spiritual act that reaches to the physical roots of the human being. It is pagan. To the degree that paganism births and evolves toward honor and the honorable, ethical paganism is an ethical naturalism.

¹⁵York (2001).

And, finally, the ethics of paganism are never categorical in a Kantian sense. They remain always open, developing and evolving. They are not and cannot be complete. So on this score, ethical paganism may also be labeled 'trans-categorical' or 'trans-holistic'. Like Nietzsche's aspirations 'beyond good and evil', pagan ethics are ultimately 'beyond completeness'. In any immediate sense, they are always situational. The virtues and values in any pagan understanding are not written in stone. They are not permanent, fixed and absolute but always subject to change commensurate to changing situations and contexts and the variations of human aspirations and interaction with nature and the natural over time. As the human being evolves, her ethics change; and as the world transforms along with concomitant structural needs – both environmental and from each other, so too do our values and virtues change as well.

Consequently, my argument is that both the spontaneous reaction to the world and the preternatural in terms of non-discriminating veneration and the more discerning and selective honoring that results through the development of ethical awareness are both natural features of what it means to be fully human – at least in a pagan sense. Paganism avoids alike the placebo of the Abrahamic alternative, the nihilistic withdrawal of the dharmic and the empty loneliness of the secular for, instead, a laughing and organic bonding with the evolving all of reality – including the human community as well as the community of nature. Freed from the constraint of fixed categorical positions and externally imposed absolute commands, the pagan ethos is a perpetually ongoing negotiation that either is or is most akin to the dialogue and response with which humans engage concerning aesthetics. However arbitrary or continually emergent, the pagan ethical framework works with and aspires toward current and future understandings of the beautiful.

Grayling, Mackie and MacIntyre

As has already been mentioned, there have been countless nuanced developments of ethical reflection and meta-ethical theory in the twentieth century. We want now to look at only a select few of the many thinkers behind these to be in a better position to examine the values and virtues of pagan ethics themselves. We should by now have a broad idea of ethical theory and the insights that have been offered toward living the good or right life. Frank Cameron considers that the key ethical traditions are the Aretaic, the Kantian and the Utilitarian,¹⁶ and while his final arguments that Nietzsche does not conform to Aristotle's virtue ethics are not particularly convincing, we can accept these three traditions along with Hedonism and Stoicism as forming the central arena within which ethical debate shall occur for pagans as well as most other interested parties.

¹⁶Cameron (2002).

Grayling

A secular perspective that is compatible with paganism is expressed by the Oxford-based British philosopher, Anthony Grayling (b. 1949). Grayling sees the whole history of ethical reflection consisting of the hostility between humanism and religion, more specifically, between the autonomy of atheistic humanism and the heteronomy of transcendental theism.¹⁷ The chief criticism I have encountered from colleagues concerning Grayling is that his secular humanism is, in its own way, as doctrinaire as the religious positions he himself attacks. Nevertheless, what is important to recognize is that, for the pagan if not others as well, the secular allows the bare bones reflection on ethics without the beclouding issue of supernatural consideration. The approaches to the preternatural are varied, personal and contested. The secular humanism of Grayling encourages us instead to face the moral questions on their own. In his terms, religions' ethical and metaphysical positions are marginal to each other. In Christianity, its ethics are motivated by the resultant reward expected from obedient compliance to divine dictate and/or avoidance of punishment for lack of submission to the same, that is, not from any necessary intrinsic worth in moral reflection and behavior independent of supernatural agency.¹⁸

The secular position chooses decidedly *not* to be productive of the supernatural; apart from technological achievement, what it 'produces' is concentrated on the ethical and aesthetic alone. By beginning moral reflection with the secular, the pagan as well as anyone else so interested can focus on moral questions freed from the ongoing and perpetual debate over religious claims. The secularist deals with the values of relationship – primarily those of the intra-human. The pagan is interested in the same foundationally – although extending the relational to include as equally important the environmental world. Deepest paganism will also eventually consider the ethical relationship with the 'soul of matter', but, for the initial encounter with the roundtable of ethical debate, it can leave that further relationship to the side. The secularist talks on the level to which everyone, whatever his/her personal religious persuasion, can – or at least should – be able to participate.

In other words, although none of Grayling's ethical positions is anything with which pagans, if not others as well, would disagree, we must still recognize that there are narrow-minded pagans – just as there are exclusive thinkers among any religious persuasion and/or ethnic identity – that place little or no value on the universe. While pagan religiosity can and often does countenance the preternatural, pagan ethics discount the magical by placing the burden of correct behavior and choice solely as a matter for self-responsibility. In this way, morality for the pagan conforms to humanistic ethics – one focused on relationship: but here not only relationship with family, community and humanity as well as with nature,

¹⁷Grayling (2003: x, *xiii*, 132, 248).

¹⁸Ibid. 94f.

but also with the gods as metaphorical or otherwise sources for the joys and beauties of life. What this means is that even when the relational is extended by the pagan to the preternatural, the responsibility for value and virtue selection and the consequences thereof remains with the individual himself/herself alone and not with either cultural indoctrination or suprahuman agency. In this way, the secularist approach to morality becomes the foundation for any and all pagan relational ethics – regardless of whatever further consideration of and application to other ontological realms beyond the empirical and social constructionist there might be.

In Grayling's terms, humanist values comprise the underlying spirit that links classical antiquity and the Renaissance with the Enlightenment and the modern scientific revolution. They are the foundations of the good life and are to be understood as personal freedom, the quest for education, the pursuit of pleasure that is non-detrimental to others, aesthetic enjoyment, friendship and the feeling of being part of the human community.¹⁹ Grayling speaks of the intrinsic worth of people, animals and the environment as the touchstones for ethical reflection and behavior – rather than intimidation through threat and punishment or inducement through the promise of reward.²⁰ The humanist/secular perspective explicitly rejects self-interest and the desire for self-preservation as the bases for morality. The emphasis upon self-responsibility discounts obedience for obedience's sake and any appeal to force as the legitimator of correct action.²¹ In Grayling's blunt phraseology, faith in a fairy story is not a recognizable contribution to the debate about the good.²²

Consequently, to the degree that paganism follows Grayling's secular humanism, it must put to the side its own preternatural biases and accept the contention of the non-necessity of metaphysical consideration in any search for the ethical. Rather than in metaphysics, morality is to be grounded on its own intrinsic worth.²³ For Grayling, these grounding ethics are human needs and values, that is, the variety of human life in its social settings. He cites in particular the humanist values of reason, atheism, democracy and human rights,²⁴ and since transcendental ethics are allegedly founded upon the imperatives of demand and fear rather than reason,²⁵ he sees such religious morality as anti-moral if not often immoral as well.²⁶

The secularist position conceives of religious belief as fundamentally non-rational.²⁷ Indeed, the 'leap of faith' may well be a constituent feature of all religion – including in fact the secular attitude itself. Paganism almost invariably

¹⁹Grayling (2003: 230).

²⁰Ibid. p. 81.

²¹Grayling (2003: 63).

²²Ibid. p. 73. For Grayling (2003: 236), religion is only good or behaves well when it is a minority.

²³Grayling (2003: 187).

²⁴Ibid. p. 238.

²⁵Grayling (2003: 96).

²⁶Ibid. p. 79f.

²⁷Grayling (2003: 236).

claims to be the default stance – with the other religions and/or non-religions as developments from it. The Abrahamic ‘leap of faith’ is its belief in a transcendent personal god. For the dharmacists, it rests instead with a belief in an impersonal principle of transcendental unity. For pagans, the cognitively dissonant is to be found with an affirmation of the sanctity of the physical – despite the invariability of ultimate pain and loss contingent upon matter and, today, thanks to the Judeo-Christian conditioning of the West, despite the fostered sense of guilt that has become imposed on such a position. But if paganism is the default, secularism’s ‘leap of faith’ is the concomitant non-commitment that accompanies belief in the mechanical and disenchanting nature of matter. This is no less a faith position.

Like the secularist, the pagan is equally in search of sanity and world peace. Her means, however, are slightly different. The pagan does not base her/his life on belief in ancient superstition, as Grayling contends, but along with the secularist “education in open-minded use of reason, experiment, observation and careful evaluation of data,”²⁸ there is an approach to the supernatural as a resource for inspiration. While paganism has a deep affinity with the Romantic, it does not hold to an exclusive *primacy* of emotion and what Grayling calls the irresponsibility of Romantic thought but explores and utilizes these along with the mechanical reductivism of the secularist’s sheer rationalism. The less imaginative outlook of the secularist school à la Grayling can only see the pagan and/or Romantic as yielding authority to the supernatural, to nature, to tradition, to visions and unsupervised emotions,²⁹ but the pagan is in reality adopting a more utilitarian stance that simply uses these as enhancements toward the will to freedom without abandoning the dictates of reasoned judgment in the full process.

Grayling adopts virtually a Nietzschean attitude toward the Old Testament God who in his opinion makes bad mistakes and is “despotic, jealous, violent, temperamental, petty and murderous.”³⁰ He cites Feuerbach who conceived of humanity’s self-alienation as resulting from the worship of a ghost that humanity has itself created.³¹ And he utterly condemns heteronomy as the submission of one’s own will to that of an external authority. Pagans would most likely agree with Grayling’s depiction of the Abrahamic God and would certainly agree with the quest for self-autonomy. Within paganism, however, it is less a question of subjecting one’s own will to an abstraction or divinity as it is in seeking to harmonize one’s thoughts and actions with what a particular deity represents and exalts in terms of beauty and honor. But along with Grayling, the pagan would also agree that there are no neat solutions to moral dilemma through ethical reflection.

Grayling presents two developments in moral philosophy for the twentieth century. One of these is existentialism whose atheistic premise, which discounts human purpose as something externally imposed, suggests, at least for Sartre and

²⁸Ibid. p. 92.

²⁹Grayling (2003: 141).

³⁰Ibid. p. 91.

³¹Grayling (2003: 170).

Camus, in the face of existential absurdity as the fundamental condition of life that love, freedom, human dignity and creativity are the central values for a meaningless existence.³² Self-responsibility for the consequences of what one does is, for the existentialist, the sole means for achieving authenticity.

The other development is what is known as ‘virtue ethics’, and in this we come virtually full circle back to Aristotle. Rather than concentrating on what modern-day witches refer to as a ‘negative morality’ concerning sin, that is, on commandments telling us what we must *not* do, virtue ethics place the emphasis on the positive virtues themselves.³³ This is not a concern with what we *ought* to be doing but rather one with what we can do to achieve the good life. For Grayling, there is an interest in whom we should be in contrast to what we should do in particular situations.³⁴ The virtues are understood as ‘excellences of character’ that ultimately incline toward – if not guarantee – a life of well-being and *eudaimonia*. The classical virtues, of course, are justice, prudence, strength and temperance. Grayling points out submission and humility as Christian virtues – ones that we find neither in Aristotle nor in Nietzsche. He points out the absence of knowledge and intelligence among religious ethics since these become suspect in any unquestioning compliance. But he also regards tolerance as a virtue that must be reckoned within an understanding of ethical values. The relation of virtue and value is important in any quest for the ethical for, along with ethical values that constitute the virtues, there are also prudential values, technological values, economic values, aesthetic values and hedonic values if not others as well. Consequently, virtue ethics are an important sub-category of the broader field of axiology – the general philosophy of value. For the pagan, the ethical possesses in particular a strong interconnection with the aesthetic. And to the degree that the pagan reveres the conceptual as itself an ethereal and/or quasi-substantial ontological presence, virtues may themselves be regarded as idols or divinities to be honored or worshiped. The task for the pagan is always to formulate his or her own pantheon of virtues. Different pagan communities will have different lists so that our present task becomes one of ascertaining what the potential candidates are and what the common denominators between the various lists or virtue pantheons might be.

³²Grayling (2003: 226). Sartre’s main work is *L’Être et le néant* (1943). Also important are his novel *La Nausée* (1938) and the essay *L’Existentialisme est un humanisme* (1946). Camus wrote exclusively in the novel/novella and essay form: *L’Étranger* (1942), *La Peste* (1947), *La Chute* (1956), *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (1942) and *L’Homme révolté* (1951).

³³“Only let us remember that more permanent good is done in this world by a beautiful nature giving itself its natural expression, than by precept or denunciation” (Fowler 1971: 405).

³⁴Grayling (2003: 227).

Mackie

In the consideration of virtue ethics, Australian analytic philosopher and moral skeptic John Mackie (1917–1981) brings an interesting insight. He stresses that virtues and/or values are not absolutes or *a priori* givens. Rather than being objective, they are instead something that is invented.³⁵ In other words, Mackie suggests an approach to values and virtues that is different than that of Plato and Kant who consider the ideal as independently *sui generis* and ontologically real. He finds this same consideration to be the tendency even with existentialism, but he stresses all the same that “the lack of objective values is not a good reason for abandoning subjective concern or for ceasing to want anything.”³⁶

In Mackie’s understanding, the recognition of egoistic behavior needs to be incorporated into any ethical system.³⁷ Although he sees an open tension between moral reason and rational self-interest – with the former serving as a check on the latter, well-being is still understood along Aristotelian terms as an activity in conformity with the virtues. These last, he explains, are dispositions that harmonize with understanding, “with seeing things as they are,” in contrast to a vice which is “one which distorts appreciation of the qualities of the relevant situation.”³⁸ By considering virtues and values as subjective rather than objective, more or less as qualities that we as humans invent, Mackie delineates an ethical stance with which in essentials pagans would find sympathy. Liberty, for instance, is not something self-evident but is more a question of adjudication between rival claims to freedom. And while the keeping of agreements is one thing, truth-telling is not always appropriate for particular situations. By understanding the subjectivity of morality as well as its contextualization, Mackie allows a fluidity for ethical decisions and activity that is centrally pagan.

In fact, a list of commandments written in stone is the antithesis of a pagan morality. The pagan gods are values, and the ultimate values – those that precede even the gods themselves – are the virtues (valor, honor, courage, justice, etc.) These translate to such undertakings as tolerance, love of nature and the body, respect for diversity and sensuality and so forth. Virtues themselves are never permanently fixed but are processes of perpetual development. If, however, for the pagan any single virtue remains incomplete in itself, it is instead as a seething complex of interaction, exchange, mutual dissolution and coalescence that a pantheistic cosmos finds its

³⁵Mackie (1977: 29): Concerning ethics, Mackie’s central thesis is that “there are no objective values,” and this is “specifically the denial that any ... categorical imperative element is objectively valid.”

³⁶Ibid. p. 34. Mackie does concede that if certain theological positions were true, then objective ethical prescriptions could have a foundation. However, he explicitly maintains that, “Since I think that theism cannot be defended, I do not regard this as any threat to my argument” (p. 48).

³⁷“I have argued that egoism is not immoral, but forms a considerable part of any viable moral system” (Mackie 1977: 190).

³⁸Ibid. p. 187.

completeness as a processual totality. Theism, the worship of a personal deity, even submission and surrender to a personal deity, takes place within the cosmos, is part of the cosmos, is at best a yielding to something that is a component of the cosmos – not to something that is other than, or even ‘greater’ than, the cosmos. For the pagan, it is the cosmos itself that is the ultimate – an ultimate that embraces perhaps many theisms or polytheism. To honor the cosmos, the pagan may bend the knee or nod the head but never to the exclusion of what is perceived as the foundational generating cosmic wish for each individual to stand upright, for each individual as well as humanity and every other viable individuality to stand out. Of course there are more preferable ways of ‘standing out’ or existing than others. The determinative feature in a ‘proper’ or commensurate standing out is aesthetic. The pagan will argue that aesthetics are the heart of ethics.

Mackie follows in the venerable tradition of moral skepticism. While he argues that morals are something made and maintained by human beings – especially human communities, there are admittedly fragments of morality – such as the making of agreements – that are already embedded in various social contexts. We do not, accordingly, have to create an ethical system from scratch. What is important is the need to have constraints upon the means we employ to achieve particular ends rather than agreement on the ends themselves. Moreover, there is already a quasi-universal concord concerning rejection of such ‘evils’ as murder, judicial injustice and treachery that it is reasonably to our best interest to retain.³⁹ The search remains, however, for some common basic moral principles that can provide a foundation for the widely different ideals that are still pursued. Nevertheless, in his argument for understanding morals as subjective and descriptive meanings rather than *a priori*, prescriptive, intrinsic and categorical imperatives (Plato’s eternal, extramental realities or abstractions), Mackie insists that moral argument cannot appeal to “any mythical objective values or requirements or obligations or transcendental necessities,” on the one hand, or to fictitious notions and/or measures of general utility or happiness, on the other.⁴⁰ In a stance that has been echoed by Grayling and that resonates with many if not most contemporary Western pagans, Mackie claims that despite the appeal of a theological foundation for ethics, as it is no more than “a bare theoretical possibility, . . . we shall in the end have to fall back on a purely secular morality.”⁴¹

Influenced perhaps in particular by Protagoras, Hobbes, Hume and Geoffrey J. Warnock, Mackie premises his analyses of moral difficulty as the result of limited

³⁹Mackie (1977: 167). Mackie, however, specifically excludes from his designation of ‘worthy evils’, upon which to construct a prevailing sense of morality, both ‘adultery’ and ‘apostasy’.

⁴⁰Ibid. p. 199. See also pp 23, 29, 40 & 236. Nevertheless, Mackie concedes that the objectification of moral values is both natural and a useful fiction that it might be dangerous to expose (239).

⁴¹Mackie (1977: 232). Mackie refers to Gertrude Elizabeth Anscombe’s argument that moral obligation, duty and the sense of ‘ought’ derive from outside the framework of belief in divine law (45). He also considers the ‘autonomy of ethics’, namely, that it can be investigated and evaluated without reference to religious beliefs (230). Anscombe’s publications include *Intention* (1957), *Ethics, Religion and Politics* (1981) and her three-volume *Collected Philosophical Papers* (1981).

resources and sympathies that generate rivalry and animosity between people and different communities.⁴² The human arena of competition, conflict and cooperation is then our situation in reality rather than one of some other sort based on wishful thinking or autocratic dictate, and for Mackie this is precisely as it should be and is to be welcomed. This is where the good life must be realistically pursued by all cogent players: competition is healthy and some conflict is inevitable. Similarly, for MacIntyre, “the existence of material scarcity, of physical dangers, and of competitive aspirations bring [*sic.*] both courage and justice or fairness on the scene.”⁴³ More focused on morality in the narrow sense, as a device for countering specific evils, than morality in the broad sense, as a system of rules for maximizing “a fictitious[ly] agreed or objectively determinable positive value, happiness or utility,”⁴⁴ Mackie claims that what is important are the rules that are actually recognized by the members of some social circle. He calls himself a rule-right-duty-disposition utilitarian/egoist⁴⁵ but insists that we are “free to mould or remould our moral system so as better to promote whatever it is that we do value.”⁴⁶

For Mackie, morality is the particular concern with “the well-being of active, intelligent, participants in a partly competitive life,” and the constraints that it imposes are the “necessary limits on competition for the benefit of all the competitors.”⁴⁷ This definition is not purely consequential but includes rules, duties, rights and dispositions, but Mackie allows that in itself this understanding of morality does not automatically include young children, the unborn, the yet-to-be-born, the aged, the sick, the infirm, the insane, the mentally defective and non-human animals. However, with the exception of those with permanent mental and/or physical defects as well as non-human animals who both remain outside the ‘core’ of morality, human well-being itself must include the care of children as well as provision for future generations – the other categories being covered by the mutual consideration involved with the dynamics of (possible) exchange in which a healthy person may become ill and *vice versa* and the young become old. But Mackie sees the two excluded groups as also covered – here by the vital role of humane dispositions that remain a central part of the core of morality and encourage the gratuitous extension of morality to these non-competitive players as well. In what would strike a chord for most pagans, he makes the claim that the natural delight in human flourishing includes delight in the flourishing of animal life – with the consequent need for moral checks on hunting for food and sport, on pollution, on factory farming and frivolous experimentation.⁴⁸

⁴²Ibid. 111. See further pp 120, 170, 176, 182, 228 & 236f. Warnock’s naturalistic ethics are presented in his *Contemporary Moral Philosophy* (1967) and *The Object of Morality* (1971).

⁴³MacIntyre (1998: 77).

⁴⁴Mackie (1977: 140).

⁴⁵Ibid. p. 199f. For Mackie’s rejection of rule utilitarianism itself and the myth of the utilitarian calculus, see pp 138f, 146.

⁴⁶Mackie (1977: 146).

⁴⁷Ibid. p. 193.

⁴⁸Mackie (1977: 194f).

Following in the tradition of Aristotle and Aquinas rather than that of Plato, Kant and the post-Kantian tradition, Mackie envisions the good life as that in which each individual pursues his or her own understanding of happiness or eudemonia. The fundamental goal or end or good of human life is comprised by a set of basic goods or primary human purposes – foremost of which are the ethical dispositions or virtues. In other words, morality becomes the object itself of the good life. This object or these objects, however, are not, according to Mackie’s moral subjectivism, objective values. They are relative to any given context, group or community; they are subjective concerns. But while the pagan is likely to agree that virtue is not a Platonic ideal – abstract, *a priori* and noumenal, she/he is willing to idolize subjective ideals into a metaphorical and quasi-ontological status that bridges the subjective-objective divide.

Though the virtues are certainly individually and culturally ‘invented’ or made, once made, they can assume for the pagan an operative independence. Mackie is confusing to the extent that he appears to fuse prescriptive, intrinsic values with the emotional and evaluative,⁴⁹ but what are emotions and evaluations other than subjective conditions and attitudes? As was briefly discussed in connection with Hume, reality for the pagan is both natural and ‘otherly’ natural, both empirical and trans-empirical, both substantive and metaphorical.

In the feedback process of something invented, made or coalesced, the ‘thing’ itself may have an effect on the inventor, maker or generating conditions – whether that thing is ontologically real or even just an imaginary illusion. The paranoid delusions of the schizophrenic are operative for the individual who has them. There is an operative effect the Christian God may have on those who believe in him. The proto-Indo-European postulated an operative non-existence or asurian that constituted the annihilative, entropic cosmic impetus.⁵⁰ In an ontological sense, the *asuras* do not exist, but they are operative, and various apotropaic rituals and myths were employed to diminish their influence. With ideals, values and virtues, by contrast, we have a different kind of existence yet one that is no less capable of operative influence and/or effect. In the pagan’s understanding of binary existence, then, we have both the ontologically real or empirical, on the one hand, and the preternatural, imaginal, hyperreal or ontologically trans-empirical, on the other. Deities and virtues belong to the latter. But inasmuch as the idol is something made and constructed by human artifice, so too are values and morals subjective in the sense that we humans have imagined and cultivated them. In the end, virtue ethics and the ethics of virtue live and are operative in both the developments of human culture and the idolatry of paganism.

⁴⁹Ibid. p. 23.

⁵⁰York (1995: 342f-n323).

MacIntyre

Culture, however, is a social phenomenon. And, in connection with society, Scottish philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre (b. 1929) raises a key issue concerning ethics, namely, the relationship between the individual and the state. He cites repeatedly the Platonic-Aristotelian focus on morality in social life – in contrast to the concern primarily with the individual by the Cynics, Cyrenaics, Epicureans and Stoics.⁵¹ Through the influence in particular of both Protestantism and capitalism, happiness has become less and less an aspect of social and political citizenship and more a product of individual psychology. Whereas both Plato and Aristotle were concerned with the *polis* or city-state and the citizen's role within it, ethical reflection has increasingly employed the individual as its frame of reference rather than the community in which the individual happens to live. In our modern era, in which the state becomes increasingly mammoth and intrusive into personal life, life itself becomes evermore a conflict between individual interest and governmental management. The ethical question relates to whether the locus of concern is with the person or the community. Depersonalization was not a problem for the thinkers of classical Greece, and the *polis* of Plato and Aristotle was comparatively a small community in comparison to the super-states of today's world. While there is an undoubted emphasis for Western pagans on individualism, both indigenous and contemporary paganism are essentially oriented to the local environment – and here we find a potential affinity with the city-state community of Aristotelian ethics and the underlying rationale for a seamless continuity between ethics and politics. With the complexities of population explosion, dwindling resources and authoritarian controls, the question remains all the same: when does the individual search for a way of life in compliance with political society, and when does she concentrate on finding her own way through the modern labyrinth – with at best a focus on the Stoic *cosmos*, the world and/or nature in general? When does one conform to a global system of politico-sectarian divide, and when does one resist it if and when effectual resistance is even possible?

In MacIntyre's reading, Kant's attempt to locate morality independent of the needs and desires of socially circumscribed human beings is most likely a search for an illusion.⁵² Discussing Hegel, MacIntyre finds that the German's answer to why

⁵¹For instance, "The Stoic is a citizen of the *κόσμος*, not of the *πόλις*" (MacIntyre 1998: 107).

⁵²Ibid. p. 198. MacIntyre levels similar criticisms against Joseph Butler (1692–1752), Claude-Adrien Helvétius (1751–71) and Denis Diderot (1713–84) and hails the Baron de Montesquieu (1689–1755) and Rousseau – especially the latter – for recognizing the impact of social and political institutions on human ethical behavior. "Men become selfish through the multiplication of private interests in an acquisitive society" (MacIntyre 1998: 187). But instead of attributing such selfishness to the inevitability of original sin, Rousseau seeks to understand human immorality and in so doing opens "the way for sociological hope to replace theological despair" (ibid. p. 189). See further for Butler: *Fifteen Sermons* (1726) and *The Analogy of Religion and Dissertation upon the Nature of Virtue* (1736); for Helvetius: *De l'esprit* (1758) and *De l'Homme, de ses facultés intellectuelles et de son education* (1172); for Diderot: *Lettre sur les aveugles* (1749), *Le Rêve*

contemporary Europeans are dissimilar to the ancient Greeks is because the rising Christian church managed to separate the individual from the state, but MacIntyre also sees that Hegel was the first to recognize that there is no one unchanging moral question. The question will always vary as the individual's social structure, times and conditions differ. At the same time, the obstacles perceived by the people of any time and place are what shape their aims and objectives and, hence, their very understanding of freedom – freedom being, for Hegel, “the core of characteristically human life.”⁵³

In the end, MacIntyre finds that the conflict between prescriptivists (those who assimilate moral commitment to the issuing and following of evaluative imperatives) and emotivists (those who hold ethical statements to be emotional expressions rather than assertions of truth or falsity) and the conflict between both and their critics are expressive of the contemporary social situation in which the moral vocabulary is void of meaning. One of the underlying problems that MacIntyre sees is that assertion is no longer backed or refuted by argument but confronted only by counter-assertion.⁵⁴ He does appear to accept the role delineated by Hare that ultimately it is the moral agent who is an arbitrary subject, that an ethical

d'Alembert (1730) and *Pensées sur l'interprétation de la nature* (1754) as well as his editorship of the prestigious *Encyclopédie* (1750–65); for Montesquieu: *Lettres persanes* (1721) and *De l'esprit des lois* (1748). For Rousseau, see Chap. 6. His major works include *Émile* (1762), *Du contrat social* (1762) and *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité parmi les homes* (1775).

⁵³MacIntyre (1998: 203). Hegel's works include *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (*The Phenomenology of Mind*, 1807), *Encyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse* (1817) and *Naturrecht und Staatswissenschaft im Grundrisse* (*The Philosophy of Right*, 1821). Hegel is, of course, and despite the obscurity of his language, one of the giants of philosophy, and his influence extends to Nietzsche, Emerson, Josiah Royce, the American pragmatists, the existentialists, the British idealists, Ernst Troeltsch, Edmund Husserl, Ludwig Feuerbach, Karl Marx, Karl Barth and the Neo-Kantians among others. In fact, as Richard Hoenigswald puts it, “Hegelianism, stripped of its inner confusions and contradictions, and methodologically clarified, is, with all its inherent limitations, one of the classical forms of philosophy” (*apud* Runes 1956: 257). Its theological implications are twofold and contradictory: a conservative Christian theism, on the one hand, and a self-determining pantheism, on the other – in which “God as the universal substance first achieves complete self-consciousness in mankind” (*ibid.* p. 242). For Hegel himself, however, according to MacIntyre, he came increasingly to consider his notion of the Absolute Idea or Spirit (*Geist*) in a manner analogous to the Christian belief in God and ordained providence, confusing symbol and concept, that is, as an invariable logical necessity (MacIntyre 1998: 210). Hegel's own absolutizing tendency is inherited by Marx and applied to economic forces.

But if Hegel posits a form of absolute idealism – with mind as the ultimate reality, it is arguably one that is not exclusive but rather embracive of materialism. In this manner, as spirit manifests and self-develops and culminates in its own self-consciousness, there is with Hegel an emphasis on a human individualism that is shaped by the changing environment. But it is Marx who transforms and grounds, so to speak, Hegel's narrative of historical conflict of nations as the striving of absolute, objective spirit/mind into a continual series of economic class conflicts that are to culminate in a totally rational human social order. But as MacIntyre recognizes, “we remain uncertain as to how Marx conceives it possible that a society prey to the errors of moral individualism may come to recognize and transcend them” (*ibid.* p. 214).

⁵⁴MacIntyre (1998: 261).

stance of any kind is a matter of self-choice, though he does acknowledge that the use of such words as ‘ought’ and ‘good’ implies the existence of standards and criteria of authority that we do not choose but simply accept. Among the collection of well-integrated moralities that we in the West have inherited, MacIntyre lists “Aristotelianism, primitive Christian simplicity, the puritan ethic, the aristocratic ethic of consumption, and the traditions of democracy and socialism”⁵⁵ – all mutually contradicting in one manner or another. The final problem, however, is seen to be one in which each position, whether that of Sartre, prescriptivist, emotivist or their critics, is one that seeks to absolutize moral concepts as if they were timeless and unhistorical. Instead, MacIntyre stresses that the value of the history of moral philosophy is precisely to show that rules, virtues and proposed ends are not fixed and permanent – that they are instead changing, they have histories, and that, understanding this, “is to be liberated from any false absolutist claims.”⁵⁶

While he appears to place more emphasis on the social context of the moral agent, MacIntyre shares with Mackie rather than Grayling the recognition of self-interest being at the heart of ethical consciousness and not something necessarily apart and in conflict. Though no permanent, objective and/or absolutist standards or values are forthcoming, as MacIntyre perceives, our social pasts bequeath parts of a moral vocabulary as frameworks in which we make our choices. Self-identity and self-interest are, however, not insulated capsules separate from all else. Following more in the line of Heidegger’s field theory of self, for moral consideration we can extend the personal self (let alone the multitude of roles the individual can and does assume) to include a greater self or selves. If the greatest self is humanity itself, between the individual self which every one has and the greatest self to which everyone belongs, there are the greater selves of community, association, nation and culture that both extend our identity and yet separate us into something other than the universal. But inasmuch as the ‘self/greater self/greatest self’ is a continuum, albeit along different pathways, for each of us, there is the possibility of moral sense and decision for the person in his and her encounters with the other. There is some point in which the other is no longer other but self, a point in which we become part of the same. Moral vision is that which allows the individual not to lose sight of the other, all the others, as self – the ‘greatest self’ of human nature as a thing-in-itself.

The difficulty, of course, is that between the self and greatest self, between self-interest and collective vision, there is that great plenitude of competing and conflicting greater selves. Each greater self consists of people who speak the same language, that is, they share the same values and general aspirations. If the ethical greater self is Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, humanist or secular, the one with which this book is concerned is the pagan – a community long misrepresented, ridiculed and ignored by the other religious and ethical greater selves that each remains convinced of its own intrinsic correctness. Our purpose in the next section of the present work is to present a suggestion of the pagan moral vocabulary in

⁵⁵Ibid. p. 266.

⁵⁶MacIntyre (1998: 269).

addressing how the pagan seeks to live and what it is toward which the pagan aims. As the pagan ethos is pluralistic, there can be no one set of principles or virtues to which each and every pagan subscribes. We will be looking instead to possible common axial denominators and shared values.⁵⁷ But inasmuch as paganism is not only pluralistic but itself must, and wishes to, flourish in a pluralistic world, already many of what we are permitted to discern as pagan values and virtues are qualities and dispositions shared with many of the other greater selves of the world and any possible melding into the greatest self of an overall harmonious and ascendingly questing humanity.

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⁵⁷Bron Taylor (2010) conceives of earthen spirituality as the common denominator or shared value not only for paganism in general but for a wider coalition that he labels 'dark green religion'. The sacred for Taylor is the biosphere which provides a "hybridized, evolutionary/ecological worldview [that] is spreading widely and rapidly." He sees this as essentially secular, "for this worldview does not require beliefs in invisible beings or cosmic processes" ("The Immanent Frame: Secularism, religion, and the public sphere: Civil earth religion versus religious nationalism": <http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/2010/07/30/civil-earth-religion/> [accessed 29 March 2014]). It is here where I differ from Taylor in what he understands as paganism. While we agree that contemporary paganism is predominantly concerned with bio-cultural evolution as well as maintaining or restoring the natural environmental balance of the planet, paganism is (1) less centered on belief than on what is done (*vide* Adler 1986: 20, 305 *et passim*) and (2), while retaining a strong secular element, is nevertheless oriented upon re-enchanting the world following its dis-enchantment through Christianity, market-driven capitalism and scientifically-inspired secularism (e.g., York 2003: 143f). It is the reverence for *both* the natural and the co-natural that I argue is the dynamic and *raison d'être* of paganism and, rather than belief in Apollo, etc., it is the related dynamic of *doing* Apollo, etc. in the active verbal sense that is important. For the Apollo, etc. metaphor, see below, Chap. 16.

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Part III
The Quest for an Applied Pagan Ethics

Chapter 8

Virtue Ethics

Any application of ethics for a pagan or pagan lifestyle is not a given but an ongoing and eventually unending quest. I have been a pagan for more years than I like to admit, and as a sociologist, I have come to learn to study various forms of pagan spirituality that have emerged over the last 30 or so years. This possibility was not always the case, and for decades I merely sought to find others of like-pagan-mindedness with whom to celebrate ancient festivals and converse together over shared feelings and recovered ways of thinking. For many years I frequented ancient pagan sites – especially for the *feriae* and sabbats – in unsuccessful hopes that I might encounter those very souls that I *knew* somehow had to exist. I was always intuitively convinced that I was not alone. It is today a much different world than it was in my younger years, and the present work is the result of both my professional development and my personal encounters with many within the broad pagan community whom I have come to feel privileged in many, many cases to call friends. The present formulation of pagan ethics and their applications is, of course, my own – one which is based not only on my academic research but also and principally on my own persistent reflections. If what I am advocating can be termed an ‘idolatrous pagan ethics’, it is because I employ the idolatry trope as a useful and accurate label for the corpo-spirituality or telluric materialism that for me significantly distinguishes a pagan way of thinking and religiosity from the other and more traditional religious constructs in our world. Learning a love of numerology from my mother, I understand the number 7 to represent the magical. In what I have come to consider to be the proto-deific foci belonging to the seminal origins of the European tradition, what I refer to as a ‘heptatheon’ or a pantheon of seven figures, I have in a parallel fashion conceived of seven virtue-values underlying the essentials of human concerns and ethics. As the human and pagan are for me virtually exchangeable adjectives, these virtues may also be approached as pagan ethics. These are, of course, suppositional and are being presented as offerings for reflective consideration. In the present chapter, I wish to address three different but to some extent overlapping formulations of virtue ethics, namely, the Christian, the Cardinal and my heptatheonic. In the following two chapters, I shall address

first what I discern as the core pagan and/or human concerns, namely, ‘the pagan *quadrivium*’ and next a subset (or *trivium*) of foci that are a part of what I term ‘worship’. Together, the *quadrivium* and *trivium* constitute an *heptatheon* of virtue-values.

In elaborating further on an ‘idolatrous pagan ethics’, we can see that the semantic development of the terms ‘idol’ and ‘idolatry’ may be traced in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Francis Bacon’s own inaccurate or disparaging use of the word follows that of Giordano Bruno in the sense of natural human prejudices that obstruct the advancement of truth.¹ As we have already seen, however, in a pluralistic world, truth itself is often contextual. Employing the word ‘idol’ in its early sense of ‘specter’ or ‘apparition’, Jewish and Christian thought developed the connotation of an ‘image of a false god’. Here again, we are permitted to recognize a value judgment. But if the Abrahamic condemns paganism as idolatry, paganism in turn rejects the Judeo-Christian condemnation in order to restore the idol as a positive, usually – but not always – material expression: a tangible reality that is godhood and represents godhood. What the idol is for the pagan is a vehicle – a vehicle that embodies the divine or represents it or both. The pagan idol, wherever it is encountered, serves as a reminder of the deity for whom it serves as vehicle. Whether it is the oak of Dodona, the statue of Pallas Athena or the whole of nature, the physical vehicle assists the worshiper in his or her encounter with sacred particularity.

One key thing about pagan spirituality as it differs from the religious outlooks of other faith traditions is that paganism in all its various forms, whether panentheistic, pantheistic, polytheistic or atheistic, always considers – or at least includes – the physical as sacred. And inasmuch as the tangible is accepted as divine and/or a vehicle of the divine, this is idolatry – if not the worship, at least the revering, of an object or idea that is other than whatever is postulated as ‘the absolute’. Consequently, if paganism is idolatry, we have been concerned broadly so far with the moralities of paganism or what we are permitted to call the ethics of idolatry. But there is another way to approach our subject that is peculiarly pagan and involves the organic flexibility of paganism at its most dynamic intersection between the human and the miraculous. This is what we may term the idolatry of ethics.

When we turn to the prescriptive, to the applied side of morality, when we endeavor to suggest possible codes of behavior commensurate with and endorsable by paganism, within a pagan framework, we are not just constructing lists of abstractions but are standing forth virtual pantheons – assemblies of deifications. If such an approach might be labeled childish play by paganism’s traditional and conservative opponents, it remains a *jeu de coeur* with which a pagan might find resonating enjoyment. And yet, despite the game-like parameters involved, the idolatry of ethics is for a pagan not only a serious matter in the navigation of life and the progressive fulfillment of human aspiration, it is dealing with the *most* serious

¹Devey (1911; 235ff & passim).

matter, namely, what do we aim for and how should we live – both as individuals and as a collectivity?

Since no tradition or, to use the term employed in the previous chapter, ‘greater self’ lives in a vacuum, pagan ethics will always want to consider the contributions of the other world faiths to the moral arena. Some positions will be dismissed outright; others will merit consideration, perhaps even acceptance. As many of our ethical terms and, indeed, the names of the virtues are pagan in origin, there is already a sharing from paganism into the ethical codes of other religions. So it always remains an open question whether this exchange is not, and at least cannot be, a two-way process.

The Muslim stress on brotherhood and equality, despite the latent gender implications in both terminology and practice, is appealing in general. But certainly the central notion of obedience in Islam, and embodied even its name, is unlikely ever to garner much favor for a pagan outlook. By contrast, the emphasis in Buddhism, especially Mahayana Buddhism, on wisdom and compassion is something that many pagans find attractive and wish to incorporate among their goals and values in one way or another. The case for Christianity is more ambiguous.

As MacIntyre sees, “Christianity introduced even more strongly than the Stoics did the concept of every man as somehow equal before God.”² ‘Aristocratic’ pagans, wishing conformity to Nietzsche’s condemnation of social leveling, are unlikely to subscribe to equality as a goal, but vernacular pagans as well as pagans in general will be much more sympathetic as a rule. Equality is no privileged preserve of Christianity alone. Both Islam and secularism endorse egalitarianism, and we need for the later only to recall the French motto of *liberté, égalité et fraternité*. However, the notion of moral commandments and especially the idea of moral goodness comprised by obedience are virtually anathemas to a pagan way.

As Aquinas came to modify Aristotelian virtues, in Christianity humility assumed a more central role. There is an irony with Christian meekness, however – one that stems from the same kind of dichotomy to be found elsewhere between the espousal of principle and the actuality of practice. What is most offensive to pagans and other non-Christians around the world is the smug righteousness that may be expressed within Christian corners. Christian arrogance is often any thing but humble. And yet, this being said, there are many people who identify as Christian and uphold its virtues including humility. The former United States President Jimmy Carter is one such person who comes to mind. Carter is a devout Baptist, but in his case his Christian faith has not thwarted but instead augmented his intelligence, graciousness and profound international outreach. Although it cost him re-election, he stayed true to his principles and refused the consensus of his advisers to pursue war with Iran in the wake of the hostage crisis involving the 1979 seizing of more than 60 Americans from the US Embassy in Tehran by a group of Iranian students.

²MacIntyre (1998: 115).

As a result, many innocent Iranian lives were spared as well as all those of the hostages.³

Another Thomist addition to Aristotle's virtues is that of 'religion' or Christian piety – the "disposition to perform the practices of due worship."⁴ Piety as such is not usually considered a pagan virtue, though the irony here is that *pietas* was indeed a virtue among the pagan Romans. Originally the goddess of domestic affection, Pietas became the personification of piety and is mentioned as such in the ancient Roman calendars.⁵ According to Fowler, *pietas* in the "sense of duty to family, State, and Deity" became "Virgil's word for religion, as it had been Cicero's in his more exalted moments."⁶ Related to the epithet *pious* which originally designated the person who conforms to the *ius divinum*, the will of the gods, *pietas* "differs from *religio*, which is not a virtue but a feeling."⁷ With Aquinas, however, religion itself becomes a virtue. Nevertheless, the words 'pious' and 'piety' have suffered in Fowler's estimation because of the damage done to them through Puritan sanctimoniousness. In their original pagan context, they were in conformity to MacIntyre's linking of morality to socio-political life and expressed the obligation and duty one felt toward both family and state.

The Three Christian Virtues

A similar situation concerning the transformation of a pagan principle to a Christian one is to be found with two of the three 'supernatural' virtues that Christianity added to the natural ones of strength, temperance, prudence and justice, namely, those of faith, hope and charity.⁸ Both 'Faith' (*Fides*) and 'Hope' (*Spes*) have pagan Roman credentials – the latter possessing a shrine or temple in the *forum holitorium* (vegetable market) and the former receiving an important sacrifice on the Capitol.⁹ Among the Romans, Fides is the personification of the honor involved in preserving an oath or promise. She is the female equivalent of the Dius Fidius or god of faith – perhaps originally an epithet belonging to Jupiter. Along with such other deified abstractions as Salus, Concordia, Mens and Honos et Virtus, Spes and Fides represent "pontifical creations in the spirit of the old Roman impersonal and

³See, e.g., <http://www.history.com/topics/iran-hostage-crisis> (accessed 30 March 2014).

⁴MacIntyre (1998: 118).

⁵The *Fasti Antiaties Maiores, Amitemini* and *Magistrorum Vici*. See York (1986: 39, 184f). Pietas also possessed a temple in Rome.

⁶Fowler (1971: 409, 412).

⁷Ibid. p. 462.

⁸I Corinthians 13:13.

⁹York (1986: 171–173). Spes is mentioned in the *Fasti Antiaties Maiores* and *Vallenses*; Fides, in the *Fasti Antiaties Maiores, Ostienses, Amitemini, Fratrum Arvalium* and *Paulini*.

daemonic ideas of divine agency.”¹⁰ Of these, Fides is considered to be the oldest. However, because of the Christian appropriation of these deity or abstraction names and assimilation to the Pauline admonition in the New Testament, both ‘faith’ and ‘hope’ have acquired a different onus and association for the non-pagan world of today than what they had among the pre-Christian Romans. With the one referring to faith in the Christian religion and the other to hope in Christian salvation, neither term remains popular for present-day pagans, and the ethical quest is perhaps better conducted without them. Nevertheless, we might still keep in mind that Fides, along with Pax, Honos, Pudor and Virtus, was among the public virtues of Rome.¹¹ We might further note since both Fides and Spes are occasionally conjoined with Fortuna, eventually referring to a person’s condition or wealth, Fowler finds that the “Romans seem from the earliest times to have believed in character than fortune as the supreme good; *virtus* can counteract *fortuna*.”¹²

We find a different situation with Paul’s Christian virtue of love or charity. The Septuagint translation of the Old Testament Hebrew terms *ahabah* (noun) and *aheb* (verb) is *agape* (noun) and *agapan* (verb). Augustine translates *agape* in Latin as *caritas* and contrasts it radically with *cupiditas* (Greek *eros*). Augustine, obviously influenced by Plato’s *Symposium* distinction between *ouranios eros* (‘heavenly love’) and *pandemos eros* (‘vulgar love’),¹³ creates a dichotomy between love and lust that has persisted throughout Christianity ever since. Consequently, we have someone like Anders Nygren separating *agape* from all kinds of natural human love with his claim that “Christian love has nothing to do with desire and longing,” or Karl Barth likewise asserting that *agape* is in antithesis to every other type of love.¹⁴ What we have here is the Church’s desire to distinguish a Christian’s love for God and neighbor from both erotic love and even humanistic paganism’s intellectual love, and there is little doubt – being given the choice between these – which way a pagan is apt to choose.

But the *agape* of the New Testament and in the Hebrew predecessor of the Old retains in itself an element of sensuousness, and even Paul uses the verb *agapan* when he advises husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the Church.¹⁵ The particular division between ‘divine love’ and ‘human love’ or, more broadly, love and lust is an Augustinian/Platonic legacy that can be traced further through Luther, Kierkegaard, Nygren and Barth.¹⁶ It is one that proclaims human powerlessness

¹⁰Fowler (1899: 341).

¹¹Fowler (1971: 446).

¹²Fowler (1914: 66).

¹³Plato, *Symposium* 180d-181d (Waterfield 1994: 13f).

¹⁴Nygren (1953: 210.236); Barth (1956: 740).

¹⁵Ephesians 5:25; cf. Colossians 3:19.

¹⁶Even earlier, the sacrament of marriage had little to do with love for the medieval Church. “For in the Middle Ages marriage, sanctified by the Church, was a socio-political arrangement, bearing no relationship to the mystery and wonder of love” (Campbell 1964: 509). The emotional glorification of love was left instead, Campbell explains, to the troubadours and the feudal court.

without the *agape* of God. But without a fabricated bifurcation, love is both erotic and spiritual, sensual and intellectual, and it is in this more unified and organic sense that it is a value for pagans. Instead of conflict and defeat of the one by the other, in paganism there is no necessary clash between “*cupiditas*, the desire for earthly things . . . [and] *caritas*, the desire for heavenly.”¹⁷ In fact, for a pagan if not others as well, when the erotic and trans-erotic can be directed simultaneously or unitarily toward a beloved in a relational or marital sense, one of life’s greatest pleasures is to be located. Beyond this, if not inclusive of this, Aristotle, drawing on a different Greek word (*filia* ‘friendship’), transforms Plato’s *eros*-love which leads supposedly to the transcendence of desire and corporeal form into *philia*-love which is seen as the very foundation of the ethical state.

The Seven Pagan Virtues, the *Heptatheon* of Virtue-Values

Consequently, the Christian virtues of faith, hope and love are not beyond pagan acceptance and reinterpretation or restoration – especially the sense of *caritas* as ‘charity’ which pagans endorse as they likewise share in the Buddhist virtue of compassion. And, indeed, there are pagans who would prefer these particular designations as their chosen ideals – as there have been and still are those who would exalt instead the cardinal virtues of fortitude, temperance, wisdom and justice. In fact, as I have tried to stress elsewhere, there can be no definitive or universal list – or pantheon – of codified pagan virtues. But with that being said, I want to suggest now a fourfold range of values – if not of virtues themselves, a quadrivium that is inclusive of virtue, that I argue is also inclusive of all the other possible choices of ethical desiderata. Before elaborating on each of these in the chapter that follows, I want first simply to posit that the unifying goals of human behavior in general and pagan desires in particular are those for freedom, comfort, health and worship. This last is the most complex and perhaps the most controversial – if and when at least our puritan heritages do not force us automatically to exclude any importance for comfort. I take worship both in its traditional but, of course, non-Christian meaning and in its etymological sense as literally the making or creating of value. Worship, as I understand, is the honoring of the gods through appreciation of them and their gifts. These last are foremost life itself and nature as well as all that these entail. For a pagan, there is no wish to escape from life and no desire to lose sight of the wondrousness of nature as *Pandora* the ‘all-giver’.

¹⁷MacIntyre (1998: 117). The irony would be all the greater if *caritas* and *carnis* ‘flesh’ derived from the same radical stem, but neither Watkins (1969: 1520, 1539) nor Shipley (1984: 152, 177f) hold this to be the case. Nevertheless, both trace *caritas* to a root *ka-* signifying ‘to like, desire’ and thereby indicate a more earthly origin for the Latin concept than its Christian sublimation would otherwise indicate – especially if, as Watkins contends, the English word ‘whore’ is also a product from the same root.

For a pagan, Aristotle's use of the word *eudaimonia* expresses the very relationship between honoring the gods and being under their benign influence as a reciprocal exchange. Ultimately, it may not matter whether the good (*'αγαθός*) leads to happiness or happiness leads to the good. When we are speaking of ethics, for all practical purposes, they may be accepted as one and the same. Pleasure and virtue are not to be equated with either happiness or the good or both. Both are components of the sevenfold dynamic – a heptatheon of virtue-values – that leads to well-being in terms of happiness and/or the good life. We must remember now that we have turned from meta-ethics to the applications of ethics, from theory and rational investigation to differentiating a moral code of behavior – whether pagan or something more universal.

Apart from any mantric/mantic dynamic toward which the virtue-values might be employed in a talismanic sense – akin perhaps at best to the Hindu and Buddhist employment of sacred *mantras*, repeated liturgical formulas that have positive effect, the pagan ethical framework is defined by the key notions of value, virtue and vigor. In a sense, these are the elements and common denominators behind the heptatheonic principles of freedom, comfort, health, worship, pleasure, generation and generosity. And for each of these, we learn illuminating insights through their respective etymologies, what I have elsewhere termed 'seminal etymology'.

Let us look first at vigor. The root from which the word derives is **weg-*signifying 'to be strong, lively'. It gives rise to a range of important words: Latin *vigēre* 'to be lively or vigorous', *vigil* 'watchful, awake', *vēlōx* 'fast'; English *vigor*, *vegetable*, *velocity*, *awake* and *watch*.¹⁸ Another word in this complex is the Sanskrit *vajra*– the lightning bolt and chief attribute of the Vedic Indra, corollary of the Greek/Roman Zeus-Jupiter. In Buddhism, the Vajra becomes the very emblem of enlightenment. For pagans, it is the divine force that annihilates sterility and fructifies the quickening powers of the earth. The overall idea is one of vital wakefulness – all of which is encapsulated in the notion of vigor as active physical and/or mental strength.

This notion of fortitude or strength we find again underlying the concept of value itself. The word 'value' is a derivative of the Latin *valēre* 'to be strong, to be of value'. We are allowed to see, therefore, that values are strengths – whether these strengths are personal, social or even political. There is an underlying impression of energy beneath the ideas of both vigor and value – one that carries through to the whole notion of virtue as well. This last is a word that descends from the Latin word for 'man' (*vir*). This is not an indication that virtues are masculine or necessarily manly: the Latin *virtūs* 'manliness, strength, capacity' is in fact a feminine word, i.e., *Virtus* is a goddess. What this origin does reflect, however, is an earlier times in which protection from the vagaries and violence of nature was achieved primarily through manly strength or courage. In tracing the Greek word *'αγαθός* 'good', a cognate of *'αρετή* 'virtue', MacIntyre delineates its original Homeric context in which it designated the virtues or strengths of courageousness, cleverness and

¹⁸York (1995: 536f).

kingliness.¹⁹ MacIntyre's ultimate point is that moral concepts change as social life itself changes, but in locating common denominators and root constellational ideas beneath the historical changes that accompany variations in place particular and time specific functions we are afforded a more grounded perspective if and when we can take on board the original significances of the words we use.

Consequently, the feature that links the framing notions of value, virtue and vigor together is that of courage, strength or energy. Possibly related to the Latin word for man (*vir*) is the English word *vim*. This last, the expression for ebullient vitality and energy, derives from the Latin accusative of *vīs* 'power, force, energy'. The Indo-European root for *vir*, namely *wiros*, may also be related to the radical behind *vīs* – **wei-* signifying 'vital force'.²⁰ What we learn from looking into the origins of these centrally significant words in the domain of ethics is the connection of virtue with strength or energy. The virtues to be virtues must be dynamic. They cannot languish on the margins of insipidity. They are active activities intimately connected with the force and reality of life itself. The ultimate implication here is that an immoral person is as valueless as a dead person. Virtue-values are the roots to life – constituting the rationale of life, the direction of life: for human life without direction is as valueless as no life at all.

The Four Cardinal Virtues

We have already seen that strength of courage is recognized as one of the four classic virtues. Specifically, fortitude refers to the moral strength to deal with adversity and pain. In some sense, the constellation of fortitude is the most important – for without strength, without energy, there is no motivation, indeed, there is no motion. If there is no strength whatsoever, there is simply stasis – whether oblivion or the nightmare of unchanging imprisonment. But the classic pagan, distinguishing the supreme importance of strength or courage, balanced this with the other virtues of temperance, prudence and justice.

While courage is pivotal as the ability to stand up against danger, intimidation, fear and injustice, one needs the wisdom of prudence to assess the situation soberly and accurately and not to fall into Aristotle's location of the excess of bravery, namely, fool-heartiness. Here we are considering carefulness, thoughtfulness, vigilance and discretion – all the aspects of prudent reflection and discrimination. And when we consider that the word 'prudence' is a contraction of 'providence', we are able to discern that the underlying idea behind wisdom is foresight – the ability to assess and understand a situation in advance of its happening rather than *ex post facto*. In other words, it is the ability to select a suitable course of action – one that

¹⁹MacIntyre (1998: 6f).

²⁰Watkins (1969: 1548, 1550).

is the most likely to achieve the ends desired. The prudent person tends not to rely on chance but acts discretely and on the basis of practical wisdom.

Another check on brute strength, however, is the cardinal virtue of temperance. Both Epicurus and Aristotle praised the moderation of desires and appetites in achieving and sustaining a good, happy or pleasurable life. The strong, energetic and/or courageous person is one who is sober, even frugal and certainly self-restrained. Through wisdom, he or she knows how to moderate the exercise of power or a strong position. Temperance is the virtue of self-mastery in the face of passion, undue temptation and provocation.

The fourth cardinal virtue is justice (*δικαιοσύνη*). Virtue for the Stoics comprised all four of the traditional virtues. One could not possess one without possessing all four.²¹ For the individual, justice concerns the respect of the rights and equity of others. It refers to impartial and fair exchange with other people or sentient beings. For MacIntyre, justice “combines the notion of fairness in externals with that of personal integrity.”²² Plato, of course, devotes the entire *Republic* to answering the question, what is justice? While platonic justice for the individual is knowing and fulfilling one’s own function, Hume considers it an artificial virtue,²³ and in essence justice is more a political value than a personal one. Of the cardinal virtues, justice is the one that most concerns the state or social polity. Likewise, among the septivium virtues, those of freedom, comfort and health – while of course being personal interests – are or correctly ought to be the chief foci of political government. We do not want to forget how Aristotle considered politics the continuation and summation of ethics. But for the individual in today’s world, justice is primarily the capacity for fairness in any exchange with others. It is perhaps best summed up in the Golden Rule.²⁴

But if the virtues of moderation, prudence and fairness act as balances or checks on strength or fortitude, they are also offered as compensations when the strength of youth declines. As we grow older, the powers of the libido tend to diminish and one’s prowess in physical matters is not what it once was. The confidence and inexhaustible reservoir of youthful energy are not and can no longer be the source of virtue that the connection of strength with value and vigor etymologically suggest. It is at this stage of life that the other cardinal virtues come increasingly to the fore. The sagacity of widening perspective allows the vision of wisdom that the impetuosity of youth often precludes. Prudence allows or even encourages – if the declining bodily vitality does not on its own – a preference for more moderate behavior. And, finally, the fruits of one’s labors, the expense of earlier energies, materialize as one’s

²¹MacIntyre (1998: 106).

²²Ibid. p. 11.

²³Hume *Treatise* 3.2.1; Mackie (1977: 110).

²⁴Christianity states this as: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Judaism and Islam have similar versions, but even Buddhism states: Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful.

just rewards. There is, however, still the call for courage – the courage to face the unknown in the impending extinction of personal life.

Much has been written on the classic pagan virtues, and they continue to circumscribe a pragmatic and complete dispositional guide to overall well-being and the possibility of a good or happy life. Christianity added the three theological virtues to come up with seven virtues in all – perhaps mainly as counterparts to the seven deadly sins, but for the pagan, the cardinal virtues are the original four rather than the amended seven. The notion of cardinal, however, suggests the cardinal directions of east, south, west and north. Masonic ritual associates the east with wisdom, the west with strength, the south with beauty and the north with darkness. If there were directional associations with cardinal virtues, considering the primacy of fortitude, it would be more likely that this virtue would be the one that is connected with the east. However, whatever the actual associations between the cardinal virtues and the cardinal directions might be if any, the addition of the Christian theological virtues suggests converting a crossroads into a sphere – with faith in Christ being above (heaven), hope for salvation being below (the netherworld), and Christian love in the center. Needless to say, pagans would dispense with the notions of both hope and faith in this sense and would replace the Christian transformation of love with desire – even passion – as the *fons et origo* of all being.²⁵ In other words, rather than considering *agape* as an antithesis to every other type of love in the center of things, where the individual himself/herself stands, a pagan would centralize a love, charity or compassion that begins with the dynamics of desire but includes the erotic as well as the other positive emotions that relate self to other. What this means is that pagans emphasize the force of attraction as a unifier rather than something that divides and separates – especially as something that divides and separates from the earth and all her glories.

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Chapter 9

The Pagan *Quadrivium*

The term ‘quadrivium’ is purely my own, and I am employing it as a designation for what I discern as fundamental human concerns – which for me renders them automatically ‘pagan’ interests as well. These concerns are what shape and motivate our activities, and implicitly they call forth standards of behavior that delineate what we might choose to do in attempting to live life rightly and appropriately. Consequently, I am seeking here to suggest a code of norms as a formulation of applied ethics. This code that is herewith discussed in the present chapter concerns our human desires for freedom, comfort, health and specifically honor but more broadly what I prefer to designate as worship. I will begin with freedom under which the consideration includes political freedoms and personal freedoms as well as pagan freedoms. But it is important I feel to make clear that my discernment of the core concerns and/or values of life derives from my own life experiences as well as more than 30 years of encounter with contemporary pagan communities and pagan substrata in non-European societies. This and the following chapter reflect my personal reflections both as a person who identifies as pagan and one who has sought active relationships with other pagans.

My personal evaluations as well as explorations are those with which I expect many – both pagan and non-pagan – to disagree, but they are presented as part of the ethical debate in which we might all be considered to be involved as well as my own attempt to suggest what might be a good life and one commensurate with worthy aims on which to concentrate both personally and collectively. With the less clear but infinitely more challenging notion of honor, I have turned in particular to what others might designate for themselves as an honorable person – thereby augmenting my own speculations and considerations on the very quality that I will argue is of fundamental importance if not *the* most fundamental in importance.

Freedom

Freedom, like the other value virtues of the ethical quadrivium, is a difficult concept to define. What is freedom? It may be as impossible to answer this question as it is the one concerning justice. There are invariably two sides to the question involving liberty: freedom from something, and freedom to do something.¹ The nuances are endless, and all is set against the ultimate question of whether we have freedom of will, freedom of choice, or whether our course is predetermined and inevitably already set.

Platonists and Stoics, as well as many others, hold to the notion of a divine plan. A plan, however, presupposes a preexisting idea. Spinoza appears to translate this idea into a doctrine of determinism. For the majority of pagans, however, it is possible that a preset divine plan makes no sense. At best, we would be simply playing out our positions as actors perform their stage roles in enacting a dramatic play for the theater. Who would be the author of the overall drama of life? And, perhaps even more to the point, who would be its audience?

While there are always exceptions, in my own by and large experience, most pagans would appear to accept that life has no prearranged purpose. It is spontaneous and perhaps even largely accidental. Instead of a divine plan as some sort of preordained script, pagans appear to hold more to the notion of a divine process – one in which divinity is unfolding and developing itself with no inevitable rules or pre-selected directions. Life is procedural rather than pre-arranged. It is for this reason that contemporary complexity theory might appeal to pagans. The spontaneity of self-organization into greater and more complex wholes is the natural way of nature – allowing for retro-diction instead of prediction, that is, the retracing of why something worked out as it has rather than forecasting in advance exactly how things are to turn out.

What often does seem inevitable is conflict. As a world grows more complex – let alone crowded with only limited resources, continual diversification seems invariably to lead to increasing competition and clash. If we follow Hegelian logic of a thesis engendering an antithesis that ultimately becomes a synthesis that, in turn, inevitably necessitates another antithesis, this would, on its own, presuppose a cosmos of endless discord and tension. Without the idealism of Hegel or even Marx, there can be no final resolution to such endless divergence. For most pagans, there is no external absolute, no *a priori* ideal, no utopian state that exists either outside the cosmic process or at the end of the road of time to rectify the inevitable and ceaseless struggle and differentiation of individual and opposing wants. There is no

¹Another way to consider freedom is to distinguish between positive freedom (Plato, Spinoza, Rousseau, Kant and Hegel) having to do with self-determination and autonomy, on the one hand, and negative freedom (Bentham, Hobbes, Locke and Hume) referring to the situation in which a person is free from the interference or coercion of others. Positive freedom is the liberty *for* something, the ability to do what one chooses. Negative freedom is freedom from constraint, intimidation or prevention *by* others.

divine plan but only process. But again, for a pagan, this process is itself divine – the perpetual divine becoming and self-fulfillment. A pagan can maintain that the only onus is to *trust* the process. Herein lies, in addition, the fundamental source for a pagan’s proclivity toward idolatry. A pagan is not one who looks outside ‘the system’ but within. Reflection within the cosmic organism is a form of self-reflection, part of the feedback looping process described by complexity theory, in which the dynamic of change and growth is located through the worship of the organism or any holographic aspect of the organism rather than with any denial of, or longing for escape from, the organic process that is our cosmos.

But if we project to any kind of final bottom line, we might be able to discern that cosmic conflict is ultimately one between the nightmare and ceaseless anguish of struggle and battle, on the one hand, and the aesthetics of harmonious cooperation and adjustment, on the other. We can always imagine a situation in which these two possibilities are equally deadlocked – with no *deus ex machina* to intervene and break the stalemate. In such an equal division, one in which the forces of entropy and dissolution are fully balanced by those of growth and concord, there is one and only one additional factor, namely, will. It is here that we find not only the source of the entire cosmic impetus but also its salvational future. It is in will both as origin and as the prerogative of sentience that we find freedom. Whatever liberty we have as individuals and social collectivities is to be found in and through our abilities to exercise will – our capacity to wish and, finally, to bring that wishing to fruition. Our full freedom is the full process, but an important part of that process, indeed, I would argue, *the* most important part, is the initial will itself, the energy to wish and want. It is for this reason that desire is as central to the pagan ethos as it is. It is the heart of a pagan’s religion; it is his or her *raison d’être*; it is the locus within which a pagan finds liberty.

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But let us return to the notion of freedom itself. In its fundamental assertion, freedom refers to emancipation from imprisonment, captivity and slavery. As a prisoner, captive or slave, this is precisely when we are *not* free. The range of choice is radically reduced – if it exists at all. Self-determined motion is denied. The classic convict, war-conquered and person owned by another are the bottom line against which the state of freedom is determined. It is these conditions of interference that allow us to explore the further extensions of the concept of liberty – both in actuality and as metaphors for many other situations in which the human individual may find himself/herself.

In all applications of the term, however, at least for a pagan, freedom is never an absolute in and of itself. It is always contextual and always suggests further directions toward greater freedom rather than any permanent condition of ‘greatest freedom’. In other words, freedom is not an independent *a priori* ideal of abstraction but an immediate assessment of any given state of being – an assessment that always remains open-ended. There can be no fixed state of liberty. It is instead a dynamic process of perpetual change.

As already mentioned, freedom is either the absence of restriction – freedom *from* something – or the presence of an unimpeded ability – the freedom *to do* something – or both. One is free from imprisonment, bellicose defeat, bondage, the control by another, illness, loneliness, poverty, hunger, boredom, pain, meaninglessness or any other innumerable countless unpleasant conditions. One may also be free to travel, to vote, to marry, to have a say over one’s own life or even simply to change one’s mind over a matter or in the overall course of one’s life. In this way, freedom is both a circumstance that is detached from a negative and one that is for, or permits, a positive. We understand liberty in terms of free thought, free will and individualism.

Consequently, freedom or liberty as the central pagan virtue is one that connects and supports the other moral conditions almost as a common denominator between all ethical disposition and achievement.² But, as we shall see, while the virtues and liberty are mutually supportive and encouraging of each other, they can and do sometimes entail choices between them. Is one free to choose comfort, for instance, over freedom, or must one choose freedom over all other possibilities? Moral dilemma is one side of the perpetual ethical question. The idea of compensation is the other. There are times in which we are not free, just as there are times we are not comfortable or healthy. When a disposition or valuable condition is absent, the other virtues may, and may have to, act as substitutes and recompense. Nevertheless, in the pagan’s navigation of life and the possibility that fewer virtues may be available in any particular time and place rather than the full spectrum, it is always freedom that is held to be the most sacred – the *primus inter pares*. Liberty is the pagan virtue *par excellence*.

Political

It is through the peculiarity and centrality of liberty to the whole pagan ethical agenda and *raison d’être* that morality interconnects with both politics and spirituality. Liberty is most significantly a political question, and, as such, it lies at the heart of any and all efforts toward democracy. At the same time, especially for those with gnostic or dharmic inclinations, liberty is identified as enlightenment – whether the Hindu *moksha* or *samadhi*, the Buddhist *nirvana* or the Stoic *apatia*. Each of these

²We seek naturally to be free from discomfort, from pain, from disease as well as from error, dishonor, emptiness and stinginess. Each of the quadrivium or heptatheonic values may be understood as an expression or instance of freedom itself. The virtues, thereby, are the aim for anyone who seeks autonomous independence as part of a life of happiness or general well-being. And the virtues are best cultivated by the free agent – someone not burdened by upset, infirmity and/or disgrace and certainly someone not subject to the rule or control of another.

directions, the political and the religious, opens up the question concerning freedom to important considerations in determining the life of well-being or happiness and the right course of correct behavior.³

But for the issue of freedom, the issue of property implies that liberty itself must be modified by other ethical considerations. If liberty is the most important, it is not the only virtue there is but must operate as a consortium with the other value considerations that belong to the overall human situation. In other words, a pagan in today's world, as much as he or she might wish to, cannot agree with Socrates' opponent Gorgias in Plato's dialogue by the same name that 'ελευθερία ('freedom') as the supreme good means the latitude to have one's desired way in everything.

A pagan recognizes that nature, however all-bountiful she may be, does not permit us our own ways in all we might want – even under the best of situations. For one, there are natural limitations to how long we can live. We are not immortal, at least within the human vehicles we presently enjoy on this earth here and now. But, secondly, there are limited resources for our planetary existence, and we are bound as a result to cooperate and share a properly managed estate if we do not wish to war and inflict loss, death and destruction on others as well as ourselves in the process. Once again, freedom is contextual. There is no absolutely free state, and this last is precluded by the 'laws' of physical existence if not by moral/aesthetic concerns as

³We have already noted that both Plato and Aristotle, let alone Nietzsche and many others, had little regard for democracy itself – most seeing that rule by the mediocre leads to a more pernicious form of tyranny and inevitably the worst possible outcome. The property-less many are seen to be too small-minded and limited by a sense of envy and desire for revenge that precludes the wise decision that is required from democracy and on which it is dependent if democracy were to succeed as a viable process of political decision-making. Within the philosophical tradition, it is John Locke who is perhaps most connected with liberal democracy. Like Aristotle and Cicero, Locke believes in the ownership of private property as a vitally important natural right. He also subscribes to the social contract theory by which human beings, facing the inevitability of disputes between themselves, allegedly agree to submission to legislative and executive authority over themselves for the protection of their natural rights – including those to property. By arguing that civil law is valid only if enacted by majority vote of a citizenry in which each individual has guaranteed equal rights in the determination process, Locke is arguing for the legitimacy of democratic government.

There are difficulties with some of Locke's assumptions – both the principle that a person has exclusive rights to his own person and to the product of his own labor, and the doctrine of tacit consent, namely, that "every man, that hath any possessions, or enjoyment, of any part of the dominions of any government, doth thereby give his tacit consent, and is as far forth obliged to obedience to the laws of that government" (Locke, *Second Treatise of Civil Government* 8.119 – Locke 1690). As MacIntyre (1998: 159) elucidates, this doctrine is important because it is the one on which every modern state rests – every state "which claims to be democratic, but which like every state wishes to coerce its citizens." Aristotle's pragmatic solution to any equal deadlock between property owners and non-property owners in the democratic process is to award the final decision to the former since they have more at stake. Cicero (*On Duties* 2.24.85; Grant 1971: 169) insists that a liberal government is one that guarantees each of its citizens the security of property ownership: "They must ensure that poor men are not swindled because they are poor. But they must equally guarantee that rich men are not prevented, by envious prejudice, from keeping [or recovering] what is theirs." The issue of property, therefore, becomes central to the very notion of democracy, and the ethical implications of this issue are manifold.

well. In other words, physicality carries with it the burden of inherent limitations – one that most pagans are willing to accept for the very experience of life, but, in addition to this, freedom is further conditioned by the social and political situation itself. This last is always a consideration, therefore, in determining the good life, what one ought to do in pursuit of it, and the related role of liberty toward the ends and means involved. In discussing Hegel, MacIntyre stresses that freedom is place and time specific and is invariably defined through whatever obstacles are perceived by men and women of the time and place concerned.⁴

Self-determination is the political issue of the late twentieth/early twenty-first century. Who has the right to be free? When should a country be allowed to be divided, as occurred with the dissolution of Czechoslovakia or is the wish of many in the states of Belgium and Ukraine? What are the rights of the Basques, the Catalonians, the Bretons, the Kurds, the Armenians, the Tibetans let alone the Kalash peoples, Yazidis, Mandaean, Amerindians, Aborigines, Maori or virtually any of the countless endangered ethnicities that struggle to maintain an indigenous identity? If liberty is an ethical concern, even the central ethical concern, it is here more than in any other moral consideration that ethics may be seen to lead directly into politics. The traditional community in its own quest to maintain itself requires the freedom to manage its own affairs. But what are the limits that the greater political entity – whether multinational state or cosmopolitan empire – can allow any minority that it incorporates?

There are no easy answers to any of these questions. The issue of liberty is one, and must be one, of perpetual negotiation with no fixed solutions or easy means of reaching compromise. If we accept that freedom is sacred and is to be respected to the best of all our abilities, then the right to self-determination must be the bottom-line starting point. But the forces of economic advantage and the frequent need for security against the possibility of violent insurrection and/or attack are such that the rights of minorities within or between borders are often sacrificed. Freedom of self-determination vies with the freedom needs of others for protection and economic well-being. It is for this reason that freedom as an ethical and axiological goal is not and cannot be self-sufficient but must be balanced by additional moral considerations. Although *primus inter pares*, there are other values that are also sacred and important and that must be worked into any viable equation that seeks to guarantee the greatest latitude for the greatest numbers. Knowledge, reason and understanding, for instance, are vital in allaying especially unwarranted and/or exaggerated fears that often lead to conflict and the suppression of autonomy by a majority or stronger party to that of a minority or weaker one.

But apart from the internal dynamics of the state or community, there is also the international arena in which political freedom is fragile and perpetually under threat. The sovereignty of any nation is challenged invariably by the sovereign demands of another nation or nations. The whole concourse of nation-states rests fundamentally on respecting the independence of the parties that comprise the whole. When does

⁴MacIntyre (1998: 204).

the stronger party have the right to intervene into the internal matters of a smaller state – as the United States and United Kingdom felt obliged to do with Saddam’s Iraq? When do aggrieved parties resist the temptation to flout national integrities and the maintenance of peaceful transaction however painful and seemingly hopeless as was not done in the preludes to the world’s two wars? When does any state prevent itself from engaging in political, economic and/or military aggression such as we see in all attempts for imperial expansion – including the desire to rectify what is perceived as colonial wrong-doing?

If we were to look at the world’s history and the rise and fall of empires, let alone the rise and fall of individual states, there would appear to be little hope for a less wasteful and clash-ridden planet earth. Everyone wants to be free; everyone wants to have his or her desired way in as much of everything as possible. This is the given situation in which we all live and within which we must carve out our own individual spaces in a manner that allows to others as much latitude for their wishes at the same time. We all have our idols, and the freedom we all crave includes the freedom to worship what we want to worship. If, as I am contending, the idol is for the most part a positive albeit something personal and not necessarily shared with others or at least many others, we must allow at the same time that there are *idola senso negativo* as well.⁵ One way to understand the positive idol is to understand what is in fact the negative idol, and to a pagan way of thinking the chief unacceptable idols are and can only be exclusive, monopolistic truth-claims, on the one hand, and anti-cosmopolitan or belligerent chauvinisms, on the other.⁶

Negative idolatry consists of exalting a representation over the thing that the representation represents – such as making the American flag more important than the freedoms that the American Republic itself enshrines. We see no such similarity of America’s protective measures, for instance, with British attitudes toward the Union Jack. It would be nice if a nation’s flag were to be respected, but that respect must be earned and not mandated. Desecrating a symbol is one way to express dissatisfaction toward whatever that symbol represents, and the freedom of protest

⁵For the ‘false god’, see York (2010: 78f). Bron Taylor considers ‘trust in military might’ as an instance (personal communication on 10 March 2014).

⁶The reifying of the nation-state is a major instance of the ‘false idolatry’ of the negative idol. It disallows people to seek balanced understandings: to weigh wrong-doings against them against those that they themselves might have committed on others. Chauvinism is itself an incarcerator because it renders the chauvinist blind and unable to participate in the freedom that comes with the wider scope of understanding. The over-glorification of the state, rather than seeing the polity as simply a vehicle for moving towards our well-being and as the *ad hoc* protector of our cultural legacies, is among the greatest of threats to the freedom of expression. For instance, United States Senator Dianne Feinstein, in defense of the proposed constitutional amendment to outlaw and prohibit the physical desecration of the American flag, says, “I strongly believe that the American flag holds a unique position in our society as the most important and universally recognized symbol that unites us as a nation. The flag – as a symbol of our nationhood – can and should be respected and protected from attack” (Email sent 25 May 2005 to the mother of Trinlay Tulku Rinpoche). This, however, is idolatry *sensu negativo* and one that curtails the freedom of self-expression even if and when we might not agree with what is being expressed.

as part of the freedom of expression and speech is among the sacrosanct allowances that constitute human liberty, particularly, in this case, that of political freedom.

In short, we are permitted to say that all the exaggerated patriotism that surrounds the American flag represents idolatry at its worst – the classic example of false idolatry or the kind of idol worship that renders one sightless rather than expanded and enhanced. Moreover, the refusal to allow the flag to touch the ground expresses the implicit gnostic notion behind this expression of American idolatry. The American national idol is one of a nation that is transcendent, something above and beyond the land that is its foundation. Once again we have that implicit notion that the earth is lowly, is matter and is something to be repudiated and rejected. Nevertheless, while American idolatrous nationalism comprises a form of idol-worship that the ethical person does not wish to encourage, it allows that in itself idolatry enshrines the very principle of choice, namely, the virtue-value of liberty.

Destroying the American flag is not the same as destroying the American principles that the flag was originally designed to symbolize. All idols are precarious and may be destroyed in one manner or another. But the ethereal idol behind them cannot be obliterated. In this case, the spirit of democracy or freedom is the ethereal idol behind both the flag and the American republic. Nevertheless, the ethereal idol does not exist apart from the instances of its manifestation. While it itself cannot be annihilated, it is dependent upon the persistence of its physical vehicles for its actuality.

Likewise, whenever we encounter expressions containing the words ‘*the truth*’ as if there is no question that the truth which is being referred to is anything but an absolute given, we have another instance of the negative idol and the inflexibility of countenancing other ways of seeing, doing and understanding things. Doctrinal rigidity is found in all religions but particularly among the Revivalist branches of Protestant Christianity: the Pentecostal Charismatics, fundamentalist Baptists and, especially, Calvinist, Presbyterian and Dominionist Reconstructionists. Dominion Theology, holding that Christians alone are mandated to hold all secular positions until the return of Christ, insists that there are only two options: the God-centered (theonomy) and the human-centered (autonomy).⁷ It is clear from the terminology alone that the taking of dominion over secular society is tied up with truth-claims and the elimination of all dissent and independence from a particular belief system. Biblical inerrancy becomes the substitute for any open-ended search for knowledge and understanding. It is also evident that with such rigid inflexibility there is the loss of freedom. When this is the outlook of a majority opinion, there is obviously less scope for maneuver for those who hold different outlooks. In other words, there are not the same freedoms for the minority, but, simultaneously, even the majority becomes locked into a restricted and less than emancipated state of being. Consequently, in radical contrast to the agenda of the Christian Right, the idolatry

⁷ Accordingly, the Dominionist seeks to produce a generation of biblically trained politicians whose first task is to eliminate religious choice and freedom. Adulterers, homosexuals, witches, idolaters, heretics and blasphemers are to be executed – either by stoning to death or by being burned alive.

of freedom is one that precludes both excessive patriotism and prejudice, on the one hand, as well as all unquestioned dogmas, on the other.

But in discussing the value of liberty, let us return to the polity itself to look at the independence that it allows or prohibits to its citizens now less as a deprived class within the state but rather across the board to everyone. Certainly, the protections of the alleged social contract are the supposed benefits of organized group living, the freedom from assault, the protection of property and so forth, but social organization at the same time often precludes individual rights that are not belligerent or reasonably harmful to others. We are now discussing the paternalism of the state – what the artist David Hockney, for instance, and in reference to Great Britain, has called the ‘nanny state’. Because of the ever-increasing complications of modern life, many restrictions imposed by government we are apt to accept without question – such as the stipulation to use seat-belts in a motor vehicle.⁸

State paternalism also extends to the prohibition of so-called ‘recreational drugs’. In the United States, the Supreme Court has even denied the use of medical marijuana for the alleviation of pain with the terminally ill. While the inhumanity of this last is one thing, governmental attempt to control the states of consciousness an individual may have is a further restriction of a person’s right to choice. With minors, such control is more understandable, but when this constraint is expanded to include adults, there is a blatant infringement on the scope of individual self-responsibility. The exploration of consciousness is a pursuit that some people undertake seriously, but whether earnest or frivolous, for all people who sacralize freedom the question remains whether, short of a person harming another, any government has the right to determine what kinds of conscious states we are allowed to have or which ones we are not. This is understood instead as something for the individual himself/herself to decide. The government’s only proper role is educational – informing people what the possible risks and consequences might be.

It is obvious, therefore, that freedom is intimately tied to democracy. In other words, the ethical impacts directly on the political. While the anti-paternalistic suggests a form of libertarianism, the consideration of intrinsic human dignities is

⁸Gun laws prohibiting the unrestricted right to possess fire-arms, however, are more ambiguous. The United States does not have them; most European countries do. The issue rests on the right to self-defense. European paternalism argues that allowing people to own guns makes its citizens more exposed to their abuse. Americans, backed by the powerful gun and rifle lobby, have steadfastly refused to surrender this right. Certainly the number of deaths in Europe that can be attributed to unlawful use of fire-arms is significantly lower than that in the United States, but the question is between state paternalism, on the one hand, and the freedom of the individual, on the other.

essentially politically liberal.⁹ I suggest therefore that the ethico-political position that best sums the dynamics of freedom that are commensurate with pagan aspirations as well as all freedom-loving people is a form of liberal libertarianism. The question before all of us, however, concerns the scope of democracy, in particular, the rule of the people. Plato and Aristotle both thought little of the process of popular vote – seeing the rule of the many as impairing viable governing management and allowing the worst possibilities rather than the best. My own contention is that democracy is something that was conceived for the *polis*, the small political community, rather than the sometimes mega-nation-states that we have today and in which there is frequently a potential minority that is greater than all but the largest of the world’s nations. Political decision-making, accordingly, is perhaps best suited for the local, immediate levels of existence. On the larger level, referenda may be the general means for the wider say, but republicanism is or at least should be by and large constitutional with the emphasis on civil rights, a bill of rights, on individual protections – perhaps with the governing management undertaken by trained professionals, rather than *ad hoc* politicians, with some general means of expressing concord or assent by the people.

It is to be understood that political democracy is the central concern of all peoples and is something infinitely more complex and contentious than can be adequately dealt with within the present pages. I wish only to signal at this point the centrality of the ethics of liberty to the ways we politically associate and come to manage our day-to-day affairs as well as the more encompassing concerns for security and protection. As McGraw has elucidated in relation to the intention of the American Founding Fathers, the civic forum is to be an arena of exchange open to all peoples – whether traditionally or conservatively religious, on the one hand, or agnostically or humanistically oriented, on the other.¹⁰ In other words, in the original conception of American democracy, both the religious right and the secular left – as well as all minority positions – are to be guaranteed access to the public forum. The government’s role is to ensure such access and freedom of expression to one and all. The government, accordingly, is to enable that no one party comes to dominate to the exclusion of any other legitimate body of thought – legitimacy being defined as adopting a political and social stance that tolerates and allows competing expressions into the public forum.¹¹

⁹In the “Editor’s Letter” to the re-founded issue of *The Liberal* magazine, Ben Ramm explains: “It is our wish to rehabilitate the term ‘liberal’, sullied after a century which deemed liberalism at best unfashionable, at worst unlawful; and to affirm the vision of our predecessors in their first editorial: to see ‘the mind of man exhibiting powers of its own, and at the same time helping to carry on the best interests of human nature’” (*The Liberal* [Independent Preview Edition] IV April/May 2005: 1).

¹⁰McGraw (2003: *passim*).

¹¹I have focused here on the polity itself and not upon the greater concerns of the atmosphere, the oceans and the commons as they are or are not addressed via the Westphalian nation-state system that has come to predominate our planet today. In the terrapolitan focus of Daniel Deudney (1998: 303), “the central basis of political association must be the Earth (terra) and its requirements.” For

Personal

But putting the political dimensions now to the side, let us concentrate on ethical freedom as it concerns the individual herself. As a basic given, I would say that everyone at heart wishes to swim in the pool of freedom. The most important thing about freedom, however, is that it involves compromise. Nevertheless, the compromises that one makes vis-à-vis freedom are those with the other virtues alone: comfort, honor, temperance, justice and so forth. As important and central as liberty is, it is not viable solely on its own. It is mitigated by other concerns and needs and must take into consideration what these might be. At the end, freedom rules over all others, but it is not an absolute rule. It is, rather, a final or end-point target.

Among the freedoms that one seeks are those from care, from illness and incapacity, from restriction as well as those for mobility such as movement and travel, for pleasure and enjoyment, for learning and the advancement of understanding, for the comforts of life and for discovery and dreaming beyond new horizons. A person wishes to be free from the concern of loss. If one does not have anything to begin with, this is relatively easier. If and when someone does indeed have things, possessions, riches, etc., it is much more difficult to be free from care – but it is still possible. Apart from the physical realities of freedom, liberty is largely a state of mind, a mental attitude, an emotional feeling, a psychological and/or intellectual achievement. In fact, ultimate individual liberty is enlightenment. While for the dharmacist, this last is *moksha*, *samadhi* or *nirvana*, for the pagan it is *ataraxia*, *apatheia*, *eudaemonia* or *ecstasia*. In general, in a pagan understanding, it has less to do strictly with release and more to do with joy. Unlike the dharmic orientation, enlightenment is not an escape from life but either a celebration of life or, at least, a coming-to-terms with life – understanding and accepting it for what it is but without denying or repudiating it. To the degree that paganism is encapsulated in and by youth, freedom is the experience of life and all that life involves: both trials and tribulations but especially its wonders and joys. As we grow older, however, that enthusiasm of youthful energy that all paganism celebrates may become tempered with a semi-detached sense of serenity, but the wisdom and enlightenment of age is yet one that continually endorses and rejoices in the glory of youth, newness, discovery and wondrousness. For pagans of all ages, the freedom of enlightenment is a freedom from envy, jealousy and resentment. What a pagan individual might not have, she/he still takes a thrill and contentment in the very possession by others of what one's self itself may be missing.

the deep ecology of social philosophy, see further Bron Taylor's "Deep Ecology and its Social Philosophy: A Critique" in Katz et al. (2000: 269–299).

Pagan

Freedom, then, is among the most complicated of issues, but for all people who value the aliveness of life and respect the intrinsic dignity of the human *sui generis* – and this includes the pagan, it is the parameter within which all other aspirations are ultimately set. Freedom in whatever form and in all forms is the central goal and wish.¹²

In today's world, we find the Statue of Liberty that adorns the New York harbor as one of the largest of contemporary idols. The Goddess of Liberty, as the Unabridged Webster's Dictionary of 1934, the Second Edition, lists this icon, is *Libertas* – the Roman personification of liberty. At the same time, the existence of this iconographic figure suggests a possible reason for the reaction against idolatry. The idol as an object of veneration serves as a mirror of its devotees and virtually elicits if not commands appropriate behavior that is commensurate with what is being honored. The extreme reaction against idolatry is of course a biblical inheritance but in the present-day American case perhaps one that is exacerbated by the steady falling short by the American people of the ideal that the nation was originally meant to enshrine. Liberty is precarious and possibly the most vulnerable of all the virtue-values, and even if and when it becomes symbolized by a physical idol, there is no guarantee that freedom itself will remain intact. For both our personal and political liberties, the onus of the burden remains upon each and every one of us in terms of responsibility. The idol of liberty is one that merits the deepest of our respects and every effort to preserve the sanctity that it involves. This responsibility and freedom is one that rests on vigilance and wakefulness – the essence of enlightenment.

¹²If we look at the etymologies behind our various terms for freedom, we gain some further insight into the dynamics that are involved. For 'liberty' itself, from the Latin *liber*, there is little new that is forthcoming; the Latin term derives from a root that has always signified being free. 'Autonomy', by contrast, places the emphasis squarely on the self, on 'self-rule' and the freedom to make one's own decisions. 'Independence', likewise, suggests 'not dependent' – self-sufficiency. 'Freedom', however, derives from a root that betokens 'love, desire' (**prâi-*). Cognate are such terms as 'Priapus', 'Freya', 'Freyr' and 'Frigg'/'Frija' and German *Friede* 'peace': Watkins (1969: 1536), Pokorny (1959: 844), York (1995: 539, 588). Watkins (ibid. See also York 1995: 588) derives the word 'free' from the Germanic **frijaz* that denotes 'beloved' – more widely, 'belonging to the loved ones', that is, either the gods or one's family. The ultimate suggestion is that one who is **frijaz* is one who is 'not in bondage', i.e., 'free'. In other words, freedom is understood as being safely among one's loved ones, at home, not in prison, and/or under the happy protection of the gods (*eudaimonia*).

Among the Romans, the personification of *liber* occurs as both a male Liber and a female Libera. Cicero (*De natura deorum* 2.62.24) refers to Liber and Libera as the children (*liberi*) of the earth-mother. The term *liber* may have been originally an epithet belonging to Jupiter in his capacity as creative force. See York (1986: 77). For *Iovi Libero et Iunoni Reginae in Aventino*, see the *Fasti Fratres Arvales* under 1 September. On the festival of the Liberalia (17 March), adolescent boys were given the *toga* of manhood – signifying freedom from childhood and the emancipation of adulthood. The identification of Liber with the Greek Dionysus suggests further the freedom that comes with intoxication.

Consequently, freedom is always contextual. There is no absolute or objective autonomy. Liberty is subjective and to be measured by the immediate situation at hand. One can be free *from* poverty, *from* disease, *from* injustice, *from* conformity, etc., and one might be free *to* move and travel, *to* enjoy various pleasures, *to* make decisions that affect one's situation in terms of economy, community and environment, *to* be the non-conformist who disdains the critical opinions of others, etc. A person who is free is one who is also free *for* laughter. The morbidly somber pessimist, the person who is paranoid and always afraid of the negatives that might possibly happen, the one who is burdened by envy and desires for revenge is *not* free. In fact, freedom is intimately connected with all the other heptatheonic virtue-values as well as the cardinal virtues that infuse them.¹³ In other words, liberty is not the sole virtue and aspiration. Freedom interconnects with all the other virtue-values, and its centrality simply underscores its foundational status for both the good life and a good planet. The underpinning quality of liberty and independence and its relation to honor, virtue and value reveals the interdependence of morals. While we might focus on one in order to elucidate and understand it further, morality is a composite of focus in which one virtue immediately and always suggests another. The person who is free is the person who is honorable, productive, generous, healthy, comfortably strong and able to appreciate the joys and pleasures of relationship, sensuality, learning and both the natural and cultural worlds in which we live.

Comfort

Among its many disparagers, the desire for comfort is frequently dismissed as a proclivity toward weakness. The person who seeks the creaturely comforts of life is denounced as a slave to frailty. And while I shall argue here to the contrary, in some respects comfort serves as the check to wanton and unlimited freedom. The rugged adventurer who endures hardship and difficulties and even life-threatening danger is a person who celebrates individual freedom perhaps to the fullest, but few of us are so inclined to live life on such a basis as a full-time pursuit. We want our comforts, and so we sacrifice some of our quest for all-encompassing liberty for them. By contrast, if we pursue the comforts of life to excess, freedom itself becomes the check and balance to any tendency toward the slavery of over self-indulgence.

Apart from the needs on the part of some for macho ostentation, the effort to make one's situation comfortable is the norm for the human being. We all seek to

¹³A person may be free to be comfortable or, vice versa, free from discomfort. A person may enjoy the freedom of health, that is, to be free from illness and disability. One might be free to indulge in the pursuit of pleasure, to be productive or to be generous. In other words, one might be free from pain and meaningless boredom, from waste and stagnation, and from miserly stinginess and the greed of hoarding.

improve upon the necessities of life. While we can endure the barest minimum, it is natural for us to endeavor to improve the conditions upon which these needs are met – making them more pleasant and enjoyable.¹⁴

When I was in my earliest twenties, having just graduated from college, I spent over a year vagabonding my way through Europe. Even in those days, though the dollar was worth substantially more vis-à-vis the European currencies, to live on approximately 70 dollars a month was an accomplishment in and of itself. I managed to travel wherever I wished (Scandinavia, Germany, Netherlands, Belgium, Britain, France, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Switzerland, Austria, Greece, Turkey and Morocco) – first by hitchhiking, later by a Eurail Pass, and finally by a VW bug. Living almost at times literally off the land, I slept in train stations, under a bush in a Parisian park, in the homes of generous people I met along the way, occasionally in a hotel or youth hostel, once unwittingly in bed-bug-ridden brothel in Marseilles and often in the car. I still managed to visit every museum and special site I could, went to operas and concerts and remember to this day a splendid performance of Shostakovich's *Fifth Symphony* by the Romanian Symphony Orchestra in the Odeon of Herodes Atticus at the foot of the Athenian Acropolis as well as a concert with Ravel's *Piano Concerto* in the Fenice Theater of Venice.

Living as I was, I became aware of what were at that time the barest necessities that I had to confront virtually each day. Apart from breathing and drinking water, the five essential needs were eating, excreting, sleeping, washing and being protected from the elemental extremes, i.e., finding shelter or having sufficient clothing. If it were winter, this last was more important on a more immediate scale, but like all these basic necessities, there was a variable duration of time before each had to be met in one manner or another. Finding somewhere to urinate or defecate was a daily necessity. By contrast, one could if necessary go a day or more between meals or even sleeping. By and large, however, these five necessities – along with for me a sixth necessity, namely, that of dreaming – were concerns that I had to fulfill on a daily basis.

What I learned in this process was that I could sleep rough when there was no alternative but that a comfortable bed was more preferable. I could wash in the sink of a public toilet or virtually any water source but that a hot shower or bath was more enjoyable. I could eat lemons from an orchard in Amalfi but a full meal was always more satisfying – especially in a nice restaurant or someone's home. One could shelter behind trees for purposes of defecation, or resort to the hole in the floor that was available throughout Germany, France and Italy at the time, but a regular enclosed and private toilet was always better. And the same applied against the vagaries of cold and rain and the need for protection from them.

¹⁴Grayling (2003: 54), in discussing the general contempt by the Cynics for conventional goods, contrasts this with the attitude of the Stoics who treat the 'indifferents' as "dispensable adjuncts to the good life" but ones that conform to our natural instincts toward "the comfort or happiness that health and a measure of material comfort bring."

The factor between meeting the necessity in its barest form and satisfying it in a more acceptable one is that of comfort. People can survive in some of the most appalling conditions, but few of us in our 'right mind' would choose to do such – all other factors being equal. Seeking the contentment of ease and avoiding misery, wretchedness and discomfort result from the natural impulse of what it means to be a human being. Our instinct is to make life easier, and on this basis, I argue that comfort is a value and/or virtue that we must consider and include in understanding the good life and any formulation of human happiness.

Further to this, if the desire for ease is to be found even among the young with their non-trepidation and flexibility, how much more is this the case for those of us in our autumn years. The comfort quota increases as we grow older. Overall, however, apart from certain sports and the thrill of facing a challenge, regardless of age, we seek as part of the normal course of life to reduce hardship and increase the material comforts that delineate our world. Nevertheless, it is important to distinguish comfort from pleasure. They are not necessarily the same. Pleasure as a rule signifies more extreme forms of enjoyment and melds more directly into feelings of ecstasy and transcendence of the ordinary, everyday and mundane. Comfort, by contrast, while referring to states of both physical and mental ease and well-being, is accompanied in general by quiet enjoyment and/or consolation. Over pleasure, comfort has the more colloquial connotation of sufficiency and pertains more to the usual flows of life and interaction that everyone faces. It is altogether gentler and without the payments that pleasure indulgence frequently demands. The person who is comfortable is a person who is at ease, a person who is contented and free from care. We see in this last, that comfort, although often enough a check or balance to unbridled independence, is still foundationally supported by liberty or emancipation, in this case, the freedom from care and concern.

But as with all the virtue-values, there are multiple facets to the very notion of comfort that stretch beyond simply egocentric orientation and any desire for material comfort and conventional goods. On the one hand, there is the ethical impetus for one to endeavor to be comfortable for others. This is an aspiration if not already an accomplished condition, but an ethically oriented person is one who tries to be pleasing to his or her loved ones, to family, to friends, to colleagues, to business associates, to community members and to people in general. The non-comfortable person might easily indulge in nastiness, meanness, spite, jealousy and such qualities that inspire general dislike from others. The comfortable person, by contrast, is one who is friendly, relaxed, balanced in overall inclinations and, in general, virtuous.

On the other hand, there is also an ethical impetus in the efforts of those who strive to make the lives of others more comfortable. In other words, comfort is not just something that pertains to the self. It is instead a condition that those who are equity-minded struggle to ensure and establish for others as well but beyond the immediate 'me and mine' of family, friends and loved ones. The truly free individual is the person who undertakes the well-being of other people in general. This is the person who is not confined to self-interest alone but one who understands that a more comfortable world is a world in which more and more people overall enjoy the

basic comforts of life and the contentment that comes with them. We are reminded once again of Indra's Net in which each nexus jewel reflects the infinite number of jewels in the net as a whole. Each virtue reflects the others, and, in this case, the virtue-value of comfort is one that is not only interdependent with that of liberty but also with those of honor, generosity, worship, pleasure and, ultimately, health.

One way to understand this interdependence of the fundamental virtue-values is to think of the comfort of freedom, the comfort of health, the comfort of honor and so forth. Likewise, there is a freedom that comes with comfort, the understanding that a comfortable person is a healthy person, or that there is a freedom that is involved with good health and the absence of infirmity. In fact, the virtue-values may be readily paired into numerous combinations. Overall, however, the heptatheonic, eudaimonic or natural values provide us with gauges, so to speak, by which we can measure or assess any given situation. We are permitted to evaluate present conditions in the natural terms of freedom, comfort, health, honor, pleasure, productivity and generosity.

If we had to single out one of the seven virtue-values as happiness per se, it would be comfort. It is here that we can discern the nuance between comfort and pleasure. The latter, in both its sensual and intellectual forms, partakes in essence of indulgence and, to the degree that it approaches the ecstatic, may also include pain. Comfort, however, refers more to the conditions within which we operate in general. Rather than the enjoyment of ecstasy as we might find with pleasure, comfort refers instead to the enjoyment of contentment. In other words, comfort is the state of *eudaimonia*. The comfortable person is a happy person.

Understanding comfort as *eudaimonia* – being under the protection or influence of a benign being, however, allows us to recognize the externality of the conditions that produce happiness, contentment or comfort. These conditions may be produced by one's parents, friends, loved ones, the state or the gods. We do not make comfort ourselves. We make ourselves *more comfortable* with the conditions and opportunities that have been provided to us. Comfort, therefore, refers to the external situation and our attitude and reaction to it.

By recognizing happiness or eudemonia as one of the virtue-values, we encourage a more fluid and flexible pagan position that accepts happiness as a teleological end but not necessarily the *only* end or goal – apart from the fundamental interchangeability of the virtue-values as an intrinsic whole. For some pagans, pleasure may be the supreme achievement. For others, it is happiness. For others still, it might be freedom, while some opt for honor. Consequently, while paganism produced the great schools of Aristotelian, Platonic, Stoic, Epicurean, Cynic and Skeptical thought – each with their own understanding of the final *raison d'être*, the pluralism of paganism as a non-sectarian but integrated accomplishment allows a range of choice and balance for its adherents individually. Paganism may be inspired by its deities and its ethical behavior may be modeled by them, but there is no final authority that mandates what must be sought, let alone what must be done. Responsibility in such decisions devolves to the community and individual in and of themselves.

Consequently, paganism embraces both egoistic and altruistic behaviors as personally decided pathways toward the good life. At the end of the day, some might choose the freedom of a transcendental liberation or enlightenment; others might pursue pleasure as the ultimate goal; some may choose honor and worship as the exclusive pursuit. However, given the overriding nature of the human being, I would suspect that comfort is and will remain to be the chief form of happiness for the many. Some may lament this reality – both within the pagan community and within the other major world religions, some might adopt a Nietzschean position and condemn the prevailing ‘herd mentality’, but the fact is: This is the way it is. A grounded pagan can accept this reality, live with it and work with it. The option of comfort need not be a source for spiritual discomfiture.

We have already seen that comfort itself has self-oriented and other-oriented possibilities. And though distinguishable, comfort easily blends into pleasure. Our efforts to make ourselves comfortable may directly lead to pursuit of unabashed joy and delight. If ethical behavior is contingent upon inclusion of at least some non-egoistic action, however, the question then becomes one of addressing how the quest for increased material and other comforts does not become an exercise in pure and unadulterated selfishness. Where, when and how does the pursuit of comfort – or, for that matter, any particular value – not become excessive and exclusively confined to the individual pursuant himself/herself? Moreover, when and how do our needs and desires as humans become incommensurate consumerist luxuries that desecrate the notion of a sacred earth?

To answer these questions, we need to turn to the cardinal virtues. While the heptatheonic or natural virtues may be used to self-assess one’s state of progress or navigation through life at any given point, the cardinal virtues do not lend themselves readily to this sort of evaluation on a personal basis. We do not determine for ourselves whether we are wise, moderate, courageous or just. For the most part, prudence, temperance, strength and justice are measures that others apply to our behavior. But by the same token, these cardinal virtues provide us with rules or standards by which we can evaluate any of the natural virtue-values. This will be easier to see when we come to discuss pleasure, but even with comfort we are permitted to ask in our quest of it whether we are being prudent or wise in the pursuit at hand, whether we are being moderate or immoderate, whether we are being brave or cowardly in seeking the comforts that we seek, and, especially, whether we are being just or unjust in our own pursuits. In other words, when we attempt to evaluate in terms of justice, at whose expense is our endeavor being undertaken? Who is being hurt, harmed or reduced in the process? When does our personal pursuit open up to the consideration of others and their well-being let alone the sustainability and well-being of our host planet? Consequently, the classical cardinal virtues may be seen as tools by which to evaluate each of the virtue-values in ethical terms.

It is through comfort, however, that the cardinal virtues and the natural virtue-values most directly connect. I have already alluded to comfort as the more widespread and general goal of most people. Its centrality has less to do with its universality, though, as it does with its underlying meaning. For this last, we must

turn to the etymology of the term.¹⁵ The word *comfort* is a development of the Latin intensive *com-* applied to the word *fortis* denoting ‘strong’.¹⁶ We can see at once the integral link of comfort as strength to the root-notions encapsulated in the ideas of ‘virtue’ and ‘value’: strength, ability, confidence.

To be comfortable is to be at home in one’s conditions, to have the courage afforded by one’s present situation. The brave hero is comfortable with his or her abilities. Perhaps even more to the point, the hero is confident enough with her value priorities to make whatever sacrifice is necessary to achieve them. Consequently, in its more colloquial understanding, comfort is the strength of confidence in one’s position and well-being – a self-assurance that at heart is that of the hero or brave contender whose strength is power, vigor, vim, valor and virtue. As the hero races forth fearlessly or at least unwaveringly against the obstacles to forward movement, so too shall a pagan humanity embrace the pursuit of personal comfort and world comfort bravely and with the strength of conviction and self-responsibility. Rather than being a softness, comfort is an intensified strength that allows one to accept normal human pursuits without intimidation while at the same time reaching to the foundational basis of what it means to be a strong, ethical agent.

As with pleasure, comfort is among the most ambivalent of ethical idols. In other words, though I have been addressing idolatry throughout this book primarily as something positive and not simply to be condemned through biblical prejudice, there is still the occasion that an idol might become the proverbial ‘false idol’. We can see this from today’s increasingly cosmopolitan and ecological perspectives in the development of chauvinistic nationalism. An idol becomes a ‘false idol’ when it undermines and invalidates the other idols. The bogus security of jingoistic patriotism represents comfort in its worst manifestation. Following in the wake of its Patriot Act, the United States Congress passed a bill to ban flag burning. In a cogent appeal, Mike Whitney described this action as a violation of the nation’s fundamental First Amendment that is intended to guarantee free speech.¹⁷ In the ethical terms of the heptatheonic formulation, the supposed comfort that is used as a refuge in times of political uncertainty and social fear becomes a travesty of liberty, health and honor. It is a comfort that makes a weakness rather than the comfort of strength and the freedom to operate virtuously even when under duress. We can see, therefore, that the idol of comfort as a useful virtue-value presents a range of

¹⁵Our English word, *comfort*, is traced through the Middle English *comforten* to the Old French *comforter* – itself a derivative of the Late Latin *confortare* with the meaning ‘to strengthen’.

¹⁶See Morris (1969: 266). Watkins (1969: 1509 & 1513) considers the possibility of the Latin *fortis* deriving from either **bhergh-* ‘high’ with derivatives referring to hills and hill-forts, or **dher-*, extended form **dhergh-*, with the meaning ‘to hold firmly, support’ and such other cognate derivatives as ‘firmament’, ‘farm’, ‘affirm’ and ‘dharma’. See further, Pokorny (1959: 140 & 252f) who supports the **bhergh-lbheregh-* etymology.

¹⁷Whitney’s article, “Show your Independence on the 4th; Burn a Flag,” was forwarded to me on the 6th of July 2005 by a Canadian friend. Living in Washington state, Whitney can be reached at fergiewhitney@msn.com. Indirectly alluding to Nietzsche, he cites Albert Einstein as saying, “The flag is proof than man is still a herd animal.”

varying possibility and nuance that can fluctuate from denial of personal freedom, on the one hand, in which ‘free speech’ is permitted so long as it is *not* politically or emotionally ‘offensive’, to, on the other hand, the courage to express dissent in the public forum. As a weakness, comfort is like a cancer that destroys the host on which it feeds. As a strength, it is an asset by which we feel comfortable and confident enough to do and say what we want. The material comforts we desire for the happy life are only good and useful if and when we use them to assist us in being morally courageous and strong, that is, in being of ethical comfort. When such comforts become handicaps and prevent us from the fortitude that is necessary for right living, we can dispense with them regardless of the cost.

As an overall disposition, the comfortable situation is like that of a healthy body. When the body is balanced and operating correctly, our attention is not drawn inwardly. There is no aching shoulder, no sprained back, no anxious and troublesome mind. Comfort is an inclusive totality – the general condition of happiness or *eudaimonia*. We are uncomfortable when and if our circumstances are incomplete or unbalanced. Comfort as a potency rather than a masking refuge from terror depends ultimately on both a healthy physical and mental existence. It becomes a measure of who we are and what we can do.

Though comfort at root pertains to strength and the power of confidence in one’s surroundings, assets and/or abilities, nevertheless in its more ordinary, colloquial usage it is understood as chiefly material comforts – e.g., a good bed, a secure home, a fine automobile, clothes that fit, look stylish and are suitable to the current weather conditions, and the like. For the pagan, these comforts begin with the material realm, but all the same, a pagan can recognize comfort additionally as something that might be mental, emotional and/or spiritual. Comfort may have a hidden core that concerns energy, strength, courage or power, but for most of us it is associated with ease and non-hardship. For pagans, comfort in this sense is a worthy and desirable goal. And though within the multiplicity of pagan possibilities there are counter-exceptions such as the Amerindian Sun Dance ritual, Santería apprenticeship and other shamanic initiatory rites, by and large paganism eschews the kind of austerities characteristic of Christian and Hindu fasting, of Christian and Shiite self-flagellation, of Zen rigor and the piercing of flesh ceremonies for the god Kataragama as witnessed in Tamil Hindu communities of southern India and northern Sri Lanka. Bodily mutilation and self-torture are not the general pagan way toward achieving the good life let alone religious ecstasy. For the middle-of-the-road pagan, the search for comfort is a legitimate pursuit in and of itself. In all this, we are permitted to understand comfort simply as happiness in its least complicated forms.¹⁸ For the heroically-minded, the cardinal virtue of strength is a

¹⁸As a personification, the deity that perhaps most encapsulates plain comfort per se is the Roman abstraction of Felicitas. [For Felicitas, according to the Fasti Antiates Ministrorum, a Capitoline temple to the goddess was founded on the Kalends of July (York 1986: 137). The reconstruction of a fragment from the Fasti Antiates Maiores suggests the temple might have been dedicated to ‘Juno in Felicitas’. Other calendars mention a temple to Felicitas being consecrated on 12 August (ibid. p. 150).] If, however, we become concerned with the deification of the essence of comfort, namely,

direct path to godhood. For the rest of us who simply seek a proper way to navigate our way through life, living gently upon the earth, the natural virtue of comfort offers a pathway to the good life and happiness that is available or at least a possibility for the greater number of us.

Health

Certainly, health is a natural virtue-value that has long been honored by humanity, pagan and otherwise.¹⁹ Like strength or courage, it is exalted as a conduit to immortality itself. The Taoists of China have perhaps more than most centered on healthful longevity as the precursor to an immortal existence. If freedom and comfort are vitally important for human happiness, health is no less a centrally crucial factor to our overall well-being. We see this recognition in the extreme popularity of Aesculapius' cult in late imperial Roman times as well as in the preoccupation with body-work, physio-therapy, nutrition and exercise that is increasingly characteristic of Western life in general.²⁰

If we consider the fundamental notion of 'wholeness' to health, there can be no denying its importance to the human being.²¹ The etymology of the term clearly indicates the basic connection between health, holiness and wholeness. This same essential idea is also to be seen in the Latin word *salus* that denotes 'health; a

strength or force, the appropriate deity is the Greco-Roman Heracles/Hercules. Hercules typifies a pagan route to deification par excellence. As a representation of the human individual with his various sins of excess (e.g., lust, gluttony, short-temper, etc.), it is through his sheer strength and perseverance that the profoundly human Heracles/Hercules attains apotheosis and a place among the gods. As an expression of comfort, Hercules conveys the very complexity that underlies the concept. [Temples to Hercules receive dedication dates of 12 August (York 1986: 150) as well as the Ides of August (ibid. pp 35, 154). Sulla dedicated a temple to Hercules on 4 June (York 1986: 255). The Roman Hercules' major shrine was the *ara maxima* in the Forum Boarium. See further Hercules' association with the winter solstice (ibid. 198).]

¹⁹Another Greco-Roman figure who achieves apotheosis besides Heracles/Hercules is the divine physician Asclepius/Aesculapius. Son of Apollo, he is slain by Zeus for transgressing the boundaries between mortal and immortal when he restores the deceased to life. However, his own capabilities as healer are such that his father is able to persuade Zeus to turn his son into the god of medicine. Among the Greeks, the direct personification of health per se is Asclepius' daughter, Hygeia. The Epidaurian Aesculapius was established in Rome in 239 bce as a result of the Sibylline oracle. According to the *Fasti Antiaties Maiores* and *Fasti Praenestini*, the temple of Aesculapius was founded 2 years later on the Tiber island (*in insula Tiberina*). See York (1986: 203, 257).

²⁰Note Kris Dierickx in Burggraeve et al. (2003: 180): "By the beginning of the twenty-first century, health has become one of humanity's highest priorities. Sociological research has shown that happiness turns out to be primarily a result of good health." Nevertheless, Dierickx distinguishes health as virtue from health as a value and norm (pp. 182f).

²¹Our word for health derives from an Indo-European root, **kailo-*, signifying 'whole, uninjured, of good omen'. Beside 'health', cognate terms that derive from the same radical stem include 'whole', 'hale', 'wholesome', 'heal', 'holy' and 'hallow': Watkins (1969: 1520).

whole or sound condition'.²² We are accordingly permitted to understand through the combinations of ideas that the complete person, the whole person, that is, the person who is whole and completed, is to be understood as a healthy person.

In our efforts to regain health, there are two fundamental and often rival approaches. Allopathic medicine operates under the premise that disease results by-and-large from an invading organism – bacteria, virus, poison – and that the remedy is to expel and eradicate the noxious or debilitating agent. Homeopathic medicine, by contrast, concentrates on balancing the full organism and rendering it more impervious to infection. In general, the latter approach is more consistent with the natural integration of a complete organic system as akin to health-as-wholeness, but in our super-advanced technological world and the concomitant pollutions it involves, health and the restoration of health for today are more likely to be a combination or negotiation between these two primary approaches. All the same, for pagans increasingly there appears to be a noticeably growing emphasis on proper and balanced diet – including a preference for organic and non-genetically modified foods, on physical fitness – including not only exercise if not sport, but also body work, meditation, tai chi-type body movement, and moderate use of recreational drugs and alcohol if any. In this respect, contemporary pagans differ little from a growing inclination found throughout the West toward the pursuit of health through marketable techniques and greater awareness of effort and consequences concerning one's physical well-being.

But as the notion of health itself mandates, well-being is not physical alone. For it to be complete, it also entails the psychological. In other words, mental and spiritual dimensions are important in achieving the state of totality that we are permitted to designate as health. A complete person, i.e., a healthy one, is someone who is balanced physically, mentally, emotionally as well as spiritually. Perhaps one of the difficulties we face in our present-day world is the compartmentalizing of issues – the attempt to treat an issue, any issue, in isolation rather than as simply one aspect of the overall whole. We tend to focus on the problem rather than on the why and reasons behind the problem. Some of these explanations, the causes of an illness or accident, are beyond our control, but to the degree that we are incomplete and unbalanced, we are more vulnerable and open to the possibility of malady. This is why, in understanding the virtue-value of health, we need to appreciate the full person and not just that area of our lives in which we experience pain, discomfort, fever or disease. Health in its very conception aims for, and is founded upon, our very wholeness, ourselves as complete people physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. The specializations that have developed in our modern world are

²²*Salus* derives from the root **sol-* 'whole' that has also given rise to Greek *holos* 'whole', Latin *sollus* 'whole, entire, unbroken', *sollemnis* 'celebrated at fixed dates, established, religious, solemn' and *salvus* 'whole, safe, healthy, uninjured', and English *solid*: Watkins (1992: 2125); Pokorny (1959: 979). The Romans personified health as the goddess *Salus*: York (1986: 149, 251). *Salus*, originally a personification of prosperity in general, became identified with the Greek *Hygeia*. She is the equivalent of the Sabine goddess *Strenia*, patroness of the new year wishes for prosperity and happiness.

fascinating and often marvelous breakthroughs in scientific and medical advance, but a pagan in particular is mindful of being able to see both forest and tree – letting neither preclude the appreciation of the other.

Consequently, the complete person in a pagan understanding is one who does not denigrate the bodily appetites but incorporates them as part of emotional and sacred well-being. Physical fitness, robustness, healthiness and vigor are aspects, fundamental aspects, of what it means to be a complete and wholesome individual – a wholesomeness that extends to using, appreciating and even on occasion indulging in our physical and bodily passions. When we are moderate in such pursuits, we are able to lead balanced and healthy lives – recognizing at the same time that the material dimension, as important as it is, is not the whole of the picture. Real health, full health, lasting health depends as well on our emotional needs and satisfactions, our mental activities and pursuits, and our encounters and exchanges with the divine. Fitness is a product of our completeness, and being complete by definition entails not excluding any aspect of our being.

In a pagan consciousness, health might well be considered among the greatest of gifts – something to be honored and encouraged through regime, exercise, consciousness and awareness of what one is doing. Health and freedom are often understood as integrally linked – especially as health itself is to be approached as a well-functioning system. Moreover, if in the fast-paced and overly stressed life of the modern world, we require a modicum of leisure in order to find time and space for worship, there is no less a necessity of leisure for the maintenance of health. Once again we can see the interrelation and interdependence between the virtue-values. The ritual demands of a festal calendar punctuate our otherwise dog-eat-dog and rat-race lifestyles of today, and the enforced leisure that thereby mitigates stressful existence can be seen by a pagan as something that is good for our health.

Whenever we wish, we are able to see the interrelated links between ethical-axial disposition. We speak of the freedom of health as well as the healthiness of freedom; the comfort of health as well as the healthiness of comfort. The implicit holism of fitness understands the healthy as bodily, mentally and spiritually, but the balance between these domains will shift when and as we grow older and the body's natural infirmities and decline reduce the stamina and resistances we knew in youth. For the elderly, the mental and emotional importance of well-being and completeness may become more dominant, but even in advancing states of physical weakening a modicum of fitness remains an aspiration and possibility for those of us who endeavor to stay attuned to our bodies and their needs. A pagan is well aware that the laws of matter involve eventual pain and loss, and as the incumbent processes take their toll, the fullness of health for the elderly may often need to swing more toward an overall attitude of mental and emotional serenity, even detachment, when our physical resources diminish. Health, therefore, as a totality, is not just the state or condition we happen to achieve at any given moment – as important as this may be – but a duration and quality that persists throughout the changes that occur for each and everyone of us. Consequently, as a virtue-value, health is not simply physical

fitness but rather the overall state of mind and body as an integrated and viably working organism that is able to deal with circumstances as they arise.

Once again, the cardinal virtues may be used as gauges against which to assess our behavior in terms of health. We may ask if a particular course of action is prudent or wise. Is it detrimental to our health? Recreational drug and alcohol use is one such instance for which this question is pertinent. If we might decide that it is not harmful, how much ought we to engage in such activities? How moderate or temperate ought we to be in this or just about anything in order to maintain the balance of a healthy equilibrium? Then too, is the pursuit of a pleasure or comfort strengthening or weakening? When does something we might choose to do undermine our vitality; when does it augment it?

The justice measure is the most difficult and initially seemingly inappropriate to ask. Is an action just or unjust for our health? What does putting the issue like this mean? For pagans, there are several avenues through which to reach an answer. If health is understood as a gift of the gods, then to abuse that gift is in itself to act unjustly. From a different perspective, excessive body-building or fanatical diet is a means of losing the balance and may be assessed as unjust or incommensurate to the goal of practical health let alone the demands and infringement such pursuits might place on others. This last opens the justice and health question into a third and less self-centered arena, namely, how much does our individual concern with our physical well-being in terms of health violate or deprive others from an equitable existence? For instance, how much does my insistence on eating special foods prevent some people elsewhere from sustainable lifestyles?

There are no easy answers to the justice question concerning health, but phrasing the issue in this way opens the ethical aspect to extra-personal levels. If health is about completeness and holism, we are also talking about the health of the family, of the community, of the state and of the world. Ultimately, the virtue-value of health leads into political dimensions as well. For instance, and permit me to select the most obvious example that exists at the time of my writing, ought we pursue a foreign policy that considers the enemy simply something to be eradicated regardless of cost, the allopathic approach, or do we set about more holistically and seek to understand the deepest causes behind the problem and to change the global state of affairs in ways that might redress religio-cultural grievances to eliminate the problem by eliminating its source? Pursuit of political health requires not only imagination, hopefully an imagination based on wisdom, but also the courage to try the innovative and be capable of transcending the traditional petty response. Likewise, it depends on remaining temperate in both response and pursuit as well as on a profound sense of just justice. Government by deceit can never be a healthy situation. The polity so ruled is an unhealthy and incomplete political unit. Most of all, however, a pagan joins with a secularist in her/his opposition to castigating the political enemy as an incarnation of evil. Rather than reducing reality to a black-and-white only situation, the unhealthy approach, a more holistic tactic is to recognize terrorism for what it is: a disease – something to be cured judiciously and without the fire-branding exaggerations of a religious crusade.

Therefore, the heptatheonic virtue of health has ramifications beyond the immediately personal. Encapsulating the quest for, and condition of, totality or wholeness, health may start with physical fitness but extends to where we are at additionally in our mental-emotional equilibrium. This last, for a pagan if not others as well, includes our spiritual perspective and practice. But the healthy person needs for completeness a holistic environment as well. This includes comfortable familial relationships, a sense of community, pride in one's political state and a world that is both inter-rationally sane and environmentally cohesive. We want, need and should demand health in all these arenas. To do less whenever we have options for otherwise is to accede to a debilitating and diseased existence. Such is not a pagan way.

Worship

With worship we reach the last of the basic quadrivium of pagan virtues. If we think of an intersection of roads in which the person at the center has four choices, between the alternatives of freedom, comfort, health and worship, in a sense, whichever direction the agent chooses, with the link and interchange of the virtue-values, each choice will lead finally to the same place. Each virtue ultimately encapsulates the rest. However, the virtue-value of worship is the most complicated. It includes three sub-categories or informal aspects, namely, pleasure, productivity and generosity, and each of these will be discussed separately to some extent. What I have had in mind with worship itself, at least in its more formal aspect, is ritual, and I have considered designating this particular virtue-value as beauty. In a purely semantic sense, 'worship' is best used for the aspect of production, that is, the making or creating of worth/value.²³ Consequently, I wish to approach the present virtue-value under discussion, especially as ritual signifies something that is correctly done, as virtue or honor itself. The Greek *arête*, Latin *virtus*, English *virtue* may be thought of as the supreme thing that is done correctly – that is, something put together validly and as it *should* be. The word I wish to employ for the most part here is *honor*, and, while honoring covers the *act* of worship – the paying of homage or respect to someone or something, in the central sense that I wish to consider here, honor is the quality that belongs to the virtuous person and/or revered thing – a quality that approximates the intrinsic regardless of whether it is recognized by

²³Please note that I am not employing worship simply in the sense of religious devotion and especially not in the sense of beseeching the gods for favors. While this last might be considered by some as what religions are about, it is at best only what *some* religions are about. Worship for many denotes the formal expression of reverence, and while I acknowledge ritual as embodying its ceremonial aspect, I conceive worship informally as the pursuits of pleasure, productivity and generosity. Honor or honoring is the underlying distinction of all worship – both formal and informal. Consequently, one may apprehend pleasure as honoring the gift of life, production as honoring the earth process itself, and generosity as honoring the other.

others or not. In other words, honor is a natural characteristic or disposition of an honorable individual. What he or she does will be principled – whether known to others and acknowledged by them or otherwise.²⁴

Our question now is: what is honor for the pagan? The virtues of freedom, health and comfort are fairly straightforward as far as apprehending their meaning and significance. Honor, however, is not as clear but certainly central – perhaps even the most central of all pagan concerns. It is through honor – or honor and virtue – that a pagan most connects to humanity, to nature and to his/her godhead. If freedom, comfort, health and worship are the principle virtues, it is honor as virtue that is the foundation to all these.

Honor has several different areas of significance: the notion of respect, admiration and/or reputation; the verbal idea of revering, expressing reverence, venerating or paying homage or tribute to someone or something; and finally the quality of being intrinsically admirable, splendid, worthy, marvelous or excellent. Being commendable suggests external recognition of one's honorability. Being without shame or disgrace might refer more to one's actual and internal condition. The nuance between being honorable and being recognized as honorable and honoring something beyond oneself is such that we have here a dynamic that comes the closest to furnishing an overall purpose to life. Freedom, comfort and health are joys; honor may also be a joy but it is even more the *raison d'être* of our existence.

If and when we try to ascertain who we might deem to be or have been an honorable person, our answers might vary according to the number of people asked. Among pagans, whether one agrees with his philosophy or not, Epicurus appears to have lived a quiet life of intrinsic dignity. He was moderate, prudent and presumably courageous in his own way. We may also assume that he was just. Another example of a person that pagans might accept as a person of honor is Spinoza who allowed his sister his share of the family inheritance that he had been legally awarded. Spinoza was once again a person who lived a modest life of diligence and perseverance.

²⁴For the Romans, honor and virtue go together as the proverbial horse and carriage. As deities, Honos and Virtus were invariably linked and received a temple dedicated on 17 July: York (1986: 142f). Other temples or shrines were dedicated to the pair on the 12th of August (150). Fowler (1971: 446) lists Honos and Virtus among the public virtues of Rome – along with Fides, Pax and Pudor. He attributes the temple to Honos as the consequence of either the battle of Clastidium or the taking of Syracuse. As we have already seen, Virtus is originally the personification of valor and manly strength, while Honos is one of those rare concepts that simply appears without the benefit of etymological pedigree or possibility of analysis. With Virtus understood as a goddess and Honos as a god – in fact, a rare masculine personification among the more usual register of female abstractions, we have a female-male coupling that echoes the festival reflections for the month of July as a whole. July, like every month, comprises the Kalends sacred to Juno and the Ides sacred to Jupiter, but there are also the Poplifugia (5 July to Jupiter) and the Nonae Caprotina (7 July to Juno of the wild fig tree) and the double Lucaria (19 and 21 July) conjecturally sacred to Jupiter and Juno. The month concludes with the Neptunalia (23 July to the god Neptune) and the Furrinalia (25 July to the goddess Furrina). See York (1986 *passim*). Consequently, we are permitted to conclude that, for the Romans at least, honor and virtue are understood as male-female equivalents.

More contemporary people to be considered as possibly honorable persons might include the current Dalai Lama (Tensin Gyatso), Nelson Mandela, Kofi Annan and certainly Jimmy Carter.

In trying to gain a further understanding of honor-virtue, I have asked several friends and colleagues for suggestions on whom they would consider to be honorable people.²⁵ For many, the question was difficult to answer. Some people could think of no one. But those whose names were put forth are interesting and merit consideration in our attempt to delineate what we mean by honor. Stefanie Freydonk (Extasia) suggests Oprah Winfrey who, despite extraordinary wealth, is compassionate and steadily concerned with humanitarian issues.

Out of nearly four dozen pagan, quasi-pagan and/or pagan-friendly respondents I asked for suggestions of honorable people, Mahatma Gandhi was mentioned the most (approximately one-fifth), followed by Jimmy Carter nominated seven times and then Nelson Mandela and Mother Teresa – both receiving six mentions each. Some people could not presume to judge anyone that they did not know personally and decided against including these more public illustrious and/or the ‘obvious’.²⁶ The others who received more than one nomination include Abraham Lincoln (3), the Dalai Lama (3), Jesus Christ (3), Martin Luther King Jr. (2), Bob Geldorf (2) and Bono (2). Four people named their spouse, five nominated friends, five suggested a parent and three included themselves.²⁷ Wendy Griffin, professor emerita in Women’s Studies at the California State University in Long Beach and current Academic Dean of Cherry Hill Seminary, countered people like Gandhi who reputedly insisted on sleeping with young girls to keep himself warm.²⁸ I have long had my own difficulties with what I feel is the over-adulation of Mother Teresa

²⁵The question was phrased as follows: “I am working on a chapter about virtue and honour. Richard has been asking for examples of honourable people. So if you can, could you name for me some people you might classify as virtuous and/or honourable however you conceive this quality to be? You need not put much thought into this; just list those who first pop into your thoughts. Please no more than ten per person. One is sufficient as well. I would appreciate your input. It would help me a lot.”

²⁶One person named instead such colleagues familiar to her as Brian Bocking, Peggy Morgan and Robert Samuel. Another friend named her niece who is bravely battling cancer and has a family of three young children to raise.

²⁷Don Hill, a friend living in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, and who has been recognized by the CDC in Atlanta as one of the longest HIV/Aids survivors, considered only himself since his experience has led him to trust no one: “I trust no one I meet now, see and hear the hurt being done each other due to gay self hate. Because I refuse to play the sick game feel disassociated from them. Outside of the gay (ha ha) scene I trust and believe [sic.] no one either -self centered greed and corruption everywhere which leads to hurtful actions which leads to hate.” (personal communication 30.7.5).

²⁸Personal communication (31.7.5). Prof. Griffin also mentions to me that the theologian Paul Tillich kept a large collection of pornography. She concludes that a virtuous or honorable person is one (1) who does her or his utmost to live in accordance with her or his principles, (2) who keeps her or his word to the extent that this is humanly possible, and (3) whose principles include wanting for others the greatest possible good without defining it for them. Meanwhile, Dr. Anthony Thorley elucidates: “One certainly thinks of people like Mandela, or Gandhi, but both earlier in their careers, before the idealisation began, were real shits” (personal communication 1.8.5).

whose primary goal was the agenda-driven concern with advancing the institution she represented and certainly not the cure of people under her care. She is reputed to have said, ‘We are here to help people die’ – even when relatively low-cost medicines were available that might have prevented the death of some of those who were in her custody. Germane Greer is the first person I know who publicly dissociated herself from and denied the hype surrounding Mother Teresa.²⁹ Overall, however, the responses were varied and reflect the concerns and backgrounds of the individual assessors.³⁰

One thing that is clear among these suggestions is that the disposition of honor necessitates an active doing.³¹ As a virtue it is not a static quality such as the color of our eyes or the gender in which we are born. An honorable person is one who

²⁹Penny Jarvis says, “Overtly pious people like Ruskin and Mother Teresa are distinctly dodgy” (personal communication 1.8.5). However, Kirstine Munk finds Mother Teresa “too boring (forgive me!) in the sense that she is too perfect” (personal communication 10.8.5).

³⁰William Bloom (Holistic Partnerships) names David Spangler, Thich Nhat Hahn, Cicely Saunders and Dorothy Maclean. Other names I received include the Buddha, Ma Jaya Bhagavati (Kashi Ashram), Oscar Schindler, the family that helped the family of Anne Frank, all those who had the courage to hide refugees from the Nazis, Doctors Without Borders (Medicins Sans Frontiers), Horatio Nelson, Albert Schweitzer, Florence Nightengale, Adam Smith, David Hume, Basil Hume, Molly Ivins, Catholic Social Activist Dorothy Day, John Peel, David Attenborough, Des Kennedy (former Jesuit priest, now Gestalt therapist), novelist/journalist Jeannette Winterson, law professor Anita Hill, Berkeley lawyer Henry Elson, Scott Ritter, Ignaz Philipp Semmelweis (Austro-Hungarian physician), Malcolm X, Che Guevara, Subcommandante Marcos (of the Chiapas Indian struggle with the Mexican government), Mohammed Ali, Archbishop Tutu, Walter Cronkite, Kenyan Pulitzer Prize winner Wangari Maathai, Indian ecofeminist Vandana Shiva, Elizabeth Taylor, Doris Day, Marlene Dietrich, Starhawk and Aleister Crowley. Maureen Sharma (Mullaly International Inc.) includes Bill Gates in her list for both his local and global generosity. Dr. Kenneth Jay Wilson gives among the names he furnishes those of Thomas Moore, Susan B. Anthony, Colonel Claus von Staffenberg, holocaust survivor Elie Wiessel and Afghan resistance fighter Ahmad Shah Massoud (communication 30.7.5). Friends Stephan Michaud and Koen Peters in The Netherlands pass on Nelson Mandela, Mother Teresa and the Dalai Lama for Queen Beatrix, her late husband Claus Von Amsberg, choreographer Hans van Maanen, and Maarten Toonder (from the ‘Bommel Strip’) (communication 31.7.5). Elisabeth Arweck (*Journal of Contemporary Religion*) was unable to name a person living or dead and suggested instead the fictional hero from Robert Goddard’s novel *Past Caring*. Other fictional examples that I received were some of the characters in Jane Austen’s novels (Irene Earis) and, suggested by Rosalind Newton, Charles Darnay (*Tale of Two Cities*), the Jimmy Stewart character in *It’s a Wonderful Life*, and the President in *Dave*. Politicians that were suggested include the late Senator Barbara Jordan (Texas), Senator Lincoln Chafee (Rhode Island), Senator Robert Byrd, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Adlai Stevenson, Tony Benn, Madeleine Albright and Colin Powell (“before Bush ruined him”). The following Catholic saints were also put forth: Francis of Assisi, Martin, Agnes of Rome, Vincent de Paul and Santiago Hernandez Doa Slieva. Anne Hecate Gould, mother of Trinlay Tulku Rinpoche, mentioned “All the Karmapas and the Tibetan Saints . . . Everyone else’s Saints . . .” along with Alfred Einstein, Joseph Campbell, Buckminster Fuller, Gandhi, Lao Tzu, Martin Luther King Jr. and Herodotus (“yet a bit of a gossip”) (personal communication 2.8.5). And finally, among the classicists, I received the names of Socrates, Diogenes, Solon, Herodotus and Cicero.

³¹Cinema and television editor Toni Morgan called this being *engagé* with the world: “I think it’s a quality that only applies to a person who is active in this very screwed up world we live in which is why I think I didn’t include Gandhi and others like him” (personal communication 30.7.5).

acts accordingly, who *makes* honor through how she or he behaves, and, if honor is a value or worth, being honorable is therefore a form of worship. In the examples of virtuous people, what they tend to have in common is stature, a quality of standing. If we consider standing-stature-honor-worship as the base of a pyramid of human ethical aspiration, we are entitled to see pleasure-happiness as what leads from the foundation to the pinnacle understood as beauty. Cognate with ‘stature’ and ‘standing’ is ‘statue’ – another name for the idol. What this might suggest is that the ethical idols and worship as ethical idolatry are the support for the beauty that is paganism, a paganism that is finally understood as both humanism and naturism.

Our evaluation of honor allows us also to understand that there are two notions to keep in mind in its consideration. Many of the people either named or at least considered as honorable are illustrious or renowned. In this sense, honor connects with reputation – the consideration by others. But if and when I acknowledge that my parents, despite their peccadillo and short-comings, are basically honorable people, I am referring to an intrinsic quality to their respective natures and not to their fame or public reputation. In general, however, honor for most of us – at least as an ethical virtue – is less about the overall condition or sum of our lives as it is about the quality of our individual acts. In its overall sense, honor, like freedom, comfort and health, is an aspiration, and while we may assess specific instances as free, healthy, comfortable or virtuous, the virtue-values are goals toward which we aim as we course our ways through life more than they are evaluative appraisals of our lives as we live them. Honor and the rest are more what we seek rather than what we may have.

One thing that comes across through the responses I received is the contrast between those who think of honor in terms of reputation and those who refuse to judge someone as honorable if they do not know the person personally.³² Considering honor in terms of standing brings it closest to the traditional or standard understanding of worship. Public figures who are accepted as honorable become models, idols or vehicles through which we appraise the ethical good. In reality, of course, such people may be little what we consider them to be. For example, if a person who at heart is a bigot and miser but gives to charity out of calculated reasons for his or her personal advance but nevertheless appears to be generous and good, is such a person honorable? In the instance I have just described, the answer is no. We see instead that virtuous honor belongs to the fundamental nature that stands behind the acts of honor we perform. The kind of honor I wish to emphasize here

³²In this connection, singer Mary Alterator (6.8.5) has the following train of thought in response to my question: “I have been thinking about it and in the fame game world we drown ourselves in I think it is really hard to move [beyond] virtual honour cause I assume for your list you need only think about people we read and write about. Not close and personal friends, who for the most part I would volunteer all their names. I hereby suggest Bob Geldorf. He really wants change and the attempt he is making to raise awareness and the voice that he uses to try and the will to really make a difference is more than honorable in this ravaged and sad time of man and woman kind we find ourselves distractedly living amongst.”

is the honor that fits with trust and friendship. It is a quality, character, disposition or general demeanor that we can picture as the most golden in its worth – whether recognized or not.

Another way to approach the question of honor is to appreciate that all the virtue-values have physical as well as intangible aspects. Freedom pertains equally to one's physical ability to move about – not being confined by jail cell or poverty – and to a state of mind that is not burdened by fears and feelings of inadequacy and the like. Comfort also concerns one's physical condition as well as the mental confidence one has. Health certainly relates to the body but additionally to one's mental equilibrium. Like all these, honor is also both material and mental. The former is encapsulated in the *acts* of honor we perform: being brave in a situation that calls for it, being just, being wise or being in self-control. From the physical end, honor is understood through the actions we do that are expressive of the cardinal virtues in particular and of any virtuous behavior in general. The more elusive and intangible aspect of honor might be understood instead in the thoughts and motives we have that exist behind our actions. Why do we help another, why do we assist someone who is in a difficulty, why do we restrain ourselves from simply pursuing our own personal interests? It is in the answer to questions like these that we are most apt to locate what is honor as a quality that is to be revered.

It is always difficult to separate honor from reputation – especially public reputation. But this last can never be the whole of being honorable. Among the responses to my question concerning virtuous people that was put to friends and colleagues, as already mentioned, some people simply refused to countenance anyone with whom they were not familiar on a personal level. Others only thought of the illustrious. Like beauty – especially as I tend to equate honor and beauty, the perception of honor is colored by one's personal perspective – by how we have been nurtured into seeing things as we do.³³ The variety of responses was for me perhaps the most interesting. But reputation alone is fleeting. For instance, Cicero speaks of various illustrious persons of his time as among the most virtuous and well-known for their honorable characters – people such as Tiberius Gracchus the elder, Publius Rutilius Rufus, Lucius Lucinius Crassus, Quintus Mucius Scaevola the Priest, Scipio Africanus the younger, Gaius Laelius Sapiens and so forth,³⁴ but few of us today apart from historians of the Roman Republic and a small group of interested people know much if anything at all about them. In time, the same might be said about such people of today – Jimmy Carter, Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King. A pagan might conceive of a time in which the Roman Catholic Church is no longer the largest religious organization but simply a remnant comprising a marginal presence and someone like Mother Teresa becomes known by few if anyone beyond the Church's limited confines.

³³As Dr. Anthony Thorley expresses this subjectivity, “honour and virtue depend on your position or perspective of the person, whole or part, then or now” (personal communication 1.8.5).

³⁴Cicero. 45 bce: *passim*.

Consequently, an honorable reputation is perhaps ephemeral at best, and it is the honor that is to be found before the reputation or even when there is no reputation at all that is what interests us in the pursuit of virtue and the good life. And, for a pagan, honor, like liberty, strength of character and completeness, is nevertheless a route toward immortality and the understanding of being among the gods. The general exchange between deities, in fact, as we read especially in Homer, is the mutual expression of respect. And we can glean from the dialogue and contacts of god with god that honor is the recognition of specialness in the other. Consequently, people we tend to accept as honorable, such as Jimmy Carter or Nelson Mandela, are those whose behavior and efforts are motivated by a respect for the intrinsic dignity of those they seek to serve.

At root, an honorable person is decent, trustworthy, friendly and pleasant. On the popular level where honor is understood chiefly in terms of reputation, Cicero tells us that it is connected with one's name for generosity, beneficence, fair dealing and loyalty.³⁵ Along with goodwill, the Roman statesman includes confidence inspired by intelligence and being just as well as general admiration. Nevertheless, he also considers that public office and fame are among the meaningless things with which most of us allow ourselves to be pleased. But if respect in the public eye is not particularly important, "Remove respect from friendship, and you have taken away the most splendid ornament it possesses."³⁶ For Cicero, respect is based on one's goodness of character which, in turn, is the foundation upon which the harmony, permanence and fidelity of intimate friendship is formed. Beyond one's personal relationships, true glory is the product of virtue alone. The quality that Cicero elucidates concerning honor as virtue or virtue as honor is that which is formed by its intersection with trust and friendship.

Despite the reluctance by some of my respondents to ascribe honor to anyone that they did not know personally,³⁷ my own reluctance is almost the opposite. I

³⁵Cicero, *On Duties* 2.8.31 (Grant 1971: 136).

³⁶Cicero, *Laelius: On Friendship* 21.81 (Grant 1971: 217).

³⁷For instance, Celia Gunn (31.7.5): "As far as I'm concerned, I don't know how anyone can deem any public icon, such as Gandhi, as virtuous or honourable, without the personal knowing." Likewise, Rowan Fairgrove (2.8.5) claims: "I still don't have enough personal information to speak about 'world leaders' but I could believe that the Dalai Lama is virtuous and honourable. Amongst politicians I could say I think Dennis Kucinich is virtuous and honourable. But it is hard to know for sure without personal experience." She wishes in general to nominate "many amongst family, friends, covenmates and trad-mates" but then continues: "Then the lives of the people I intersect with in the interfaith movement intruded and I realized that I know many virtuous and honourable people." In this important area, Fairgrove proceeds to name "The Rev. Canon Charles Gibbs who is the Executive Director of the United Religions Initiative. Deborah Moldow of the World Peace Prayer Society. Dr. Dave Randle of Utah URI and Global Healing. Dr. Yehuda Stolov of the Interfaith Encounter Association in Jerusalem. Rev. Dr. Bill Rankin of the Global AIDS Interfaith Alliance. Elana Rozenman of the Women's Interfaith Encounter CC in Jerusalem. Yoland Trevino of the Indigenous MCC who recently became chair of the URI Global Council. Helen Spector of the Parliament of the World's Religions. Elder Don Frew, National Interfaith Representative of Covenant of the Goddess and emeritus member of the URI Global Council."

feel that my love for my friends disallows me the objectivity to judge them in that category – at least those who are still living. I do, however, feel privileged to say that the late actor Alan Bates was a good friend, and here I will now allow that he was an honorable person. Yes, he had foibles as we all do, but he was also generous, trustworthy, modest, and his loyalty to friends and loved ones was exemplary. He also possessed the marvelous insight to be able to laugh at himself. So, in my list, I would include Alan.

The honor question is indeed a baffling one – as many people expressed to me in one manner or another.³⁸ Part of this uncertainty stems from the role of publicity in the recognition of an honorable person.³⁹ But I want to stress here that as a virtue-value, the honor that is important to a pagan is precisely the quality that someone cultivates as part of his or her self-development regardless if that quality is acknowledged by others or not.⁴⁰ Certainly a pagan champions those who champion political, social and/or religious causes, and he/she will honor such activists to the degree that the person's efforts coincide with cultural and religious values concerning the earth and humanity that pagans themselves support. But pagans also aim for a world in which activist causes are no longer necessary – a world in which

³⁸Drama teacher and author, Phoebe Wray, writes to me on 31.7.5 the following: "If by 'honorable' you mean people who seem to strive for honesty in their public utterances and back that up with the way they live their lives, then I would add Maya Angelou. . . . [Integrity] must be a part of the label, too, and the above-mentioned [Mandela, Tutu, Walter Cronkite] have that. If we're speaking of dead people, I nominate the early twentieth century actress Minnie Maddern Fiske. I am defeated trying to find a Virtuous Person. I looked up 'virtue' in my Oxford American Dictionary and discover it means 'Behavior showing high moral standards.' I thought of two [people] who fit BOTH categories. One is our mutual acquaintance Alice O Howell, the other is my dear friend and surrogate son Harry Hart-Browne who lives on a hillside in Southern California." This distinction between virtue and honor was expressed by others as well. For instance, Toni Morgan believed that "for me, honour is the quality I admire the most. I also think it's innate. I know people who have no interest in being honorable and, consequently, could never be even if they decided to change. I think if you are honorable you are, by definition, virtuous. I'm not crazy about the 'v' word" (30.7.5). She added later: "Virtue or being virtuous . . . oddly enough, and probably as a consequence of the world we live in, has a rather negative connotation for me. As I said, if you are honorable you are by definition virtuous. But if you are simply virtuous you are probably just a bit self-righteous and smug. This is simply semantics . . . the world changes and the definitions of words begin to change as well" (31.7.5).

³⁹Mika Lassander (University of Finland, Open University) makes the following observations: "But in [people like Gandhi, Nelson Mandela and Ken Saro-Wiwa] virtue and honour are linked with political activism and publicity. Could this lead to confusion in the measure of virtue and honour? Would Ken Saro-Wiwa be on the list had he been known only for his poems? Is honour equal to social activism/idealism? Is virtue equal to following uncompromisingly those (social/political) ideals? I think that it is difficult to classify any widely recognized people as honourable and/or virtuous because in order to be recognized they must be known for something i.e. political/religious/social activism – or are there people who are REALLY recognized just for their virtue/honour? The cynic in me says that [is] not likely." (personal communication 1.8.5).

⁴⁰In his reply to my question, writer Tom Badyna prefaces his response with his belief that "the most honorable among us, like the greatest forgers, are necessarily unknown" (personal communication 31.7.5).

a person could be honored for her honorable and virtuous qualities alone, a person perhaps like Numa Pompilius, the second king of Rome. And, most importantly here, whether honorable people are honored or remain invisible to the public eye – even to the perception of more personal contacts, it is the condition or quality itself as something *sui generis*, as something innate or self-nurtured, that is important for the individual alone in his or her personal pursuit of the good life and the goal of happiness – happiness less as a psychological disposition of contentment and more as the moral quality of one’s entire life.⁴¹

At the end of the day, the honor that a pagan might celebrate is one that is encapsulated by any of the classic cardinal virtues: strength or courage, temperance; moderation or self-control; wisdom or prudence; and justice or fairness. What would appear to underlie all these is behavior in conformity with an assumption of intrinsic dignity belonging to each human being. To be honorable, it is not necessary that people are inherently venerable, but the honorable person is one who acts *as if* this were the case. This consideration to others also extends to oneself as well. The honorable person not only respects others as a basic stance in life but possesses a self-respect that shapes his/her behavior in general. Some of the nuance concerning respect and the cardinal virtues came out in some of the further responses I received to the question who is honorable or virtuous. Two responses suggest a basic respect for the other – one that includes a respect for the earth.⁴²

⁴¹In Mortimer Adler’s words (1985: 135), happiness is part of the quest “to discharge our moral obligation to seek whatever is really good for us and nothing else unless it is something, such as an innocuous apparent good, that does not interfere with our obtaining all the real goods we need . . . life, liberty, . . . the protection of health, a sufficient measure of wealth, and other real goods that individuals cannot obtain solely by their own efforts.”

⁴²In nominating her father, Phyllis Meiners (Meinerworks Consulting & Publications) argues that “at the ripe age of 90 [he] is kind and gentle to his family, looking after their cares and woes, patient in understanding their personal difficulties, and eager to temper hostilities which remain among them” (Personal communication 30.7.5). In this estimation, we see kindness, temperance and understanding as recognizable facets of honor. Toni Morgan (*loc. cit.*) continued on the quality of being *engagé*: “So what do I mean when I call a person honorable . . . I need to think more about this. But for now . . . a belief that man’s inhumanity to man is wrong and a tremendous desire to right that wrong if even on a small level (like Jimmy Carter’s Habitat for Humanity) . . . a recognition of the tremendous wealth that exists in the world and a desire to at least share it in a more equitable manner. A respect for the earth itself and consequently the knowledge that that wealth came from the earth and the intelligence of man . . . I would say that an honorable man would be the man that actually feels a physical pain from seeing others suffer. And not to alleviate his own pain but to alleviate that of others will use his own intelligence and strength in spite of the consequences to himself . . . to right wrong. As he sees it. An honorable man is not a perfect man. Find me one of those if you can. He has to be, as I said, completely engaged with this world. Mistakes will be made. They will be recognized by him but he will continue. Can’t help it.”

Allowing for a lack of perfection is an interesting point.⁴³ In several of the responses I received, there is the recognition that the honorable person is one who fundamentally respects the other – including having a respect for the earth as well. Perhaps even more important, the honorable person is human – perhaps ‘all too human’ in Nietzsche’s phrase – and not some abstract, inhuman ideal. Honor may be an ideal, but a person who has it is real – blemishes and warts and all. For without that quality of being vulnerably human – making mistakes, suffering, having difficulties just like the rest of us, a person is too removed from the human arena where honor lives.⁴⁴

This humanness, this mixing of qualities, is reflected by others as well. For instance, Dr. Anthony Thorley’s thought of Lord Nelson.⁴⁵ On the field, in his professional life, Nelson was peerless. He exhibited the qualities of bravery and justice in the form of compassion, fairness and generosity. But privately, he had his human flaws. But does this last necessarily disqualify him from being admirable? Do we not respect him now all the more because he was true to himself over and above conforming to the social dictate of his times regardless of the concomitant scandal involved? Does not this last reveal strength of character that in itself

⁴³This notion is echoed by Kirstine Munk (*loc. cit.*). While I do not agree with her assessment that Mother Teresa was “too perfect,” she elaborates: “I think that perhaps a person can be too virtuous and honorable. A flawless person is somehow out from the category ‘virtuous human beings’, because as a human being it is difficult to relate to them properly. But Tutu always shares his mistakes with us and besides he is said to be a terrible driver. Blixen sold her soul to the devil and had syphilis and [financial] troubles. They are not perfect. They are virtuous to us *because* of their humanness as much as because they enact particular human ideals.”

⁴⁴However, for Shirley Eastham, the humanness of the honorable person mitigates their position and places them more into an ‘heroic’ category. She puts this as follows: “Did you want the qualities that make them virtuous and honourable in my mind, or is the list enough? There are more who mostly were v and h [virtuous and honorable] but had some sticky life situations that created compromises they struggled with. The reality of those compromises sort of take[s] them out of the v and h category but maybe put[s] them in a ‘heroic’ category. It is also possible I just don’t know enough about everyone. I am presuming you mean people I know, not saints, martyrs, leaders, etc.” She nominated her sister Joan, her father, her aunt Molly and my mother, Myrth Brooks York.

⁴⁵Considering Lord Nelson, Anthony Thorley (*loc. cit.*) makes the following comments: “I’ve been reading a lot lately about Horatio Nelson (as its nearly 200 years since Trafalgar) and he is interesting because as a professional sailor (aged 12–47 in the Royal navy) he was exemplary, and acknowledged by even his post-Trafalgar enemies as being peerless as an ideal sailor, leader, tactician and hero. His concern for his captains, and the ordinary seaman, his concern with fairness and justice and his very real kindness, generosity and compassion both in and out of battle make him a real candidate for a man of honour and virtue – but only as a Vice Admiral.

“As a man in his private life he was publicly dishonourable to his wife (whom he left abandoned in Bath) and unvirtuous as he publicly lived with Lady Emma Hamilton and was the public father of her their child, Horatia. So England was torn between their virtuous and honorable Admiral of their Fleet, the man who gave his life at Trafalgar and ensured 100 years of naval dominance and the foreign trade certainty that ensured the British Empire, and the scandalous and most public dishonour of an affair and a bastard daughter.”

is estimable?⁴⁶ The answers to questions as these are ones that we must leave open to some extent but will nevertheless address in part as we proceed with the full discourse on worship. Nevertheless, we need to keep in mind the changing mores of a time: the dishonorable person of the past may not be thought of as disreputable today; the honorable person of former times might no longer be considered praiseworthy now.

Remaining true to inner standards is an idea that frequently emerges among several of my replies, and this concerns the important perception that honor is something not intrinsically connected with fame, reputation or adulation.⁴⁷ Because of its own genuine value, what pagans wish to recognize as a *golden* value may indeed be appreciated by others on the more public stage of life, but it is the value itself that is important and not any necessary recognition of it by others.⁴⁸ While

⁴⁶Astrologer and cineaste Darrelyn Gunzberg echoes some of my thoughts here. In considering the Dalai Lama, she says: “Honourable people . . . well, the Dalai Lama springs to mind. He is true to himself and his beliefs and in so doing, holds to his honour in the sense of adherence to what is right. So Nelson Mandela falls into this category, also. In doing what they believe is right and true – without impinging upon the rights of others – these people also gain our respect. This is different, of course, from a suicide bomber who is also doing what they think is right and true but in so doing, destroys the lives of others to achieve it. Olympic champions gain honour through winning a race but it is the actions they take afterwards which truly make them honourable. So maybe Kelly Holmes fits this category – using one’s place to help others in need. Bob Geldorf also fits this. Taking yourself out of the picture enough so that ego does not intervene but allowing your name and rank to carry you along a pathway which alleviates the distress of others. Jamie Oliver probably fit this also with his ‘School Dinners’ TV programme which changed government policy” (personal communication 2.8.5).

⁴⁷Irene Earis (University of Lampeter) sifted her thoughts accordingly: “What a curiously difficult question you’ve asked about virtue and honour. At first I thought it would be easy to find examples, but I have come up with only one in the end after a process of elimination according to my own strict rules. I decided that honourable behaviour involved acting by the standards of inner truth even when it would be simpler or at least quite possible to behave with more material self-interest.

“The person who then sprang to mind was Krishnamurti who . . . was groomed by Annie Besant and Charles Leadbeater in the Theosophical Society to be a messiah or World Teacher but then in 1929 severed his ties with the organisations they had set up for him. It would have been much easier for him to accept the role they had prepared, but instead he said he did not want followers and that ‘Truth is a pathless land’ and that all religions and spiritual paths just created new cages. As far as I know he kept to this for the rest of his life. One might argue, of course, that his own feelings of being trapped into a false position formed the basis of his later philosophy of freedom, but nevertheless a dishonourable person might simply have continued in the role he had been given and gone on enjoying the adulation, fame and material comfort presented to him” (personal communication 2.8.5).

⁴⁸Caroline Robertson, Westbury Music, defines an honorable person as “someone who follows a plan, like a destiny, resolutely through the years; someone with magnanimity and yet humility” (personal communication 3.8.5). Homeopath and multi-tasker Caroline Pike considers “People who work tirelessly without ego or greed” to be those who are honorable (personal communication 3.8.5). The examples supplied are: Pattie Smith, Nelson Mandela, David Loxley (companion of the druid order), homoeopath Janice Micallef and Susie Shearer. Romuvan elder Jonas Trinkunas (personal communication 5.8.5) nominated two illustrious Lithuanians, namely, Grand Duke Gediminas (1275–1341) and the philosopher Vyduenas (1868–1953). The former established the

most of my respondents are not pagan, their answers on honor reflect that, as a virtue-value, principle or nobility is a universal quality that transcends religious sectarianism.⁴⁹

I will argue that the common denominator behind virtually all the responses I have received concerning honorable people is integrity. This integral quality suggests an essential uprightness, decency, probity or what we can quite simply consider as *goodness*. Honorable people are those who maintain or at least aspire toward adhering to a standard of conduct that is beyond the norm. In short, they are people who are worthy of honor – whether they receive such or not. They are the models and at the forefront for what is potentially inherent in all human beings. If we wish to be free, comfortable and healthy, for a meaningful life that conforms to the innate beauty of nature, we must wish also to be ethically principled as well as scrupulous in this aspiration. Moral worth is ultimately an aesthetic worth, and as we endeavor to construct our lives as ongoing accomplishments that are ‘correctly put together’, we are at heart coalescing them as living rituals and works of art. Honor is beauty.

It is hopefully obvious that by equating honor with beauty I am not referring to the simply comely or attractive. While an appreciation of the striking and appealingly pleasant last is a part of worship – something we shall discuss in the next chapter, the beauty I have presently in mind is the beauty of moral goodness. Another example of an honorable person is that of Wangari Maathai

tradition of the Lithuanian capital Vilnius as a universal city in which all religions have equal rights. He was a magnificent example of tolerance and enlightenment – declaring that “Pagans, Catholics and Orthodox Christians worship essentially the same divinity, albeit in different forms.” Although Gediminas guaranteed religious freedom to all his subjects, he tenaciously defended Lithuania against the Christian crusaders who sought to convert his nation by force. Trinkunas added, “His example showed that paganism could be a tolerant religious system,” while Vyduenas, in his turn, declared morality to be the highest virtue in a culture – seeing Baltic culture in particular as belonging to a “universal ethics and morality.”

⁴⁹Nevertheless, I wish to include mention of the nominees suggested off the top of her head by contemporary pagan leader Selena Fox (Circle Sanctuary), namely, Joe Raymond (Colorado) of the Guardians of the Sacred Circle, Deborah Ann Light (New York) of the Covenant of the Goddess and the Crones Cradle Conserve (Florida) and Kerr Cuhulain of Canada. The last, according to Fox, “includes Honor as part of the code for the Officers of Avalon, an international organization of Pagan police officers and those involved in emergency services” (personal communication 2.8.5). Among Fox’s suggestion, I know personally only Deborah Ann Light but can vouchsafe in this case her sterling character in terms of wisdom, courage, perspective, temperance, humility, dedication, perseverance, vitality, generosity and overall dignity. Perhaps from this example alone we have as fine an example of a person of honor as is possible. The Neo-pagan ethos consists of one sole principle that frequently goes by the name of the Wiccan Rede, namely, ‘An ye harm none, do what ye will’. While the ostensible thrust of this ‘credo’ is the libertarianism of freedom, it is couched in the same fundamental respect for others that we can discern behind most people’s understanding of honor. I suspect that Ms. Light has cut few corners in her swathe through life – appreciating all to the kind of fullness that would do any pagan proud, but at the same time – perhaps even as the underlying tenor of her *joie de vivre*, she has pursued all with intelligence, sensitivity and respect that we can only understand as honor.

(1940–2011).⁵⁰ I wish to emphasize Maathai at this juncture because, despite her Christian orientation, her sufferings for her beliefs, her persistent efforts and her recognition of the inherent sanctity of nature are all things that most pagans would acknowledge as worthy and honorable causes. In pagan eyes, she is a person of honor – one who has likewise linked spirituality and environmentalism.

Among the two remaining replies I wish to discuss, I will postpone the one from free-lance writer and editor Freeman Gunter to the next chapter. The other is from writer Tom Badyna who nominates at the start of his list “the three I’ve written about in my weird kind of essays – Gaetano Bresci, the assassin of the King of Italy, whom I find the most outstanding example of honor I know of⁵¹; George Washington, for his character in general, but mostly his historically unique example of walking away from a victorious army at Fraunce’s Tavern; and Sitting Bull, who lacks a dramatic moment of exemplifying honor, but certainly impressed all who came in contact with him as a man who held himself to the highest standards of honor and virtue.”⁵² Badyna mentions liking the scene in which Sitting Bull makes his son surrender his rifle.

⁵⁰While mentioned also to me by parapsychologist, Dr. Serena Roney-Dougal, as well as Professor Wendy Griffin, I am indebted for the information that follows to Dr. Bron Taylor (University of Florida, Gainesville) who forwarded to me a 4.8.5 article by Samwel Rambaya and Makena Memeu on Maathai from the *The Standard* of Nairobi, Kenya. Ranked in 2005 by *Forbes* magazine as number 68 among the world’s 100 most powerful women, Maathai had become the Kenyan Assistant Minister for Environment and Natural Resources as well as Africa’s first woman Nobel laureate. Before this, however, and as the person who launched the tree-planting movement in Kenya, she had been beaten and imprisoned. Maathai was not pagan but a practicing Catholic, though in a personal communication (10.3.14), Taylor informs me that “she came to hold her Christianity more at arms length and was much or more a pagan than a Christian by the time she died.” Nevertheless, she is a fine example of the dedication and courage that often characterizes a person of honor. According to *Beliefnet*, an American religious publication, she proposed that Easter Monday be dedicated to tree planting as part of the celebration of Christ’s conquest of death. Maathai said, “If we could make that Monday a day of regeneration, revival, of being reborn, of finding salvation by restoring the Earth, it would be a great celebration of Christ’s resurrection.” She added, “I always say somebody had to go into the forest, cut a tree, and chop it up for Jesus to be crucified. What a celebration of his conquering [death] it would be if we were to plant trees on Easter Monday thanks giving.”

⁵¹Upon further inquiry on my part, I received the following elucidation from Badyna on 13.8.5: “Assuming that the assassination itself does not exclude the possibility of honor or virtue, I was so taken with G. Bresci’s actions because he acted with the real possibility, even likelihood, that not only would no one ever know that he had done the grand deed, but that the last taste of him had by his friends and family would be one of acrimony and bitterness. Indeed, leaving behind the sore feelings was part of the very honorableness of his actions – so as to incriminate none of them. He had to consider the possibility that he would fail, that the king’s guards would toss him nameless into a dungeon. As it was, well, you know . . . It was, to me, an act of honor untainted by its own glory.”

⁵²Personal communication 31.7.5.

Badya's list is the longest of any I received,⁵³ but he concludes with the following which I find particularly insightful:

But if I were to write about honor, I think I'd have to play it off bullfighters. The code they live by, the stylized flamboyance, the ritual and the danger – all are based on a sense of honor that has no place in real society. So in a way they are absurd characters and their honorableness almost abstract, as in abstracted from, and, of course, they must have a psychology that requires they be known for living and dying up to their atavistic code.

Perhaps we are reminded here of Cervantes' Don Quixote. And perhaps it is true that honor has no place in actual society, though if that were so, a pagan might still adopt a quixotic determination to pursue it anyway. But what I like most in this inclusion and consideration is the link of courage, style and ritual that I wish to argue is the matrix of the quality of honor that we recognize in its various forms along with the human foibles and missing-the-mark misdeeds that can so often accompany them.

In conclusion, I should like to say that honor as something independent of reputation is simply virtue. The connection, interchange or identity of the two is probably to be detected in the Roman pairing of *Virtus* and *Honos*. The implicit suggestion is that *Virtue* is the passive feminine, the thing itself, while *Honos* is the male equivalent, the active outward expression – ultimately the *repute* that goes with virtue as something that does not remain unnoticed. The virtuous person, he or she who lives according to the dictates of ethical norms, will almost by default be recognized by others. *Virtue* does not live in a vacuum, and when it is seen by one's family, friends, peers, community or the larger world, it is understood as intrinsic honor and *is* honored as such.⁵⁴ In a word, virtue retains a transparency, and the resultant visibility involved is what we understand as honor.

Finally, the reluctance by many to consider anyone honorable if the candidate is not known to them personally betrays the fact that honor, like health, is something that relates to the whole person. It is not an aspect of just one part of a person's being but the person in his/her entirety: behavior, attitude, motive, disposition, etc. Once again we are permitted to understand the interchange of the essential virtues. A free person, a person who truly enjoys liberty, is one who walks comfortably with virtue and honor. A healthy person is also someone who has incorporated virtue and honor into his or her very being – however modestly, however preliminarily, however much such incorporation is merely a start in the direction toward goodness. And a person who lives in comfort, is one who knows virtue-honor and is comfortable

⁵³Badya includes Charles Darwin “not only for the famous incident with the letter from Alfred Wallace, but also, again, for his character in general” – pointing out that Robert Wright used Darwin's life as the model for his *The Moral Animal*. Others mentioned by Badya are the baseball player and fighter pilot Ted Williams who once “asked for a pay cut after a season not up to his own standards, . . . Joe Hill and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn . . . Maybe Eugene Debs.” Then, too, there is Lafcadio Hearn (an innate sense of honor) and George Jackson, one of the Soledad brothers (a rigorous sense of honor).

⁵⁴For instance, Albert Hoffman, the Swiss discoverer of lysergic acid-25, is loved by the psychonautic community less for the LSD product as he is for his honesty and integrity. I had the great privilege to tell him this once during a 1998 conference in Amsterdam.

and unthreatened by this. If we are to ascribe honor to anyone – whether family, friends, loved ones, colleagues, even ourselves or those who make impact upon the world stage, it is through our holistic knowing of them that we can do this. And this is worship: the making or creating of value – in this case through the recognition and acknowledging of intrinsic worth.

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Chapter 10

The *Trivium* of Worship

The key thing to keep in mind about honor is that it is understood as both a verb and a noun. To honor is the essence of worship, or, to the degree that it might be distinguished from adoration and veneration, at least the most important part of worship. If worship itself refers to the making or creating of value, then honor as a noun, as that almost elusive quality that we have sought to discern behind the various acts of being honorable, is simply worth: the worth or value that is implicitly present in anyone's acts or deeds of honor. Worship itself has both formal and informal expressions. As a kind of nomenclature shorthand, formal worship is what we understand as ritual – something correctly and properly put together like a work of art or a religious rite. But more informally, ritual or worship may be understood as a good deed: assisting another, expressing gratitude, being kindly, contributing in some way to the human endeavor. Over many years of persistent contemplation on worship and especially on its informal aspects, I have come to recognize the pursuits of pleasure, productivity and generosity as the more spontaneous, ordinary and normal ways of honoring godhead, however it is conceived, and it is these three virtue-values and their pursuance that I refer to as the *trivium* of worship. It is these three qualities that are discussed in the present chapter. They are in part derivatives of the ethical traditions already examined – especially those of the classical tradition and are here suggested as continuations if not also expansions of the world's forum of ethical debate. If as I have said honorable acts are based on recognizing the intrinsic value of all humans if not all sentient life and/or nature as our grounding matrix, does it follow that all people are honorable? Obviously not, since we are all equally capable of removing ourselves from commensurate behavior.

My own way of understanding the Wiccan Rede as the key moral statement for the Neo-pagan religion of Wicca is that all behavior is permissible with the one proviso that we do not harm or reduce another person against his or her will. This is a negative ethic. It tells us what we ought not do. Performing honorable acts and deeds is the positive counterpart. Such behavior expresses the aesthetic morality that I argue pagans as a whole endorse. Some of us, however, engage in vile acts against our fellows let alone the earth: murder, rape, theft, violation and so forth. Those

who cross completely the boundaries of decency are those who forfeit their own right to be treated with respect and honor. Whether we are to go so far as to endorse capital punishment in such instances, the transgressor has removed himself from the right of free movement within the human community. In such cases, an imposed sequestration may be seen as appropriate. But this last can only be enforced morally when there is no doubt concerning the perpetrator's guilt in the matter. If there is uncertainty, we ourselves have to live with it, for, to do otherwise, runs the risk indeed that we could harm or reduce another against his will and thereby to have ourselves acted immorally.

But for our own actions to be ethical, they must also be aesthetic, that is, they must conform to the highest standards of tolerance and latitude. We ought always to endeavor to be free from the shackles of myopic and sectarian perception. We cannot, accordingly, judge someone else's behavior as necessarily wrong just because it does not conform to our own way of doing things. In its more informal aspects, worship has to do with the pursuits of pleasure, productivity and generosity. And yet, the standards of what is proper in these areas vary – sometimes radically – from one individual or one community to the next. I shall supply one instance to illustrate my point here. In response to my question asking for names of honorable people, Freeman Gunter came up with the following:

Virtue and Honor. Well, I thought and thought. I looked the words up. But it depends upon one's own idea of what these qualities exemplify. The only clear cut examples I could think of were Jimmy Carter and my mother. My friend Carol Navin said, without hesitation: Doris Day. I jumped. But Carol thought this because she is almost pathologically devoted to dogs, and Doris Day has devoted her post-retirement years to caring for animals and their rights. So if she gets to drag this lofty concept down to movie stars, I get to propose Marlene Dietrich for her war work and her living her life as she believed right, devoted to her own principles. Since she had sex with whomever she wished (bringing happiness to hundreds), some would balk at the virtue part. But does virtue have to mean what it meant to my old maid Sunday school teachers? What a question. But by any standard, my mother qualifies, as I suppose Mr. Carter does. And isn't it interesting that in these days, these qualities are not only not exemplified by public figures, they are all but scorned. You've got your work cut out.¹

Marlene Dietrich's is probably not the first name that springs to mind for most people, but Gunter's choice is illustrative not only of the variety of our different perceptions but also that honor for the pagan is organic and real – not something merely reiterated from Sunday School teachings or to be mimicked from parochial and narrow-minded religious doctrines. Dietrich in her own way was a votary to the godhead by encompassing the fuller range of expressing honor in its formal and informal dimensions alike.

Consequently, the value or virtue of worship will be seen to differentiate yet further into four integrated components. The first of these I have termed formal worship or ritual – expressly, the putting of something together correctly. It refers to beauty as the aesthetic core of ethics. But further, there are the more informal

¹Freeman Gunter personal communication 1.8.5.

aspects of worship or honoring, and these I understand chiefly as the pursuits of pleasure, productivity and generosity. If we think of ritual as *ἄρετή-honos*-virtue alongside but inclusive of a sub-division or trivium, our ethical quadrivium expands to seven virtue-values similar to the medieval quadrivium of geometry, astronomy, arithmetic and music becoming the seven liberal arts of higher study along with the disciplines of grammar, logic and rhetoric. In other words, the seven virtue-values are freedom, comfort, health, honor, pleasure, productivity and generosity.

It is these seven virtue-values that I will argue are at the heart of any virtue ethics and quest for human happiness. Some people will place different emphases within them, and the interpretations of each will inevitably vary for anyone as well as for pagans. But at the same time, none of these are inseparable from the next. They overlap, they interchange, they coalesce, merge and re-emerge. They also serve as mutual checks to any particular excess on the part of any one to the exclusion of the others. Furthermore, there is a range of different names that each may be known under, but by positing this specific nomenclature, I am suggesting pragmatic reifications – idolizations, if one will – by which hopefully to incorporate a working and dynamic virtue ethics into our personal lives as members of both local and human communities in our individual quests for a well-being within harmoniously cooperative and respectfully competitive networks of overlapping being.

Pleasure

Pleasure is doubtlessly the most controversial virtue-value in many people's minds – even among pagans as well. When this last occurs, it can usually be traced to a gnostic puritanism that has historically intersected with paganism and continues to do so today. For 'deep' or generic pagans, along with nature worship, this-worldliness, corpo-spirituality, enchantment, deific pluralism and humanism, the pursuit of pleasure is another central concern. It is not something to be shunned but celebrated and embraced. Of course what constitutes as pleasure ranges from sensual enjoyment to reading, intellectual exchange, scientific discovery, the arts and humanitarian service. In keeping with pagan diversity and pluralism, some people opt for particular pleasures over others, but whatever the pursuit and enjoyment, the broad category is pleasure itself.

We have already seen that for the Cyrenaics, Epicureans and Utilitarians, pleasure is understood as the sole goal and only good. For most pagans of today, however, especially those who follow implicitly or explicitly a heptatheonic approach to the good life and morality, pleasure is simply one part of the overall picture – albeit a most important part. The question almost always comes down to being able to square honor and pleasure – especially when the former is more oriented toward serving the other and the latter is focused primarily on the self. Once again the answer is suggested by the Rede: An it harm none, do what thou will. As long as no one is harmed or reduced against his or her will, one is free to pursue what one wishes.

And it cannot be denied that for many humans, pleasure is indeed what they seek and want. This is especially the case for the young and, in the aesthetic balance of nature and the cosmos, rightly so. As I have said elsewhere, paganism is a celebration of youth: their energy, their beauty, their newness, their vulnerability and their promise. Any person who celebrates nature and life cannot do otherwise but honor, celebrate and wish for the young of this planet, and this includes not only protecting them, educating them, encouraging them but also thrilling over their own thrill of their being and enjoyment and discovery of life.

Paganism is of course more than *only* the celebration of youth. There is an honoring of the older, their wisdom and dignity, but to the degree that paganism is first and foremost a reverence of nature and the life that is born of nature, youth holds and will continue to hold a most special place in the overall pagan *joie de vivre*. And for the young, sensual pleasure, as well as learning to navigate its peaks and pitfalls, its ecstasies and dangers, is the baseline foundation to the hedonic. The deeper carnal delights that follow initial discovery and the beginning period of trial and experimentation are the flower of pagan *raison d'être*. It is through these – especially as they are supported by the reserves of youthful energy and endurance – that a pagan experiences the sublime and has his or her glimpse of what it is to be among the gods as one of the gods.

Pleasure derives from our senses – the very basic mediators of our earthly, physical being. The smell of a flower, the sight of a panoramic vista, the taste of pure water or a home-cooked meal, the sound of honky-tonk jazz or a Mozart symphony, the touch of a desired other – all these spring from our fundamental animal natures and the sense organs with which we are constituted to encounter the physical. As such, for a pagan, the faculties of perception may be considered gifts of the gods – as are life, the world, nature and the cosmos themselves. To shun these gifts through world-weariness or transcendental rejection is to dishonor the gods themselves. A pagan pursues and enjoys the pleasures of life as an act of worship – as a way of expressing gratitude to the earth and the deities.² It is perhaps this stance which most distinguishes the religious option of paganism from the other religions of the world. Denial is for a pagan something that is appropriate only for special circumstances or to achieve particular ends. Otherwise, paganism is not a religiosity of abstinence and renunciation but instead one of affirmation and indulgent celebration.

Carnal

There are of course many different kinds of pleasure than simply the passion of sensual/sexual congress, and most of this chapter is devoted to these. But it still

²Helvétius, *De l'esprit* 2.14 (p. 148): “les dieux sont bons; et nos plaisirs sont, pour eux, l'offrande la plus agreeable de notre reconnaissance” – <http://www2.ac-toulouse.fr/philosophie/textes/helvetiusesprit.htm> (accessed 31.3.6).

needs to be stressed that amorous fever is not condemned by pagan ethics as long as all participating parties engage of their own free will and choice and are mindful of the self-responsibility of any untoward consequences that might possibly result from such congress. The joy of love-making for young and old alike is endorsed by a pagan stance on life and the general desire to honor through enjoyment whatever forces and all forces there are that are behind such enjoyment. If pleasure is the great gift of the terrestrial and cosmic deities, sensual pleasure is a *primus inter pares*, the beginning gateway for adult appreciation of divine energy in its rawest manifestation and understanding from a pagan perspective. The mating bliss is to be honored as the initial foray for most into pagan mysteries.

Consequently, the passion of the senses calls for a true indulgence, bordering occasionally on self-abandonment, if it is to be experienced as pagans might understand that the gods intend. This libertine position, however, always has the potential to degenerate into complete licentiousness. Once again, though, as long as no one is hurt or reduced against her/his will, this is permitted. But this injunction applies to all parties involved: the self as well as the other. This is why a pagan would advise and encourage the cultivation and mindfulness of temperance at some point in our sexual developments. Pleasure, sensual pleasure, sexual pleasure, is but one possibility of worship and one of the basic virtue-values. It is to be encouraged but not at the expense or final neglect of the other ethical principles. In the end, coition and related activities are learning experiences – with a pagan insisting that education can be, and at times should be, a blissful, happy undertaking. To the degree that paganism is a celebration of nature and the changing round or cycles of existence, there is nothing in paganism that is static. Everything changes and wishfully develops, and this is precisely what paganism celebrates. The sexual and sensual here are no exceptions but are instead honored as being at the heart of pagan growth, discovery and pleasurable joy.

Nevertheless, we need to keep in mind the approximation of orgasmic pleasure in particular with the experience or sensation of pain. The more intense forms of pleasure tend to coincide with something akin to the painful. Apart from the cumulative climax itself, the consequence of pleasure, especially indulgent or reckless pleasure, may be something greatly less than the pleasant. The morning after, the hangover, the addiction, the illness, the unwanted pregnancy and so forth are part of what the conscious pagan must weigh in as possibilities in determining the choices and pursuits he or she makes. Pleasure, in fact, is at the furthest remove from a simple black-and-white scenario. The gradations and mixtures between it and pain are part of its volatility and elusiveness, part of its virtual indefinable nature. For the orgasm itself, once it is underway, there is often no turning back unless one has accomplished the rare super-restraint of Tantric self-control and continence. This last is suitable for the dharmic mystic, but most pagans do not take this particular route and have little wish to do so. Yet even apart from the ecstatic result of intercourse, it is the aftermath of the achievement of pleasure where the painful consequences are of the most concern to the natural ethicist or pagan.

It is at this juncture that we see the role of the cardinal virtues as conditioning agents in any self-abandoned pursuit of the hedonic virtue-value. Temperance

as a moderating restraint is what mitigates perhaps the pleasure but certainly the payment. A moderate consumption of the intoxicating beverage rather than the binge-drinking inanity to be witnessed on weekends in college towns and elsewhere allows an enjoyment that remains within this-side of consciousness and responsibility. A pleasure is had and repetitive oblivion avoided. The same principle applies to those who choose enjoyment through the use of recreational drugs. These are not as a rule ingredients that demand excess but rather ones that provide occasions, when employed with a mindfulness of proper balance, for learning the advantages of quality over quantity.

Prudence is another factor in such indulgent pursuits. I knew a pharmacist in Varanasi at one point that argued there was nothing addictive in his use of heroin or morphine as an aid for amusement and delight. Be this as it may, most people do not possess the requisite rigors of self-control when it comes to the use of such substances like heroin, cocaine or crystal-methadine. The more prudent course of action for a nature- and god-loving pagan is to avoid such things as well as to use such more benign channels as marijuana, alcohol, MDMA or the psychotropics with judicious caution, moderate employment or for the special – even ritualistic celebratory – occasion.

We can indeed detect the commensurateness of prudence and moderation as tempering factors for most pursuits of pleasure, especially sensual pleasures, but the other cardinal virtues are important here as well. For a pagan especially, courage calls for biting the bullet in the pursuit of carnal joys, that is, having the strength and audacity to pursue one's pleasurable wants in disregard to biblical intimidation or Abrahamic guilt. The Western pagan of today lives in a culture that has been shaped by Judeo-Christian mores and whether he or she endorses that informing religiosity or not, he/she cannot escape the accompanying cultural influence. From a pagan perspective, this last feeds on cultivating a sense of shame and the fear of everlasting punishment. For anyone raised in such a framework of thought and conditioning, it takes a degree of bravery to say no to such spiritual/cultural bullying and coercion and pursue the organic and natural path that a pagan honors. The love and enjoyment of pleasure is precisely where the pagan living in a Judeo-Christian milieu is the most vulnerable. Cultivating the cardinal virtue of courage or strength allows the ability to flaunt institutional terrorism and instead enjoy the enjoyable gifts that nature and the gods have given.

Justice and pleasure seem at first to be uncomfortable partners, but here we have the foundation to the *Rede* or principle that allows the widest latitude of behavior as long as it is not done at someone else's expense. The wealthy magnate who possesses the stately home that is the envy of many must be allowed his or her indulgence if it has not been achieved through material exploitation. It is the mealy-mouthed and mean-spirited, Nietzsche's herd mentality person, who cannot rejoice in another's good fortune, who wishes to reduce all to the level of the same, who is unable to celebrate the difference in life-styles and comforts in which some have been lucky enough to be better off than the rest. If, however, one's status or luxury surpasses a modicum of excess, it is then that such achievement may be thought of as having occurred at the expense of others. It is the judgment of such that is the

tricky aspect of this equation, but it is the exploitation that is real and not simply imagined or projected that is the true degradation. A fair or just enjoyment is one in which no such unfairness or belittling or thwarting of another for one's own pleasure has occurred.

Generic

In his fifth *Discussion at Tusculum*, Cicero condemns Epicurus for understanding the virtues of honor, wisdom and justice in terms of pleasure.³ However, while preceding Christianity, Cicero nevertheless is illustrative of the gnostic counter-current that runs through much of classical paganism, namely, the schools of Pythagorean, Platonic and Neoplatonic thought that deplored the “voluptuous languors by fatuous transports of delight”⁴ as obstacles to happiness. In other words, this greatest of statesmen and certainly one of the world's more honorable figures shared a Christian or Judeo-Christian sentiment that demands liberation from sensuality and immoderate cravings. For Cicero, Epicurus' identification of evil with pain and good with pleasure represents “a mockery of all our attempts to establish moral standards.”⁵ To be fair to Epicurus, he does not maintain that only *physical* sensations are important, and to be fair to the pagan of yesteryear and today “moral force, distaste for wrong-doing, constant practice in endurance [and] manly toughness” are indeed important.⁶ But Cicero has here shifted the argument to *remedies* for pain and away from the pursuit of pleasure. Sensuality, he claims, simply seduces humanity from the straight and narrow path of integrity.⁷

To all this, the pagan who is both honest and life-affirming will say resoundingly ‘no!’ Pleasure concerns both the locus of the pleasure-seeker's body *and* the normal transactions between people – whether the everyday or the special or both. While the etymology behind our word *pleasure* derives through the Latin *placēre* ‘to please, be agreeable’,⁸ both pleasure and gratification are the bases of countless expressions for polite exchange between people: French *s'il vous plait*, English *please*, Italian *grazie*, Spanish *gracia*, etc. Through such formulae of politeness, may it please you, we express both requests and gratitude. In other words, pleasure is more than merely carnal or sensual enjoyment – as important as this is, but the medium through which

³Cicero, *Discussions at Tusculum* 5.9.26 (Grant 1971:67). All the same, in his essay, *Laelius: On Friendship* 21.81, Cicero speaks about taking pleasure in fairness and justice (Grant 1971:217).

⁴*Ibid.* 5.6.16, p. 61.

⁵Cicero, *Discussions at Tusculum* 5.25.72 (Grant 1971:91).

⁶*Ibid.* 5.26.73, p. 92.

⁷See Cicero, *On Duties* 2.10.37 (Grant 1971:139).

⁸From an extended form of the Indo-European radical **pele-* ‘flat, to spread’, namely, **plāk-* ‘to be flat’, **plak-ē-* ‘to be calm (as of the flat sea)’: Morris (1969:1006); Watkins (1969:1535).

we experience and express gratefulness and our being pleased to one another. And, once again, it is through pleasure, in experiencing pleasure, that a pagan may thank the gods for the very beingness of life.

This fullness of life is what we enjoy through sports, hobbies and the arts. We play cricket, chess, football, checkers, tennis, baseball, basketball; we swim, surf, cycle, run, dance or even leisurely walk; we collect stamps, recipes, souvenirs, memories; we rock-climb, bungee-jump, hang-glide, parachute, snorkel, deep sea dive, travel; we attend the opera, go to the theater, see a movie, watch television, visit a museum, perform on the stage, sit in the audience, or stay quietly at home enjoying the read of a book: the pleasurable pastimes of the human are virtually countless. For some – especially those who are fortunate enough, one’s work or professional life melds with what one enjoys, and this last, the loving of one’s work, is what every pagan if not every awake human being in general aims for and hopes to achieve. In its fullest grasp and celebration, the pleasurable does not belong to a special compartment or interlude but to the fullness of a complete life.

Consequently, a pagan can agree with Bentham and Mill that happiness is pleasure and the exemption from pain. As Mill argues, anything that is desired must be to some degree pleasurable. So while Aristotle might have held that the greatest good for the majority, that is, persons of ‘low tastes’, is pleasure, for the businessman wealth and for the gentleman honor, a pagan is more apt to consider all these and more as pleasures – allowing each to his or her own if and when such enjoyment does not occur at another’s expense.⁹ Mill, in fact, in his *On Liberty*, stresses the importance of different types of character for the full freedom of development necessary for human expansion. We are not the same; we have different potentials; we have different wants; and we have been nurtured to want differently. But what we want in whatever form that brings us satisfaction and gratification shares that one quality that we may term as ‘pleasure’. If it is not pleasurable on some level or for some reason, we do not want it and do not pursue it.

It should be obvious in this, though sometimes it needs to be spelled out, that pleasures extend to areas beyond the immediately sensual. The pleasure of learning and, conversely, of teaching are instances of such. For a pagan, the whole range of education may be classified under the hegemony of gratification, but once again, we can witness the interlinking between the virtues here as well. Education and learning are part of, and what promote, freedom. They may also be ascribed as comforts but more certainly as aspects of health and completeness. It is healthy to learn and to want to learn – from the newborn infant who shows an insatiable curiosity of the great big mysterious and wondrous world ‘out there’ to the retiree who has the leisure to pursue further study and quiet contemplation. The whole of human life is an affair of learning, and as long as we retain our basic faculties – especially that of memory – it is an endless procedure. The learning process may not always be a happy one; there are bumps and disappointments along the way. But the overall

⁹Grayling (2003:30f, 176, 179).

net result is one or at least hopefully is one that augments insight, allows us to become wiser, encourages that freedom of the spirit that every emancipated human cherishes – and all this is ultimately a pleasure.

But if education and learning are pleasures – allowing life itself to be a university and our schools, colleges and universities to be sacred centers and holy shrines, a pagan may nevertheless be suspicious of labeling this kind of pleasure as ‘higher’. Knowledge, erudition and wisdom are *different* kinds of pleasure than the sensually carnal, at best perhaps of a *primus inter pares* status, but not in a pagan schema hierarchically superior. The wise Socrates and Confucius are not necessarily happier than a Casanova or Don Juan in his youth; their pleasure is simply a different pleasure – at least for themselves alone. We might possibly rank enjoyment as it affects others, that is, the benefit that Socratic or Confucian wisdom might have for another as opposed to the other-person effects of the lustful enjoyments of a libertine. But we are here at once moving into a different area of worship. Pleasure itself concerns the individual, and what is considered pleasurable for the one may not be for the next. Even when we approach the Utilitarian principle that seeks political and social effort in securing the greatest happiness for the greatest number, we have moved away from pleasure per se for the honorable concerns of service, productivity and generosity. Pleasure is what I feel, you feel, he or she feels. Even when it becomes a matter of how we or they feel – or the you of the actor’s audience or my readership, with pleasure the collectivity is simply an aggregate of individuals who each feel the enjoyment personally. Delight, joy, happiness, pleasure is something that is intimate and self-oriented even when it is shared between two or more people.

Worship

Beside the sensual and intellectual enjoyments, another form of pleasure is that which is found in worship itself. Our acts of reverence toward the earth, sun, moon, dawn, Goddess, God, Apollo, Demeter, Indra, Śiva, Devi or any other of countless goddesses and gods are something that is pleasurable – no matter whom we worship and even when performed as fasting or other austerities. If and when pain is involved, it is the pleasure of connecting or relating to deity that constitutes the thrill of pleasure – one that, for the worshipper, dominates ultimately over whatever sacrifice and discomfort that is involved.

In fact, honorable behavior will take, even for a pagan, precedence over voluptuous joys. In other words, Honos has a more revered status than Volupia, goddess of delight and happiness.¹⁰ Nevertheless, pleasure with honor does not

¹⁰On Volupia (from *voluptas* ‘joy’), see York (1986:198f). The goddess appears to have been particularly honored at the time of the winter solstice – again suggesting the foundational aspect of carnality to all experiences of pleasure.

translate into abstinence and the absence of bodily delights. To the contrary, it is the enjoyment of education and worship in all their forms – along with the carnal and sensual – that comprise for a pagan honorable pleasure and pleasurable honor. Goodness of character can incorporate the full range of appreciating the gifts of life and, in its own right, is a worthy pleasure as much as is the joy of two youths locked in passionate embrace. While Cicero considers sexual love as “utterly trivial, and the promoter of shame and inconstancy,”¹¹ he can nevertheless refer to taking “pleasure in fairness and justice.”¹² In Cicero’s case, it is clearly his gnostic predilection that ensures his judgment that the animal-like terms of pleasure are to be regarded as lowly and degraded, but the point here is that even the more sublimated and intangible forms of pursuit and fulfillment can be pleasurable. Honor is in itself a pleasure.

Friendship

Perhaps no clearer illustration of the non-carnal joys of life is the utter delight of friendship. Cicero has much to say here as he builds from Aristotle’s understanding of friendship as “the greatest of external goods.”¹³ He considers that congeniality of temperament, the sharing of tastes, aims and outlooks, constitutes the essence of friendship and that, in conformity to Stoic ideas, friendship is in full harmony with nature itself. For Cicero, friendship is “defined as a complete feeling about all things in heaven and earth: an identity which is strengthened by mutual goodwill and affection.”¹⁴ Apart from wisdom, he sees friendship as the supreme gift of the gods to human beings. Other than goodness, it is the finest thing in the world. For Cicero, amity is based entirely on moral goodness, and he echoes Aristotle in recognizing the necessity of friends for both good times and bad. It is as necessary as are fire and water to life.¹⁵ Affection is motivated and ensured by the goodness that is recognized by mutual friends in each other. On this basis, a friend is he or she who exerts every effort to augment the other’s self-confidence. Companionship, being fused with trust and honor, is free, relaxed and agreeable.¹⁶ In short, it is a pleasure, an incomparable

¹¹*Discussions at Tusculum* 4.32.68 – vide Grant (1971:174)

¹²Cicero, *Laelius: On Friendship* 21.81 (Grant, 1971:217).

¹³*Nicomachean Ethics* 9.3 [1169b] (McKeon 1947:511). In his *Laelius: On Friendship* 19.70 (Grant 1971:212), Cicero has Laelius proclaim “whatever gifts of mind and character we may possess, we only reap their finest fruits when we are able to share them with our nearest and dearest.”

¹⁴Cicero, *Laelius: On Friendship* 5.19 (Grant 1971:187).

¹⁵The Latin word for ‘friendship’, namely, *amicitia*, derives from *amor* ‘love’ and *amare* ‘to love’ – and is expressive of where there is no element of falsity or pretense: *ibid.* 8.26 & 27.100 (Grant 1971:191, 226).

¹⁶Cicero, *Laelius: On Friendship* 18.65 (Grant 1971:210).

pleasure. “The people who merit your friendship are those who genuinely possess some characteristic capable of inspiring devotion.”¹⁷ Worthy companionship encompasses everything akin to goodness, celebrity, tranquility and satisfaction, in short, all the things that produce happiness. This is the one thing that all humanity will agree to be of value.¹⁸ Without friendship, a decent human existence is not possible; without affection and feelings of kindness, life is without joy.

One beautiful aspect concerning friendship is that it is not necessarily dependent on the frequency of interaction. What I mean here is that two people may have known each other and been friends during a certain interval of their lives. For example, I knew my college roommate John and we were friends during our years as students at the University of California, Santa Barbara and for a few years thereafter, but circumstances led us to losing contact with each other for the past 36 years. When some further circumstances allowed me to learn of his address, during the course of writing this chapter, we were able to reconnect when I knocked on his door in Flagstaff, Arizona. What had been until that moment a 6 or 7 year relationship suddenly became a friendship of 40 years or more. The bonds of closeness always have the potential of renewal regardless of the absence of intervening time. In our age of today, thanks to electronic forms of communication in particular, there is a potential to maintain contact – and not to lose contact – that is unprecedented. Our technological world allows the joy of renewing and sustaining friendships over huge distances that previous generations of humanity did not share.

A key observation that Cicero makes concerning friendship, namely, “if you are lonely, every pleasure loses its savour,”¹⁹ permits us to recognize the importance of having friends not only to pleasure but ultimately *as* pleasure. The Roman statesman considers that nature detests loneliness (a sort of emotional *horror vacui*) and is so constructed that everything is dependent upon some kind of support, which for the human being is a good friend – the best support of all. Not only in giving advice but in receiving it, a real and loyal friend is not simply a pleasure but a genuine pleasure – not associated with hypocrisy, false adulation or obsequious sweet talk. While Cicero spurns Epicurean philosophy, Epicurus too holds that friendship is one of the supreme pleasures.²⁰ It is both intrinsically valuable and also instrumental – unlike justice which is merely helpful but not of inherent worth in itself. A pagan accepts eudemonia variously as delight, honor, wealth, reputation and so forth but nevertheless understands each of these as pleasures. And among this vast range of joys, closeness, familiarity and alliance with another is a *primus inter pares* – a first among the pleasures of life.²¹

¹⁷Ibid. 21.78 (p. 216).

¹⁸Cicero *Laelius: On Friendship* 22.84 (Grant 1971:217f).

¹⁹Ibid. 23.87 (p. 219).

²⁰Grayling (2003:48).

²¹See MacIntyre (1998:59f). Nevertheless, MacIntyre argues (pp. 79f) that Aristotle’s description of the ‘great-souled man’ as characterized purely by goodness, pleasantness and utilitarian practicality has no capacity – due to his self-containment – to love another simply for the sake

The Virtue-Values

In fact, virtually all the virtue-values are to be understood – or at least can be understood – as pleasures. Certainly, liberty is a pleasure, the unimpeded activity that we all seek. But so too are comfort and health as well as worship – all are pleasures, with worship being the very expression of gratitude – both for the pleasures that life brings and as a pleasure in itself. While it may be true, as MacIntyre opines, that pleasure may be used to name whatever people aim at, if pleasure is balanced by such other genuine worthies as service, output and generosity, it is still an ethically evaluative and practical standard. In the end, we must realize that all human *desiderata* – from sexual passion to friendship, honor and consciousness – are pleasures, and it is in their being such that they are sought, with the making the other happy being yet one more of the pleasures of life that most of us seek – at least some of the time. The cook cooks to please. We aim in general to produce a smile (perhaps the benign acceptance of the folly of life) or laughter (a release from tension). Both are mysteries belonging to the human fabric of nature – with laughter in particular the energy that takes us into another realm, that of pure pleasure, however ephemeral. Laughter can result from a joke or from the eureka insight or a sharp or clever idea. In short, the most generic category with which we can classify all these variable joys of life is that of pleasure.

The ethical question for humanity in general and pagans in particular hinges on the almost indefinable relationship between pleasure and honor – even honor *as* pleasure and especially pleasure as honor. Despite Nietzsche's deploring of the herd, the many-too-many, the bourgeois mind-set of the unimaginative masses, a guiding principle remains that we can endeavor to treat everyone we encounter as a *potential friend*. Here is perhaps the underlying rationale for the aesthetic of polite behavior – what Hume held to be virtuous in and of itself. We need not consider each and every person to be a friend, but we can be piloted in our navigations of life on all levels – from daily intercourse to our most encompassing actions – by the possibility that another might someday become a friend. It virtually goes without saying that if we could approach life in this fashion, we would have a more viable and happier world than we do with the present one riddled by the purely me-orientation of greed, selfishness and competition concerning both space and time.

Consciousness

If friendship and wisdom are among the supreme pleasures available to us as human animals, a third ultimate delight is that of consciousness itself. Whatever consciousness is, it is just what it is when it is. For a pagan, consciousness

of loving. But if the great person that Aristotle exalts is not as purely ego-centered as MacIntyre contends, there is still room for him to engage in genuine friendship even if and when the relationship comprises in part "moral mutual admiration."

becomes an offering to the cosmos. If so, the question must be: what do we wish to offer – puritanical, purely rational consciousness; or one that has tasted and enjoyed pleasure without accompanying or resultant guilt or shame? From a pagan perspective, pleasure is the conscious gift to the cosmos and consciousness is the very pleasure that is given. It is this consciousness of our pleasure that supersedes even the self-abandonment of ecstatic pleasure – as pleasurable as this last may still be. Consequently, the ethical pleasures of consciousness – both rational and rapturous – that are to be offered are only good pleasures. This should go without saying since ethics is only about the good.

The idea of fusing the supernatural with the ethical standards of right and wrong is (especially) an Abrahamic take. Though at first I had wanted to say that a pagan does not do this, the truth of the matter is that a pagan does do this – albeit differently: against different standards and different understandings of the preternatural. In general, a pagan seeks to remain on this side of the border between decorum pleasures and outrageous pleasures even if and when these last are still to be tolerated. Cherishing balance and health, a pagan for the most part seeks his or her enjoyments not as an affront to others but as an honoring of the gods. There is a seeking of joy and delight that fits with life in an organic and even, if one will, non-confrontational manner. As we crest the exuberances of youth, we come to understand the enjoyable more moderately for the most part and as less disruptive to the ebbs and flows of a natural rhythm.

In all my musings on pleasure, honor and worship, I have tried here to illustrate the interconnectedness of physical, mental and spiritual pleasures for an ethical pagan. The pagan insists on the widest latitude in behavior and the freedom of pleasurable pursuit. This scope is expressed in the Rede and as the principle that as long as another is not harmed or reduced against her will all is permitted. But what this means and underscores is an important and distinguishing reality for a pagan himself to grasp – however uncomfortable the implications here may be. For instance, some people could argue that not seeking to help the refugees of the Katrina hurricane that struck New Orleans and the Gulf coast is not, on their part, reducing or harming the stranded and wounded against their will – that these people have already been reduced and harmed. And from this particular framework, this stance must be accepted as valid *for those who hold it*. Many of us, however, perhaps most of us and certainly most pagans, wish to conduct our lives beyond the immediate confines of the negative ethic. Such people recognize instead a greater aesthetic in the compassion and assistance of others – especially in times of dire need. A pagan cannot condemn people who do not wish or chose to help²² but simply champions those that find the mindfulness of others and the opportunity to help them as conforming more completely to the aesthetic/ethical standards of life – a beauty that is a pleasure in and of itself.

²²This non-condemnation, however, does not extend to the government whose very task and responsibility is to govern its subjects and seek to prevent harm to them or assist them when they have been harmed. We are talking here about personal ethics and not about governmental irresponsibility.

Thermal

The ideas encapsulated here shall be discussed in greater detail in a later chapter. For now, let us recognize that the fusion of the physical and spiritual in terms of pleasure for the organic naturalist is epitomized in the recognition and experience of the hot spring as a pagan citadel of deity and pleasure. At such centers, the godhead is advanced as a manifest tangibility. Springs, sources, wells and fountains are important pagan religious centers. They have always been such and continue to be revered as sacred places today. The thermal spring in particular is approached as a numinous locus. It is place in which the mystery of godhead is at its fullest. Here we find the *tirtha* as the ford between the worlds, this world and the otherworld – one that offers in addition the sensual delight of restoration and renewal and, hopefully, the re-found ability to do good for others as well.

Commodification

The pleasure-dome of the health resort suggests another consideration in connection with delight, namely, the commodification of pleasure. One may condemn this if one must, but within the full parameters of pagan tolerance and celebration, even pleasure as a commodity is acceptable and becomes something to work with rather than necessarily to resist and oppose. In our day and age in which everything might be commodified, pleasure enjoys no exception. If it is pleasing, that is what counts and can be taken into any further reckoning of ethical navigation. A stunning concerto performance becomes a CD; a theatrical masterpiece, a DVD. The delight of massage is something for purchase within the spas of the world and elsewhere. A cappuccino; a margarita; a tennis championship match – all these will rank alongside the more free pleasures of simply enjoying the sun, gazing at the stars, going for a walk, participating in the company of a loved one or engaging in general conversation.

Conversational

With regard to the last, it is where friendship and consciousness most come together. Conversing with others is one more of the supreme pleasures of life.²³ It is also the medium through which we enter into a larger dimension of world engagement. *The Conversation*, that is, the dialogue and open-ended negotiation with others – with all

²³Whereas in dharmically oriented faiths, consciousness is the supreme achievement, with paganism it may well be conversation that is the ultimate, that is, what opens us up to both community and our fullest humanity.

others – becomes at the end of the day our very *raison d'être*.²⁴ The human forum of universal conversation is the means to secure a more equitable and universally based world for everyone and not merely a privileged clique or divisive sectarian banter. Such a world – as well as the means toward its sustainable procurement – could well be our greatest pleasure.

Productivity

Production, the ‘leading forth’, is akin to education, the ‘leading out (from darkness or ignorance)’. Productivity refers to the positive yield of our actions and output. And to the degree that what we produce is of value, productivity is itself the heart of worship – the making or creating (*scheppen* > –*ship*) of worth. In producing things of value, we are at our most active in any positive sense. Productivity takes us beyond the passive state of simply being free, comfortable or healthy and into that condition in which we contribute to our world and cosmos. It is here that we find our *raison d'être*.

Because we are different as individuals, because we have been nurtured through different cultures to become the distinctive individuals that we are, what we produce is also different from the one to the next. When discussing the virtue of productivity, it is not what we produce that is necessarily significant but *that* we produce. It may be as simple as growing a tomato plant. Or it might be the oeuvre of Shakespeare. It could be an entertaining song sung at a party, or it might be Einstein’s development of the theories of relativity. Added all together, what we as a human species produce is what constitutes our net impact vis-à-vis the cosmos. To be ethical, to be a virtuous person, it is imperative at the end of the day that we participate in this collective contribution of producing positive value in some way. What we actually produce, both in terms of quality and quantity, is largely for ourselves individually to determine within the circumstances and opportunities that we have, but to the degree that we do indeed participate in the human producing process, we are engaging ethically with life.

In this sense, the so-called ‘work ethic’ is not automatically a part of the virtue-value of productivity. Work for work’s sake may indeed be healthy – at least for some, and if so, then it is of value. But the emphasis here is that of producing value, valuable resources for self and ultimately others, and transcending the basic feeding loop process of most animal existence. Some of us, in fact, might earn our living

²⁴Once again we can witness in this pagan validity the distinction of paganism from those religions that exalt a sacred text as inerrant and ultimate. Over and above any Bible, Koran or Veda is, for a pagan, human dialogue – the open-ended and unconditional conversation with another person; the sharing of ideas and information with all people. *The Conversation* itself is for the pagan the sacred text that is being written at each and every moment of human duration. Along with consciousness, it is our offering to the cosmos – our gift to the gods that is offered from within our own ephemeral flash through time and space.

through the manufacture of arms and weapons; some as tax collectors. Everyone needs to make a living, but such professional work is not part of the process of producing positive value. This last needs to be something extra for those of us who are not fortunate enough to have a job that itself entails positive production. Again, it is not the quantity that matters; it is that we produce something of quality – whether vocationally or as an avocation.

It goes virtually without question that there are shadings in quality production. Weaponry development and tax collection are obvious in how they are to be ranked. More nuance might be seen with the output of a chef. Is the meal produced in itself healthy, or is it simply delicious, or is it old-fashioned, starchy and cholesterol-laden? The gourmet creation and the nutritious dinner are both valuable, and it is perhaps through the kitchen that many, if not most, of us fulfill our quota for being ethically productive.

There is, however, another consideration with productivity as a value-virtue. Take the mining industry as an example. Here we have the extraction of much needed minerals and other substances that we use in our day-to-day existences. But counterbalancing this particular production is the scarring of the earth that often comes with it – let alone the pollution and other environmental hazards. Consequently, what we need to consider with this and virtually any productivity, no matter how valuable what is produced is, are the further consequences involved. With productivity, management is essential – with the case of mining, extracting and fracking, this entails managing the resource in manners that are compatible with sustainable growth and ecological protections.

In short, with production, there are two considerations, namely, the quality of what is produced and the damage or negative consequences involved in its production. These latter must be reduced, if not eliminated, and, in the least, need not outweigh the positive value of the product itself. For productivity to be commensurate with morality, it must in balance be valuable, useful or enjoyable and not detrimental, useless or harmful.

Driving across the North American continent in the course of writing this chapter, I have been privileged to witness the magnificent beauty of constantly shifting terrain: the lushness of Virginia and Tennessee, the majesty of cactus ‘fields’ in Arizona, the intimacy of California’s Sierra Nevadas, the openness of Nevada, the mesa spectacular and ‘elephant feet’ of Utah, the shifting panoramas of the Colorado river basin, the expanse of Kansas, the green rolling hills of Wisconsin, the Pennsylvanian Appalachian, the early autumnal Catskills of New York, etc. The experience of all these have been pleasures. The marathon distance involved in the driving is an achievement. This last, too, if we were to ascribe an heptatheonic value to it, is a pleasure. Productivity, by contrast, is the producing of value of some sort, and this is something different.

In the non-constraining ethical parameters of pagan latitude, it is not so much what exactly is produced but rather that valuable production as a process itself occurs. The product may range from such tangibles as the tomato, a malt whisky, a handicraft item, a jumbo jet, an ocean-sailing vessel, a computer program, a cinematic film or architectural construction to such quasi-tangibles as a poem or novel or theatrical production to such intangibles as comradeship, loving relationship

or conversation. Certainly agriculture, if not also husbandry, is the foundation of all human production. The producing of food is what has emancipated us as an animal species from a strictly hunting and gathering form of subsistence into the accumulation of surplus with its concomitant possibilities of leisure, differentiation and, thereby, civilization. The entire march of human progress may be measured by our technical skills that were related first to the acquisition of food and subsequently to ever greater abilities for shelter, transportation, travel, exchange, communication and discovery. For all these various stages of development, physical products have been produced to allow us higher degrees of comfort, health, pleasure and freedom. A product is valuable to the extent that it serves its purpose: the automobile for transport, the rocket ship for interplanetary exploration, the food processor for a greater range of culinary delight, the bicycle for local and pollution-free travel in a place like Amsterdam, the computer for communication and research, the shovel for digging, the ladder for climbing, the refrigerator for food storage, the washing machine for cleaning laundry, the hammer for striking a nail, the vacuum cleaner for hovering – the list is virtually endless by human standards. A pagan recognizes the utility of technological as well as creative invention, but in her/his understanding of ethical navigation itself it is the creative/productive/fruitful aspect that is singled out as significant and contributory to the *summum bonum* on which human happiness ultimately depends. What is important in this sense is less the worth itself of the produced item as it is the process of producing something of value. This is the *scheppen* – the making or creating – of something of value or worth: this is worship as a process – a functionally verbal act – in and of itself.

Paganism, like any religion, can be and has been reflective of any given state of human non-development. Horrors and imperial expansions have occurred under the name of paganism as they have with other religious orientations. But unlike all other religions, in its conformity to natural tendencies and rhythms, paganism also has the propensity to regenerate organically and spontaneously. Its two millennium eclipse may be accepted as paganism's night or winter, its period of hibernation or sleep, from which it emerges renewed and strengthened and with the potential to be commensurate with a growing human aspiration. At heart, each of us is pagan because each of us is human and a product of nature. Unless we have been conditioned, intimidated, frightened or hexed to think and believe otherwise, paganism is and always remains our natural birthright. And it is in this sense that we might be able to regain and/or discover an ethical code and moral quality of being that encourages the best of human stature and collective ability. In short, paganism allows us to be most in touch with the realities and needs of life as well as with all the spiritual wonders that life involves.

One of these great wonders is, from a pagan and/or human perspective, the making of the positive. For a person to be fully alive, to participate in the joyous gift of life as *sui generis*, as something unadulterated with further agenda or as simply a means to something else – however important these other ends may be at the end of the day, engagement with the development of the positive in itself, however great or small, numerous or singular, is necessary. In today's ethical parlance, we often hear about 'production ethics'. This last, however, is different from the ethics of production and refers, instead, to producing goods without detrimental harm

to the environment or others. As important as this last is, it represents a different emphasis – one that in the ethics of production itself is merely one consideration among several, the consideration of positive balance. It is here that we begin to re-approach the blurring of honor and worship. Production ethics is part of the broader concern with respecting the intrinsic dignity of earth, environment and others and not reducing that inherent quality of nobility in the course of producing a valuable product. For the specific concerns of productivity as a virtue-value, however, this non-reduction is part of the process, but it is the process itself that is preeminent in significance – for if nothing valuable is produced or if the value of what has been produced is outweighed by negative or harmful consequences, the process itself has not occurred.

Art

Productivity, as has already been said, ranges vastly. The French composer, Maurice Ravel, in the last year of his life, while suffering from the debilitating aphasia that was to end his life, composed one of his greatest works, his Piano Concerto in G Major. Sandwiched between two scintillating movements, the Adagio assai is a supreme accomplishment. If this sublime interlude were the only thing that Ravel had produced it would still have been enough to render his life as a worthy one of a great production. In fact, however, Ravel was one of those gifted souls who created many a masterpiece of thoroughly enjoyable music. Most of us, nevertheless, meander through life without the talents and outputs of a Ravel, Mozart, Shakespeare, Rembrandt, Michelangelo or Caravaggio. We must instead be content to find our own niche in which we produce whatever we can produce as a worthy output regardless of the greater recognition it earns us – if any. From the more egalitarian pagan outlook, this acknowledgement is incidental. What matters is that we make something or at least contribute toward the positive result of something. If we can garner recognition or reward in the process, so much the better. But however humble or however superbly outstanding our productivity may be, the crucial issue is that we have done something – something more than simply live a comfortable, pleasurable life. We have contributed to the ever-growing reservoir of human output – whether that contribution is permanent or temporary. It is the contribution itself that counts. The item produced may be no less ephemeral than a conversation, but it is the positive aspect of what is produced that is crucial to the valuation of output as an ethical activity. This may concern the growing of the tomato plant, the articulation of an *ad hoc* invocation, the construction of the Great Pyramid of Ghiza, or the composition of the *Iliad* or the *Inferno*. What matters is that one is simply the author, creator, constructor or producer of something of worth, whether singularly or as part of a team effort.

Artistic creation ranks among the quasi-tangible/quasi-intangible realm of production. There is a tangible aspect of a work of art – whether poem, novel, dramatic play, painting, sculpture or musical composition. But at the same time, each of

these – as well as all other forms of art – is more than simply the sum of its physical parts. The work of art is or suggests something that transcends its corporeal components. Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, for instance, exists as a novel that appears primarily as a printed book with cover and pages – the pages containing text, meaningful text. But the novel is not just the physical product but exists somehow and somewhere independent of the physical book-form in which it is recorded. While a pagan does not as a rule rank productivity hierarchically, but embraces each and every positive aspect or product as important and worthy in the overall consummating whole, artistic output still points in directions that open and widen the dimensions of positive value. For as vital and necessary to human flourishing in all senses of the word that physical products and tangible productivity can be and are, ethereal production is yet another area in which the human species can contribute – both collectively and as individuals.

Education

The range of intangible production covers education, emotional relationship, conversation, prayer and the like. Education from virtually any contemporary pagan perspective is of central importance. 'Leading out', like 'leading forth', is another form of production – but perhaps the most important in our overall survival as a species. The teaching profession is by-and-large dedicated to producing insight, knowledge, information, understanding and further skills into learning on one's own among the students with whom it interacts. The expansion of anyone's horizons is understandably a sacred exercise. As something holy, it ties directly into worship – worship as itself a sacred art. To whatever degree that something disseminated is a positive augmentation for the recipient – readying him or her not only for survival but also planting within a thirst for further knowledge and discovery, we encounter productivity in its ethereal and sacrosanct best.

And as with the teacher-student relationship, that between friend-friend or between parent-child, involves what we could term 'memory planting'. The good teacher 'plants' knowledge – or the memory of knowledge – in the mind of the student. Parents take their children to the seashore, on camping excursions, perhaps fishing, family reunions, and, in so doing, implant memories that often become treasured recollections for the children when they grow up and become adults. Likewise, the gathering of friends – for parties, outings, special occasions or even for simply being in each other's company – provides the possibility for positive reminiscences. It is on the existence of such mutual memories and the bonds of affection that accompany them that friendships are formed. In the realm of intangibles, those relationships that are developed through sharing, trust and mutual comfort are in themselves worthy productions. Though the kinds of relationships may vary greatly from docent and apprentice to parent and offspring to comrades or partners, these are all motivated by the emotion of love if and when they are to be ranked among the gifts belonging to a happy life. If it takes two to

tango – or occasionally more than two – in the dominion of producing a positive relationship, there is a collaborative effort that here engenders the productive value.

Conversation

More casual and ubiquitous than specific relationships, there is conversation itself – a central human pastime. Exchange, discussion or banter is something in which we all engage – or at least most of us. From the perspective of pagan ethics that I have been outlining, this too can be something productive – providing not only pleasure, relaxation or the comfort of leisure, but on occasion discovery, learning, concerted effort and/or advance. In itself, conversation is ephemeral, though its consequences might be far-reaching. It is an activity that occurs between friends but also between casual passer-bys or between people engaging in ordinary commercial exchange. In fact, there are few limits to the areas in which conversation can occur apart from those determined by political and sectarian opponents or belligerent combatants.

As a virtue or virtuous activity, meaningful conversation is particularly significant to a world that is facing environmental and security bankruptcy. It provides a viable means by which to bypass political intimidation, stalemate and ineffectiveness. While both talking *and* listening are not panaceas to all the world's woes, if there is a problem, there is also a solution, and open dialogue and exchange are one means through which the resolution might be found. Mutual demonizing is the crux of all human conflict, and if we are to break free of the suffocating historical, cultural, political and religious impasses that confront any real human advance, conversational bypass might just be the only viable recourse to move beyond purely self-oriented goals and ends. Positive conversation allows us one great way forward. To the degree that any of us engage in the dynamic of multiple conversation on all levels and between as many divergent groups and people as possible, we are producing something positive and beneficial and could or should be able to move beyond the limited political competencies and unimaginative religious leadership that keep human beings confined to something less than their fuller potentials.

But if education, love relationships and conversational challenge are forms of what we might call intangible productions, prayer to the gods is another. Pagans, no less than Christians, Muslims, Jews and Hindus, find prayer or conversation with the godhead a centering, renewing and helpful experience. Invocation, evocation, incantation, libation and direct dialogue with the gods are at the heart of pagan religious expression. Throughout the differing pagan communities, there is disagreement and different takes on what the gods are ontologically. Are they reified human constructs or existential beings?²⁵ Do gods sit somewhere on thrones as does the chief God of

²⁵This question was raised by Lee Gilmore on the Nature Religions Scholars Network (29.9.5) and forwarded to me by Macha NightMare the following day. natrel@listserv.colostate-pueblo.edu.

the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints? Are they otherworldly essences of some sort? Or are they simply psychological projections or ideals through which appeals to them might have “psycho/spiritual/magical/physical effects”? For pagans, there is no single answer. The question forms part of the theological debate that allows paganism to be the dynamic yet non-dogmatic phenomenon that it is.

Doing the Gods

Perhaps as much as anything else the pagan gods are to be approached as verbs. I Apollo, you Apollo, we Apollo; I Goddess, you Goddess, she Goddesses. One *does* a pagan deity – through invocation, evocation, contemplation, worship, honor, reflection, ritual, study, reading about them, prayer, *darshan*.²⁶ Whatever a pagan does concerning a particular deity, he or she is ‘verbing’ that god or goddess. The reality of a pagan deity may lie, at least in part, in how one *does* the deity. And in this process, the prayer to the entity is part of the figure’s ontology. Whether the deity takes on a complexity that is greater than the sum of its invoked and summoned parts is not the real question here. In considering the virtue-value of productivity, the prayer is itself a creation and outcome – one that strikes at the essence of deity. However ephemeral the articulated wish of a prayer might be, once offered out into the cosmos, it exists because it has existed and, for a pagan, so too do her/his gods. Prayer is ritual, and this last is simply something that is ‘put together correctly’. Whether we are talking about *arête*, *aristos*, *ars* or art or ritual, in each case when something is arranged in proper order, a valid product has been produced. We can see here the interrelationship between prayer, ritual and art that links all these as productivities of worship.

The Happy Life

Of course it may be argued that even with conversation, relationships, prayer, education and the like that, however intangible, a physical basis is nonetheless present. But whether ethereal or material, without a value ranking, this is incidental to a pagan. What is important and remains important for a pagan *ethos* is that

²⁶Invocation refers to calling the deity to within, even from within, but certainly into the present *locus* – whether self, ritual circle, sanctum, etc. Evocation derives from the Latin *evocatio*, a military ritual by which the Romans implored the gods of the enemy to grant them victory in exchange for being henceforth honored by the Romans. Consequently, evocation suggests a calling forth of the gods from without, from something exterior and, as such, implies their ontological existence. *Darshan* is a Hindu term that designates the ‘seeing’ of the deity: through revelation, through ecstatic or ordinary worship. It implies that the deity discloses herself/himself to the worshipper as a vision that is considered a gift of the deity.

something is produced. For a life to be worthwhile, it must produce something – anything in fact, as long as what is produced has a place within the overall scheme of worth, significance and usefulness.

What follows from this is that the ultimate production for a pagan is a happy life. A pagan endeavors to a *vita summae bonae*, a life of supreme good. This ‘happy life’, however, is not so much as an end in itself but as a totality, as an overall balance. Pagans are too grounded in reality to fantasize that life is to be without trials, tribulations, sufferings, pains and losses. Nevertheless, a pagan life aims to be one as filled with the riches of joy as much as possible. We may end poorly or not. We may know grief and hardship. But to the degree that a pagan life conforms to a necklace that is studded with the jewels of moments of fulfillment *et des moments supremes*, it is judged to have been a successful life – the ultimate in pagan accomplishment, come what may. Consequently, life itself is the final and real pagan production. It is itself the expression and translation of productiveness as virtue and value, as happiness.

Eudaimonia is, in the final analysis, what production is to achieve. Our lives in an overall sense may not prove to have been happy ones, but to the degree that we achieve something that on balance is positive, we have at least attained productivity. In other words, a productive life might be the acceptable substitute for some of us who have not been able to realize happiness, pleasure or comfort itself. Producing freedom for ourselves or others, producing health for ourselves or others, being honorable, that is, producing honor, and/or producing comfort for others may in each instance be what our products of merit are. What has been left out in this evaluation of productiveness against the heptatheonic virtue-values is producing comfort or pleasure only for ourselves. What we have not addressed so far with the necessity of being productive is the corollary of sharing what is produced with others. The remaining virtue is that of generosity which, by default, must be yoked to that of productivity. It is to this virtue-value that we turn now.

Generosity

The present chapter is dedicated respectively to pleasure, productivity and generosity – three virtue-values that I conceive as sub-categories or subsets to the broader area of worship in general. Overall, worship is honor – both as a quality and as a verbal action. In short, an honorable person is one who may be described as pleasant, productive and generous. It is generosity that in the schema of virtue-values I have been outlining is the key counterpart to the others – the very guarantee that the pursuits of freedom, comfort, health, honor, pleasure and productivity are *not* just about the self alone. Kindness is the sharing of what one has with others. It is the attitude and activity that renders the virtues and/or values as virtuous in themselves. Through genuine generosity, we become other-centric rather than simply ego-centric. It is here that we are able to transcend beyond the narrower confines of self.

As a word, ‘generosity’ derives from the root **genə-* that originally had to do with giving birth, begetting or procreating – with derivatives pertaining to family groups and tribes.²⁷ One offshoot of this stem is the Latin *genius* – the protecting and procreative tutelary spirit that each person has and that is genial or congenial in nature.²⁸ The term ‘kind’ develops presumably from the attitude one has towards one’s own kind, one’s kin or kindred, one’s *gēns* or ‘clan’. All these genealogical terms develop from the root that expresses birth, origin, race, family, kind. Along with these, we have the English word ‘gentle’ as a further development. As a concept, then, generosity is directly connected to generation, kindness and gentleness. It also relates to gentility. In fact, the Dutch word for ‘generosity’ is *edelheid* – or what we otherwise understand as ‘nobility’. Munificence, largess, or the unstinted willingness to give is one of the chief characteristics of the aristocracy, of the well-bred, of those of noble birth.²⁹

While the virtue of liberal bounty is one that is historically associated with royalty and early pagan society, openhanded generosity is no longer a class-confined virtue but rather, for today’s pagan, is something that is an ethical aspiration for everyone – for individuals as well as groups. While productivity is central to our survival and well-being, for our moral well-being, what we produce, make or have is what we share in some manner or another with others. Yes, of course, we all need to make a living, so to speak, and often what we produce is what we sell or exchange for profit or other goods. This is part of the life process. It is normal and natural. But for there to be a life process that is also ethical, honorable or meritorious, we need to dispense freely of some of our profit or possessions to those who are less fortunate. In this, it is not enough to consider that what the governments take as taxes absolves us of the aesthetic/ethic responsibility also to be generous. It is imperative for largess to be bona fide that it occurs willingly and is not something that is enforced. Bounteousness cannot be something that we do under duress to do it. Magnanimity comes from what a pagan calls the soul – in this case, a healthy soul that exudes its plenitude naturally and spontaneously at its best; or, otherwise, at least through rational discourse and the logic of necessity.

Among Christians, generosity is often referred to as charity, and the doing of charitable works is among the most worthy of Christian activities. For Buddhism, especially Mahayana Buddhism, kindness is largely understood in the importance

²⁷Watkins (1992:2103) (1969:1516). **genə-* (‘to give birth, beget’; with derivatives referring to aspects and results of procreation and to familial and tribal groups)>Latin *genus*, stem *gener-* (‘birth, race, kind’)>Latin *genrōsus* (‘of noble birth, excellent, magnanimous’)>Old French *geneureux*>English *generous*>*generosity*.

²⁸Strictly speaking, the protective procreating divinity of the male is the *genius* while the designation of the same for a woman is termed the *juno*. See York (1986:51, 64).

²⁹It takes no great stretch of imagination to understand how these associations might have developed historically. The first generous people, those with the ability to accumulate surplus along with a proclivity to share it, would most likely have been those that became the rulers. It is the generous nature of the noble person, enabling his or her reputation as ‘known’ throughout the relevant community, that distinguishes the aristocrat from the mere bully or warlord.

of compassion. From the Hindu tradition, there can be a stress placed on *sewa*, and we find this emphasis on service particularly in the teachings of Neem Karoli Baba, Baba Ram Dass and Ma Jaya Bhagavati. And, in Islam, the third of the Five Pillars (*din*) of the faith is the giving of alms to the poor.

In other words, each of the major world religions considers the importance of giving to some degree or other. But whereas Hindu *sewa* or ‘service’ is an activity and Buddhist compassion is a feeling, pagan generosity is something more dynamic and differs from both simply doing and simply feeling. Generosity for a pagan goes to the heart of what it is to be pagan. It is where a pagan engages with her or his world and with all forms of sentience and being. In a word, liberality of soul constitutes the wellspring of pagan virtue; it is where transcendence of the strictly ‘me and mine’ occurs.³⁰

It is certainly true that in the contemporary West, as a fledgling spirituality, pagan charity has not been as developed as we find the equivalent to have been in some of the other religions. There is as a rule much less organization and certainly much less in the way of established resources. Nevertheless, as befits the essential world-engagement of pagan spirituality, there are signs of what will come as the re-born faith continues to mature. The Officers of Avalon, for example, is one instance.³¹ In the Katrina and Pakistan-India relief efforts of 2005, many other pagan groups did what they could as well.³²

Though the practice of all pagan virtue-values is easier under the proper conditions, generosity is still perhaps the most difficult. Freedom, for example, is both psychological and political, and its exercise is much more likely in a democracy than in a totalitarian state. The achievement of comfort, pleasure and health is greatly more possible in favorable environments and conducive given conditions. Charity is more detectable as a rule in situations of surplus and productivity, though there are many examples of people in the most appalling conditions reaching out beyond their own suffering to help and assist others. But even if a person is well-off and in a state of relative ease, it may still be more difficult to give to others

³⁰Among the Romans, the goddess who most personifies ‘abundance’ is Ops whose *feriae* fall on the 19th of August and 19th of December. Her latter festival, as part of the Saturnalia, is associated with the *strenae* or yule gifts that form the precedent to the gift-giving exchange of Christmas. See York (1986:57f & 193) for, respectively, Ops and the *strenae*. For the Sabine personification of the gift, the goddess Strenia (the Roman Salus or personification of health and wealth), see *ibid.* p. 149 f.

³¹www.officersofavalon.com

³²For instance, a hurricane-relief fundraising auction on E-Witch (<http://www.e-witch.com>) was organized that featured items donated by Pagan authors. Between the time of the disaster and Samhain, Witchvox (www.witchvox.com) donated 100 % of its membership and renewal fees that it received to hurricane relief. Likewise Ruth Barrett’s Temple of Diana (<http://www.templeofdiana.org/>) donated all the funds it raised for the recovery efforts. A Hurricane Katrina Relief Fund was also established by the Ancient Order of Druids in America (<http://www.aoda.org>) on behalf of the entire Druid community and not just the AODA alone.

than to hold onto what one has. Generosity, liberality, kindness or munificence is not necessarily a natural state for most human beings. Magnanimity is an ethical challenge for the majority of us.

We are again here with Nietzsche. Generosity is for him the ‘bestowing virtue’, and it is what distinguishes the noble person from the herd.³³ It takes the special person to share with others and give to them who are less fortunate. This is not a proclivity for the ordinary person but instead is largely characteristic of nobility – those individuals who reach out beyond themselves for the benefit of others. If we look to the origins of morality, we find that aristocracy, generosity and paganism often go hand-in-hand. The best is what a pagan endeavors to be and achieve, and bigheartedness is the fundamental characteristic of both pagan and aristocrat.

In today’s world, the generous person does not murder, steal or unduly hoard. Taking the life or possessions of another is not a generous act. Depriving another of well-being through one’s own greed is a disrespect of the intrinsic dignity that a pagan recognizes in each of us. The generous person wants the best for others, and in this recognition we are permitted to understand that the wish for people to be themselves is one of the greater instances of generosity.

The Golden Rule

Almost all that can be said about liberal generosity might be reduced to the universal adage of the Golden Rule, namely, to do to others what one would wish to be done by them to himself/herself. We find versions of the Golden Rule in most religions.³⁴ And we also find the concept among various classical pagan authors from Aristotle to Seneca and Publius Syrus.³⁵ Aristotle speaks specifically of friends. The Bible transforms the doing as one would want to receive into the act of loving – one’s neighbors,³⁶ one another,³⁷ even one’s enemies.³⁸ Most pagans would

³³Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra* 1.22 (vide Common [1962]).

³⁴In Christianity, the Golden Rule is found in Matthew 7:12; in Judaism, Talmud, Shabbat 31a. It also appears in Islam (Sunnah) and Zoroastrianism (Dadistan-i-dinik 94:5) as well as in Hinduism (Mahabharata 5.1517), Buddhism (Udana-Varga 5.18) and both Taoism (Tai Shang Kan Yin P’ien) and Confucianism (Analects 12:2, 15:23). Will Durant stressed this principle in his writings. See also http://infidels.org/library/modern/richard_carrier/ought.html (Carrier 1999/2004) for an agnostic perspective, namely, “be a hero, not a villain. For this is the way to be happy” (accessed 8 April 2014). For Rabbi Hillel the Elder’s version. “Do not do to others what would be hateful if done to you,” see Lacey (2006): <http://www.ijs.org.au/Hillel-the-Elder/default.aspx> (accessed 31.3.14).

³⁵Aristotle *apud* Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* 5.21. For Seneca, see his *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium* 94.43. See also Publius Syrus, *Sententiae* 1 and Epictetus *apud* Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae* 17.9.6.

³⁶Leviticus 19:18, Matthew 19:19 & 22:39, Mark 12:31, Luke 10:27, Romans 13:9 and Galatians 5:14.

³⁷John 13:34 & 15:12 & 17, Romans 12:10, 1 Thessalonians 4:9, etc.

³⁸Matthew 5:44, Luke 6:27 & 35.

have difficulty with this last in the form of a commandment, and many would insist that actions toward others need not take the form of love (gushing or otherwise) for them to be generous. In all, pagan largess and magnanimity are largely judicious behaviors that, apart from actual loved ones, extend to others in a less demanding and intimate manner in contrast to Christian zeal. For Confucius, it is simply a matter of: “What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others.”³⁹

The question emerges whether Golden Rule morality is not simply a self-oriented code that is based on one’s own personal well-being. But for an emancipated pagan, it is not a matter of helping others so that one might individually receive the same – ensuring good *karma*. It is instead an evaluative position. One behaves towards others *as if* one were performing the same acts toward oneself. It is possible that a masochist who enjoys pain could, if he were to be following the Golden Rule strictly, legitimately inflict pain on others. But this last would not be an instance of generosity. The Golden Rule is simply a guideline – one that is valid to the extent that the doer projects himself/herself in some way into the receiving other. Pagan generosity is a generosity of spirit that requires a leaping of some sort beyond the limiting confines of self alone. It becomes most valid when the recipient is not identified with the giving self. The graciousness involved, however, is not to be one based on pity, for this last implies a distancing superiority – what Nietzsche despised and condemned. Instead, pagan generosity at its best is purely gratuitous – without strings or expectations of return.⁴⁰ The other is simply an other – implicitly or intrinsically the equal of self.

In a word, generosity or largess within a pagan framework is the desire for people to be themselves. There is little wish to have others change to conform to one’s own standards and behaviors. True enough, when others are like ourselves, this can be a pleasant joy, and we then have people with whom we can easily relate and enjoy their mutual company. But for a pagan, freedom always takes precedent over pleasure, and it is a pagan’s sense of kindness and liberality that ensures others to pursue their own pathways as long as these in turn do not infringe on yet others. It is from this position that ethical paganism eschews murder, thievery and injurious deprivation. All personhood is held as sacred and is to be treated as such. If there are other like-minded souls in our lives, so much the better, but what is paramount is the freedom of everyone to be who he or she is. This last, however, is dependent on the generosity of tolerance and the celebration of difference.

³⁹Loc. cit. (note 34 *supra*).

⁴⁰We find a similar notion among the Ten Principles of Burning Man, namely, that of Gifting: “Burning Man is devoted to acts of gift giving. The value of the gift is unconditional. Gifting does not contemplate a return or an exchange for something of equal value” (http://www.burningman.com/whatisburningman/about_burningman/principles.html – accessed 4 August 2006).

Idolatry

The latitude of openheartedness is normally contingent upon one's accustomed sense of privilege. First-class travel, three-star restaurants, luxury hotels, front-row theater seats: for some people these are the norm, and for many of those for whom they are not they furnish instead our driving aspirations. Paganism, in its valuing of comfort and pleasure, is always at risk of endorsing the kind of insidious self-pampering and self-indulgence increasingly characteristic of Americans and perhaps closely followed by that of the Europeans. This kind of profligate abandon of entitlement culture is the antithesis of generosity as a virtue and measure of self-discipline and restraint. For pagans, there is no simple solution to this dichotomy and no safe-guarding guarantees against debauchery and decadence. With their reverence for *both* the Apollonian and Dionysian, although pagans might place high esteem on a moderate or middle-way Confucius or Epicurus, they cannot rule out ecstasy and the occasional extravagance of abandon. It is for this reason that the heptatheonic virtue-values must be measured and balanced against the cardinal virtues – especially those of prudence and moderation. And to the degree that the virtue-values are pursued prudently, the conditional context for their pursuit is that all seven considerations must be pursued together. If freedom, pleasure and comfort are pagan goals, no less is the spirit of giving, extending and sharing, namely, that which we can understand broadly as being generous.

It is through generosity that we come to the decisive distinction between 'true' idolatry and 'false' idolatry, idolatry *sensu certo* and idolatry *sensu negativo*. It is by being charitable and kind to others that we can secure freedom from the false god. A bogus god is to be located whenever the deity is reduced to an idol, representation or reification and nothing more – it becomes something that one hides behind as a mask, cover or subterfuge. In other words, generous ethical behavior is open and authentic; it cannot be camouflaged by disguise or buried within national idols for unethical purposes – whether as individuals, groups or nations. With a pagan, the mask is at home for the carnival celebration – the time-outside-time, the special time.⁴¹ Its use is delineated and sacred. The idol is simply a special instance of deity – not the deity as a whole, and it is only as good as it reflects the ethical ideal. The masks or idols of god have deliberate purposes,⁴² and yet these purposes exclude being used as vehicles for sinister, malicious and dishonorable ends. If generosity precludes murder, theft and greed, a nation that uses its power, wealth and advantage to usurp the independence of other peoples through invasive war,

⁴¹ York (1986:238f).

⁴² We might note that Joseph Campbell could have titled his *Masks of God*, covering Primitive, Oriental, Occidental and Creative Mythology, respectively, published in 1959, 1962, 1964 and 1968, the 'Idols of God'. Because, however, there is a much greater negative connotation concerning the words 'idol' and 'idolatry' in Western society, the folklorist opted for the much safer word 'masks' in titling his four-volume series.

imperial greed, colonial rule and economic intimidation is not an ethical nation. It is a false idol – a sham and counterfeit in the realm of honorable status and ethical constellation.

As individuals, generosity is to be – or at least to aim to be – a grand human being. The same may be said for any group – including the nation-state as well. While the esteemed person is one who accomplishes, vanquishes, discovers, invents and/or creates, he or she is also one who is magnanimous in both largesse and service. The grand person, like the grand nation, is one who serves. We might note in our present world how much the whole notion of service has slipped away in all businesses. While charity or service is implicit in the abrahamic and dharmic religions, it is central and mandatory in paganism. If religion in general has a calling to bring a true human understanding and spirit back into the political realm, it is this calling that is intrinsic to the pagan's sense of nature and humanity. It is the interaction and interdependence of the natural and the human that is the dynamic and embodiment of the sacred for pagan perception. As humans we are the guardians and custodians of the earth and her children, and greatness for a pagan is achieved in serving and being part of this holy matrix of being.

Sacrifice

Pagan service is understood in social work, ecological consideration, humanitarian concern, environmental protection, kindness and creative imagination. In the rituals of paganism, generosity is known as sacrifice.⁴³ This last constitutes something that is surrendered, given up, foregone or forfeited. In its fullest sense, it comprises that which is offered to the gods – either directly or through the agency of other human and natural vehicles. While a pagan may perform libation or offer a sacramental eucharist to deity, it is help and assistance to others that is the crux of pagan offering. And for a pagan ethical position, the sacrifice does not sum up as a loss because, in the interdependence of virtue and value as a pagan can understand them, generosity is recognized as one of the greatest of pleasures.

Blasphemy

If we extend our comprehension of this virtue-value interdependence, we come to see the profound link between being generous and being free. In the broad-mindedness of pagan understanding, even the freedom to blaspheme is acceptable. One could even go so far to say that the freedom of blasphemy is a basic pagan

⁴³Gombrich (1998:44), in reviewing Jean Starobinski's *Largesse*, argues that "even the ritual of *Largesse* . . . partakes of the nature of sacrifice and need not be seen in a purely negative light."

principle. This last is best done if it is performed as ritual metaphor, but the underlying sacred principle that both pagans and humanists stand for is the freedom of expression – even if that freedom includes someone other profaning one’s own gods. Needless to say, as a rule, one does not profane the gods – either his/her own or that of others or both. But for humanity as a sacred being in itself, it must respect everyone’s right to offer disrespect – as long as this does not include physical violation. Generosity is in part the development of a thick-skinned response to the verbal assaults of others.

Kindness

While kindness begins with the family and one’s loved ones, if it follows the ethical track to the full, it opens up to the world and others. It may come eventually – and hopefully – to what Tennessee Williams refers to as the kindness of strangers upon whom the weak and vulnerable depend. In a pagan world, generosity is sacred, and to be fully generous would mean to be able to abandon the surveillance society that has increasingly become the norm. This abandonment, of course, this relinquishing of what Foucault refers to as the optic domination or intrusion by the state, requires courage – courage as well as respect for the intrinsic individual. In other words, the ultimate generous act is the development of trust, and a pagan, the ethical pagan, endeavors to become free of the ungenerous world we have become.

In his discussion of Claude-Adrien Helvétius, MacIntyre comments that benevolence is exhibited when we “are pained by the pain of others and pleased by the pleasure of others.”⁴⁴ There is a similarity here to the moral-sense theory of Francis Hutcheson who understood that the “properties which arouse a pleasurable and approving response are those of benevolence.”⁴⁵ Joseph Butler, however, ties this pleasure directly to our egoistic concerns – arguing that a part of our happiness is dependent on satisfying our innate desire to be kindly and benevolent to other peoples.⁴⁶ This brings us closer to John Mackie who denies outright that egoism is immoral and should be considered as such. He sees it instead as the foundation for ethical behavior and holds that “Morality has the function of checking what would be the natural result of prudence alone.”⁴⁷

But nevertheless prudence to some degree is essential if our natural sense of magnanimity is not to degenerate into pure idiocy. Unlike the biblical Prodigal Son, not all of us have a forgiving father or secure welfare state system to rely upon when we have nothing left in the cupboard. What we give and what we can afford to

⁴⁴See MacIntyre (1998:181). Helvétius’ *De l’esprit* appeared in 1758.

⁴⁵Ibid. p. 163. Hutcheson, *Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1725) 3.8.

⁴⁶MacIntyre (1998:164f). Joseph Butler, “Sermon I: Upon the Social Nature of Man–Rom. xii. 4,5” (<http://anglicanhistory.org/butler/rolls/01.html> – accessed 30.3.6).

⁴⁷Mackie (1990:190).

give must be measured for our acts of kindness not to be simply foolish. All acts of generosity require some judiciousness. As I learned in earlier days when my well-being exceeded that of many of my companions, people will often accept what one offers but develop an animosity toward the benefactor for the latter's freedom to be generous vis-à-vis their own inability to do the same. There is an art to giving – to knowing when, where and how to give. This being said, however, largess and tolerance in our overall demeanor and our abilities to part with some of what we have for the benefit of others are in themselves pleasures of enjoyment. In the final analysis, what is important is the pleasure of the generous act in itself – regardless of what is returned. A generous offering is an ethical action, but a generous offering that does not result in resentment, seduction or conflict over who shall procure the distributed gift is altogether a more generous deed and probable instance of wisdom. For the unwitting, a gift may too easily be maleficent – unless, of course, it is so intended from the start: in which case, it is not an ethical gift or act at all.

In sum, we might be able to understand two categories of ethical giving. One consists of those generous behaviors that are egoistic – based finally on the wish for something in return, whether recognition, honor or merit. If self-orientation is a foundation for most if not all human behavior, this category of semi-altruism cannot be dismissed but instead accepted as part of our limited ability to share with others. In the least, it is better than nothing and provides a *modus vivendi* that is reasonable and hopefully harmlessly ethical. The second category would comprise of genuinely selfless forms of charity, service and assistance to others with no thought or expectation of return. While we cannot perform these last in all circumstances and on all occasions, if we might aim for the infrequent, sporadic or intermittent acts of gallant generosity, we are then incorporating a virtue into our lives that is aesthetically ethical. We have then completed the beginnings of the heptatheonic pathway toward overflowing and ethical bliss.

Re-contemplation and Further Thoughts

The preceding sections and two chapters have been composed primarily as meditations and over a period beginning in the French Provence the day following the Roman *feriae* of the Tublistrium dedicated to Volcanus in the month of May and concluding on the Narragansett coast in Rhode Island around the autumnal season of the Celtic festival of Samhain, a moment by which contemporary Western pagans remember and honor their departed loved ones. These compositions followed the loss of my beloved mother, Myrth Brooks York, as well as a dearest of childhood friends, Margaret (Peggy) Buecher Wilson. During this time, my travels took me to Paris, Antwerp, Amsterdam, London, New York, Los Angeles and San Francisco. Within this period, I have traversed the North American continent twice – first by air; the second time by road, and all in all have been privileged to admire the fascinating beauty and wonder of a huge swath of the Euro-American territories of this planet. My reflections on the virtue-values of paganism have been an attempt to

discern the good life in today's world and locate what I understand as 'heptatheonic bliss' – happiness obtained through pursuit of the seven basic ethical foci of human existence.

This does not mean that we necessarily live in a 'happy' world. In too many respects, it is far from it. Life itself is conditioned by pain and loss for each of us. And most of us can stomach this for ourselves because in the end we have no choice. What is virtually intolerable, however, is to observe loss and pain for a loved one. To be witnesses in this sense produces an irrational reaction that virtually renders us unable to justify what we witness. Yes, the suffering we feel as we encounter the suffering of our loved ones is yet one more painful agony that becomes part of our overall life experience. Such downsides to life are unavoidable. We are fortunate when they remain minimal or only arrive late in life.

The real question is how do we react to life in the face of such hardships and the eventual loss of life that each of us will experience if our advancing technology does not come to alter the likelihood of personal death? Do we become kamikaze terrorists shooting to death an entire bank staff or our colleagues in a law firm or fly jumbo jets into a skyscraper or detonate a suitcase full of explosives in a middle eastern marketplace? Or do we become callously indifferent and focused on ourselves exclusively – letting all others take care of themselves? If ethics are no part of our lives and do not become something toward which we aspire at all, the basic choices are black and white with little, if anything, in between. We can let others suffer and die, for all we care, or we can perpetrate their sufferings and deaths in one manner or another. Either way, we have opted out of any valid *raison d'être* whatsoever.

The seven virtue-values I have been suggesting are only one possibility among others. Different people will have different formulations, different understandings of worth and different grasps of what is meaningful. I might argue that all moral and aesthetic principles could be reduced or equated to the heptatheonic ones, but this is unimportant. What is important, and vitally, is that each of us as individuals, as collectivities of some or any sort, as nations or cultures, and as the human species in all its fascination and potential, has some ego-transcending morality that touches, however lightly, on the universal. For those who wish to adopt a moral code that is allegedly God-given, there is no difficulty as long as there is a meaningful code and some attempt to adhere to it. There is likewise no substantially real problem with those who seek to derive their ethical programs through the judicious exercise of pure reason alone – with no supernatural assistance. And, similarly, for the pagan who reveres his or her gods as inspirations and perhaps protectors but not as moral lawgivers – leaving the responsibility for ethical/aesthetic behavior, principles and goals upon the individual herself/himself, there is again no trouble. What is and remains important is that we simply find some moral program and then find some way to fit it or incorporate it into our lives.

A pagan could begin with any of the seven virtue-values I have been outlining in this work. For a pagan, worship is not only the most complex but is also centrally essential. Ultimately, it comes down to being able to see beauty in things – in all things. It is through a pagan's ability to rejoice over the pure splendor of

nature and human interaction and achievement that our moral foothold is located. Pagans eschew a purely mechanical world – one that is disenchanting and merely instrumental. And since some of the other world religions at least implicitly recognize terrestrial creation as the handiwork of divine providence, the aesthetic wash that surrounds us provides a common ground for much of humanity to work together and develop a sustainable moral *modus vivendi*. But among the possible reactions to the artistic quality implicit in nature and man's developments, a pagan does not shirk or pull back from beauty but instead tends to rush headlong toward and into it. The cultivation of an aesthetic sense is a grounding foundation for pagan ethical maturity.

As social creatures, we have elaborated laws to regulate our exchanges with each other as well as to designate our individual rights. Over time, however, our legal systems may become overburdened and archaic. We of today are enmeshed and often restricted by legal complexity and bureaucracy that tend to lose sight of the 'spirit of the law'. We have come to rely too much on the so-called 'letter of the law'. For normal purposes, this is perhaps acceptable, but for there to be grandeur of the human spirit, openness of heart and salvific magnanimity, the 'letter of the law' requires a balance in the form of the occasional spontaneous intuitive interpretation. We must learn to be flexibly hermeneutical. Our understandings need to be variable and adjustable – dependent on the situation, context, condition and our intrinsic spirits of niceness.

I have also stressed the importance of health as a foundation-stone for the good and happy life. Throughout much of our lives we tend to take health for granted, but we learn to appreciate it as a treasure as we come closer to the end of our days. The earlier we can become mindful of its importance and behave in manners that are conducive to its prolongation, the better off in the long run we shall be. A pagan may sense that nature yearns to be beautiful and that a healthy well-being, in tune with the old earth-pagan rituals, is crucial to that yearning beauty. We as humans are not other than or apart from nature. We are natural, naturally healthy, and one glorious thread that weaves through the emerging fabric that is nature, a healthy nature, in all her vibrancy and sacredness.

And reflective of the bounty of nature, the human burden is to be generous – not only in our ability to share but also in our proclivity to forgive and be the good loser in those situations we have lost. Between passion and abstinence, there is a quieter dynamic through which we might locate a liberal comfort. In today's world, we scarcely need any longer to try for peaks let alone falls: our world issues these of its own accord. It is perhaps in the sacredness of the interlude that we might find for ourselves what there is to treasure, for it is when we bask in the interval of suspension between disengagement and exaggerated involvement that we are free from possessiveness and still find that sense of comfort that we wish to have others partake in as well.

How much the blissful interstate of being is dependent on our sense of freedom and our satisfaction in output is again something that will differ for each of us. Perhaps for some, our prodigy is virtually all that we produce. No mean achievement in itself, but whether through our children or through something that

we have technically produced, the enjoyment of accomplishment is yet again a vital ingredient in the composition of our well-being. Our achievements are extended through service, sacrifice and generosity with or to others. The simplicity in this outpouring is there for the seeing; the mystery is how is it that we can remain so blindly stubborn to its enjoyment?

Pleasure is something that, if and when we are being honest with ourselves, we all enjoy. Its unbridled seizure by youth is among the most joyous beauties of our cosmos. But there are countless other forms it can assume and reveal itself through – for all people and for all stages of the lifeward journey. Even the unpleasant may become pleasant in the overall story, and we often can look back at the unhappy situations of our past and laugh at them in time. Humor itself then becomes a freedom, and it is through liberty – but also *to* liberty – that we approach the sacred. In non-restraint we know and are the holy. And to be truly free is to be in a state of pure joy. That is why Schiller had no real difficulty substituting the word ‘freedom’ (*Friede*) with the word ‘joy’ (*Freude*) in his ode that Beethoven used in his Ninth Symphony. Liberty and joyousness are equivalents.

But if heptatheonic bliss is a goal for pagans if not others as well, how can its pursuit be squared with a world that increasing appears out-of balance and dominated by large and powerfully vested interests? Much of our individual navigations must confront the political labyrinth that appears to have transformed planet earth into a chessboard game for the privileged few. Do we have democracy or various forms of plutocracy and ‘econocracy’ as the predominant political systems in which we must seek our *raison d’être* and moral manners of pursuing *arête* and happiness? As witnessed in the United States of America and elsewhere, the ethical and the political increasingly conflate – perhaps additionally with the religious as well.

Consequently, we have important questions to ask and evaluate within a pagan ethical framework, namely, those concerning such issues as abortion, rights to die, gay marriage and capital punishment let alone the broader concerns of global warming, environmental pollution, over-population, world famine, pandemic disease, terrorism, hegemonic domination, drug trade, gender equality and ethnic emancipation. In an article entitled “The Christian Right and the Rise of American Fascism,” *New York Times* reporter Chris Hedges describes the Reconstructionist movement in America that was founded in 1973 by Rousas Rushdooney.⁴⁸ Also known as Dominionists, this movement is described by Hedges as the intellectual foundation for the most politically active element within the Christian Right and its leading advocacy groups, namely, The Christian Coalition, Eagle Forum and the Family Resource Council. Combining religion and politics, according to

⁴⁸The article was forwarded to me by email on 4 November 2005 as “an article by Chris Hedges that no major publication would print.” Hedges, holding a Master of Divinity degree from the Harvard Divinity School, is author of *War is a Force that Gives Us Meaning* (2002), *Losing Moses on the Freeway: The 10 Commandments in America* (2005) and *Days of Destruction, Days of Revolt* (2012).

spokesperson, televangelist Pat Robertson, its goal is to use the United States to create, through infiltration and the use of violent means, a global, Christian empire based on biblical law. The Dominion Mandate is opposed to income, property and inheritance taxes as well as abortion rights, single parents, jazz, magic, homosexuality, science and the sponsorship of peace before the return of Christ.

As Hedges points out, the Dominionist/Reconstructionist agenda rarely, if at all, considers Christ's more traditional message of love, forgiveness and compassion. Instead, the sound of the Messiah's voice at the Second Coming is alone to eviscerate the flesh of all non-believers – as described by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins in their apocalyptic novel, *Glorious Appearing*. Dominionism is a virulent ideology of hate and terror. It would be pathetic and ludicrous if it were not serious and playing the influential role in American politics that it has managed to achieve. In its focus on witchcraft and blasphemy, along with adultery and homosexuality, paganism would be considered the worst of evils if it were better known. Instead, theologian Francis Schaeffer of the Christian Right has singled out 'Secular Humanists' as the greatest threat to Christianity. While secularism and humanism are natural allies to paganism and provide many of the elements incorporated into paganism in general, the ethical battle lines – let alone the political and potentially military – are becoming clearly drawn.

As the faith of Islam is being increasingly tarnished and hampered by the emergence of Islamic terrorism, likewise is Christianity losing ground as a viable world religion in the light of Christian fundamentalism and Reconstructionism. A pagan may wish to believe that the venomous and spiteful hostility that is emerging from such quarters is the dragon's final death scream, but this opponent merely rejoices in the End Times scenario that it encourages with relish. It is a dangerous enemy – not only for pagans but for all thinking and generous minded people on the planet. It may not win, but it could wreak unalterable havoc before the rest of the world wakes sufficiently to prevent it.

For virtually all the ethical issues that are before us today, the Christian Right has taken a position that is diametrically different from that of the pagan. What we need to do in the last part of this work is single out what the concerns are and how a pagan evaluation of them fits with the heptatheonic virtue-values that may be seen as the core of paganism. While the classical cardinal virtues may be considered qualifying modifiers of behavior, the pantheon of virtue-values suggest what a pagan is actually after – the goals of life for a pagan in today's complex, crowded, technological and emerging post-Christian world. These virtue-values may of course be idolized and employed in some magical-talismanic sense that has resonance for some people. But they are also guidelines in the virtue ethics sense of Aristotle – ones that are fully relevant for today's cosmopolitan world and the wish that everyone might be a viable part of that world. And, yet, as germane as they are to contemporary conditions for the intelligent and basically sober-minded person, they are a grounding foundation to paganism as it has always been and always will be. Consequently, we must turn now to a brief overview of the ethical

dilemmas of our times as our world yet seeks to establish a pragmatic *modus vivendi* for an ever-widening number of diverse ethnicities, nations, groups and individuals. Ultimately, the question is: What is a pagan bottom line, and where is there room for compromise?

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Part IV
Moral Issues from a Pagan Perspective

Chapter 11

Same-Sex Unions and Recreational Drugs

In Part IV, I want to look at a few of the current contentious issues that occupy much of global attention and argue for a possible pagan and/or heptatheonic approach to them. In other words, using the seven virtue-values already outlined, I wish to examine how the various moral issues of our day may be understood and evaluated in terms of freedom, honor, generosity and so forth. For myself, the counterculture of the 1960s was an unforgettable time of innovative experimentation and the expectation of radical social change, and two concerns that can be argued to have developed directly out of the freedoms cherished at the time are those of same-sex union and recreational drug use. I will begin with these. Here and elsewhere, we might understand that what is appropriate for the pagan and what ought to be legal are strictly speaking different issues. They are nonetheless interrelated in my conception since the freedom of behavior challenges both the state and the disagreeing opponent for the feasible rectification and expansion of laws that augment personal liberties. In other words, on the basis of freedom alone, what is permitted is *both* an ethical and political matter.

Same-Sex Unions

Same-sex union, often referred to as gay marriage, has risen to prominence in ethical, religious and legal debate as the formerly established parameters of acceptable human behavior become increasingly challenged and stretched. In the United States, the counter-drive to the legalization of marriage beyond the traditional definition based on the uniting of a man with a woman has been vociferous and has fueled efforts for a Constitutional amendment, the Marriage Protection

Amendment, to prohibit same-sex union.¹ In many respects, the issue is comparable to legal polygamy and polyandry that allows, respectively, a man to have more than one wife (Islam, early Mormonism) and a woman to have more than one husband (the *Mahabharata*). By the second decade of the twenty-first century, same-sex marriage has been legalized in Europe: Belgium, Denmark, France, Iceland, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom; North America: Canada, parts of Mexico and nearly one-third of the states of the United States; South America: Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay; as well as South Africa and New Zealand.² By contrast, in 2014 Uganda became one of thirty-seven countries that outlaws homosexuality.

One argument that opponents use against the legalization of same-sex union is that this will lead to bestiality and the allowance of a man or woman to marry their pet. There is no apparent logic to this argument, though it is frequently used. In the conservative and unimaginative minds of some people, to have sexual relations with a person of the same sex is as repugnant and unimaginable as having congress with an animal. If the one is allowed, the other will inevitably follow. But in contrast, marriage for a progressive world can be and should be a contract that is undertaken between two willing people – two self-responsible and self-directed individuals. On this basis, marriage with an animal that cannot give consent is automatically excluded. Although in large parts of the world, arranged marriage or enforced marriage is still the normal practice, and though this practice is infinitely more complex and culturally subtle than a simple-minded Western denunciation allows, the pagan-liberal-secular thrust of advance condones and encourages marital union as a voluntary union between the parties involved – one without intimidation or compulsion by external agents whether familial, ecclesiastical or civil.

¹37 US states have at some point enacted DOMAs (“*Defense of Marriage Acts*”) that ban same-sex marriage; 4 states (Maryland, Oregon, Wisconsin and Wyoming) have had marriage laws that specifically prohibit same-sex marriage, and 3 states (Arkansas, Nebraska and Nevada) have banned same-sex marriage through amendments to their state constitutions. http://www.religioustolerance.org/hom_marr.htm (accessed 2 April 2014). In 2014, the states of Colorado, Nevada, Oregon and Wisconsin allowed civil unions between same gendered partners allowing limited rights and responsibilities when compared to those guaranteed by the institution of marriage. On 25/10/14, the federal government recognized same-sex marriage in Alaska, Arizona, Idaho, North Carolina, West Virginia & Wyoming making the total 32 states + DC.

²Civil unions as distinct from marriage of same-gendered partners are allowed by law in the European countries of Finland, Germany, Switzerland, Hungary, Slovenia, Croatia and parts of Italy; the Oceanic nation of Australia; and in the American states of Colorado, Nevada, Oregon and Wisconsin. In these political jurisdictions, gay and lesbian couples receive some but not all the rights and benefits that are acquired automatically by opposite-gender couples when they marry. The issue remains under legislative consideration in Ireland, Poland, the Czech Republic, Austria and the remainder of Italy. In Asia, similar moves or expressions of support have occurred in both the Republic of China (Taiwan) and the People’s Republic of China, as well as by the Communist Party in the Philippines and, in 2004, by Prince Norodom Sihanouk in Cambodia. <http://www.lgbtqnation.com/tag/gay-marriage/> (accessed 14 December 2005); <http://newworldsummit.eu/cppnpa/> and <http://connection.ebscohost.com/c/articles/13076618/cambodian-king-gay-marriage-ok> (accessed 22 July 2014).

The crux of the issue is to ask who is actually hurt or reduced by other people having marital relations with a partner of the same sex? About the only person I can reckon here is the one who takes offense over the alleged travesty of an institution supposedly established by an Abrahamic god. Accordingly, the act of marriage is considered to be only for the legitimation of offspring. Such a contention disallows the sharing and developing affection that is possible between two people regardless or not if children are involved, let alone the joint property rights and other issues such as benefits, discounts and hospital visiting rights that also arise. More importantly, the traditional-and-only-the-traditional stance does not take into mind the possibility that the human animal, in its radical difference from all other animal species, has the potential for vastly varying behavior. We humans do not behave the same as members of other species do in conformity with instinctual and natural drives. Nature has endowed the human to become what he or she wills to be. There is not the same kind of pre-set agenda and behavioral scope that we encounter with all non-human biological life forms.

Moreover, any unbiased investigation into much animal life in general reveals a significant degree of homosexuality that occurs naturally within various species – whether primates, quadrupeds or birds.³ The homosexual relation is revealed as not something that is ‘unnatural’. Biblically-minded opponents, however, are more apt to dismiss any contention that human beings are animals. We are allegedly completely different, and one argument that bolsters this contention is the denial of Darwinism and the theory of evolution through natural selection. Though I do not have available data to support this, I imagine that those who push for the teaching of ‘intelligent design’ in science classes are also opponents to the legalization of same-sex unions.

As Palm Springs resident Marlowe Rosin contends in *The Desert Sun*, “Homosexuals no more select their sexual orientation than heterosexuals do.”⁴ Responding to an earlier letter containing the proclamation that “Same-sex marriage . . . is wrong,” Rosin wonders whether there is here confusion between choice and an individual’s innate sexual identity. He captures a liberal tendency to consider spouse abuse, child abandonment and illegitimacy, and the high divorce rate as potentially greater concerns than a jihad against two men or two women making a commitment to each other, and he is perplexed why traditional marriage is threatened by same-sex marriage.

Nevertheless, in its historic and traditional understanding, marriage is an institutionalized union between the sexes that is governed by rules of endogamy and exogamy. Although for the most part it is singular in form, that is, monogamous,

³See <http://www.abc.net.au/science/features/queercreatures/default.htm> (accessed 29 March 2006). In contrast to the conclusion of http://journals.cambridge.org/download.php?file=%2FPSM%2FPSM24_04%2FS0033291700028919a.pdf&code=06c3ca1cb6abea1e968140bc4db80943 (accessed 2 April 2014), see further <http://www.pnas.org/content/105/30/10273.extract> and www.livescience.com/3905-identical-twins-identical.html (accessed 16 October 2013).

⁴Marlowe Rosin, “Same-sex marriage: Let’s think about this,” Opinion section of *The Desert Sun* (17 October 2005: B7).

plural forms (polygyny and polyandry) are not uncommon. In Western culture, however, monogamy is the rule, and this concerns defining the legal rights between spouses as well as establishing the legitimacy of the children that issue from the union. More universally, marriage is the key factor in kinship systems and social alliance arrangements and is centrally focused on property, transfer rights and exchange. It is primarily, therefore, a legal institution that is sacralized through the ceremony of marriage – traditionally religious but, in our increasingly secularized societies, increasingly civil as well. In either sense, marriage is the socially recognized ceremony by which the change in social status is legitimated. As such, it is a *rite de passage*.

While the hegemony in conducting marital rites of transition in the West has been Christian, the steady shift toward rites of civil ceremony is perhaps a throw-back to the more diverse forms of marital legitimation that we find among the Romans.⁵ For both the Republic and the Empire, three forms of marriage were permitted. Clearly, the more formal marital unions of the West conform to the Roman *confarreatio* prototype – conducted by and in the presence of a religious officiant or civil official.⁶ By contrast, marital unions among contemporary Western pagans have often been closer to the Roman *coemptio* or *usus* and are called ‘handfastings’. These may or may not be legally recognized by the state and in conformity to civil law. In other words, a religious ceremony, for it to be registered as a legal institution by the state, must also be legally inscribed as a civil union. One can marry without a religious ceremony, but one cannot legally marry without the formal permission of the civil community.

⁵Referring to the decline in marriage in America and the rise in divorce rates, John D’Emilio claims that “*Since the early 1960’s, the lives of many, many heterosexuals have become much more like the imagined lives of homosexuals*” (“The Marriage Fight Is Setting Us Back,” *The Gay and Lesbian Review* 13.6, November-December 2006: 11 – author’s italics). He attributes these non-reversible social changes in American lifestyles, along with the decline in reproductive rates and the de-centering of marriage, to the revolutionary advance in economic growth and technological innovation. D’Emilio calls for the pursuit of intelligent strategies toward obtainable goals. Gay marriage, he contends, is currently not one of these.

⁶Among the Romans, the most sacrosanct form of marriage is known as *confarreatio* – undoubtedly the human equivalent of the *hieros gamos* among the gods. Like the Western wedding ceremony, this is the most ritualized – taking the form of the bride and groom, seated on chairs covered with the skin of a sheep sacrificed for the occasion, mutually holding a *panis farreus*, a wheaten cake made from *far* that was offered to Jupiter Farreus who presides over the matrimonial ceremony. The *confarreatio* is an august patrician institution conducted in the presence of the highest priests of the city (York 1986: 355). Less formal than the *confarreatio* is *coemptio* – a symbolic form of purchasing the bride with her consent (Gai. *Inst.* 1.113-5b). As Claude Lévi-Strauss (1949) has argued, the exchange of women has been the critical element in kinship formation. *Coemptio* is a more open marital arrangement in that it is not restricted to a special minority or class. Nevertheless, Romans also enjoyed a third form of matrimonial procedure known as *usus* – the essential equivalent of common-law marriage (ibid. 1.111. See also York 1986: 354). If a woman lived with a man for a full year without absenting herself from him for more than three nights, marriage could be effected purely through the consent of the parties (*sponsalia per verba de praesenti*). Consequently, marriage for pagan Rome ranged from the non-formal to institutionalized exchange to the human parallel of *hieros gamos*.

During the writing of this chapter, the 1-year delay of the Civil Partnerships Act elapsed after having been originally passed by the United Kingdom's Parliament in November 2004.⁷ This Act is not restricted to same-sex unions but includes these along with the partnerships or friendships of any couple regardless of the genders of the parties involved. Clearly the British move is one more illustration of the advances on this front in Europe as compared to the resistances and countermoves that we encounter in the United States of America. The civil partnerships are not marriages but permit the same rights to the people who contract them that marriage otherwise confers to a husband and wife. For some gay and lesbian couples, there is a desire and wish to be legally married in the same sense that heterosexual partners may be, and, from a pagan perspective, there is no reason that nominal marriage rights themselves should not be accorded to those who so wish to acquire them. This follows from the pagan stance that values freedom above all but further from the notion of honor, namely, respecting and encouraging the intrinsic dignity of the individual regardless of gender, race, status or creed. On this score, Europe is vastly more advanced and sophisticated than is her daughter nation on the west side of the Atlantic Ocean. What is now being called for among discerning minds in the United States is a thinking ethical coalition to supersede the so-called 'moral majority' of rightwing conservatism and transform this last into the 'unimaginative immoral minority' that at heart, vis-à-vis the American pioneering spirit of the nation's founding legacy, it is.

The issue concerning same-sex partnerships and whether these are to be legally recognized marital unions is dependent upon the concerned society's definition of marriage. Is marriage a religious act or is it the legitimization of a social institution?⁸

⁷See, for example, "Britain's gay, lesbian couples soon can walk down the aisle," *USA Today* (Friday 25 November 2005: 9A). A year's delay had been imposed on the Act before it could go into effect.

⁸Same-sex unions have been recognized since ancient times in Asia, Europe, North America and Africa. In the Chinese province of Fujian, elaborate marriage ceremonies were performed between a man and a youth. These marital partnerships were temporary – lasting only a number of years until the elder partner secured a wife for the younger. We know of similar temporary same-sex marriage unions among the Azande of the Congo in Africa, and, among the Afro-Latin diasporic traditions, Santería is a religious orientation that frequently promotes 'gay rights' – including sanctified unions for same-sex couples. In Egypt, we find the Old Kingdom tomb of Niankhnum and Knumhotep at Sakara –manicurist and hairdresser to the pharaoh and presumably two male lovers. Greece also is known to have evidenced pederastic marriages between men (*esastes*) and youths (*eromenes*). These relationships were social, religious and sexual arrangements. In Rome, it is clear that at least several of the emperors participated in ceremonies in which they were wedded to men (e.g., Nero, Diocletian). We might assume that such unions were not necessarily restricted only to the emperors. Likewise, formal marriage between men has also been known to have existed among various Native American societies. The person taking on the responsibilities of the female gender would usually be socially recognized as a shaman (a two-spirit person) and encouraged to become the wife of a male member of the tribe. And that same-sex unions were not only male-male affairs, in the nineteenth century United States, the 'Boston marriage' was a recognition of the long-term commitment between two cohabitating woman, though it is doubtful if the general public was aware of the possible sexual nature of such relationships.

Religious opponents to same-gender, gender-neutral or gay marriage base their arguments on an alleged diminishing of the conventional meaning of marriage that redefines the family and encourages confusion concerning sexual identity.⁹ Same-sex sexual acts are seen as ‘unnatural’, ‘aberrant’, ‘immoral’ and ‘anti-biblical’. But apart from the religious, usually fundamentalist, arguments, secular opinion is often concerned with protecting the procreative foundation of the family unit along with economic and legal benefits that support its stability and growth. Same-sex marriage proponents, however, counter the sterility argument by pointing out that sterile heterosexual couples or women past menopause are not prohibited by law from marrying.¹⁰

A pagan position is supported by the stress on freedom, honor and magnanimity. To prohibit marriage to those who wish to engage in such is considered an ungenerous act. As a rule, pagans fail to see how the institution of marriage is undermined and/or threatened by the legal and social acceptance of marital partnerships between same-gendered people. The ethical question at the heart of the debate for a pagan is to ask who is really being hurt? Opponents tend to be seen as myopically small-minded – restricting an institution that could be and perhaps should be at the heart of human relationship regardless of gender. Same-sex unions today face the same kinds of oppositional intolerance that were previously codified as the anti-miscegenation laws that prohibited interracial marriage.¹¹ As a whole, and certainly in the wake of its current overall vanguard, paganism simply cherishes and celebrates the closeness and bonding that two people might be fortunate enough to have discovered. In such relationships, issues of gender, race, creed and status become secondary and are dismissed as being of little value or significance against the full sacredness of the relational partnership itself.

For a pagan, her/his gods are beloveds, and the warmth and closeness with the deities is akin to the love one might have with a human partner. Some people may not have been lucky enough or sufficiently persevering to have achieved such a

⁹This is, however, not to deny such more progressive religious advocates of same-sex union or marriage rights as we find among the Unitarian Universalist Association, the United Church of Canada, the Anglican Church of Canada, Reform Judaism, the United Church of Christ, some Quaker congregations and the Jodo Shinshu sect of Japanese Buddhism. See <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/12/07/religious-groups-official-positions-on-same-sex-marriage/>, <http://www.marriageequality.org/religious-vs-civil>, <http://www.united-church.ca/communications/news/moderator/050117>, http://www.religioustolerance.org/hom_ang.htm and <http://www.globalbuddhism.org/13/wilson12.pdf> (all accessed 22 July 2014).

¹⁰For instance, former New York governor, Mario Cuomo (2004), asks, “With respect to gay marriages, is there a reason to condemn them other than the fact that they cannot produce children? And, if there is not, why are heterosexuals who do not choose to have children – or aren’t physically able to – entitled to civil benefits that are denied gays? Why not authorize two categories: traditional marriage between heterosexuals, and civil unions that give same-sex partners the same civil benefits?” http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/opinion/editorials/2004-12-05-values-cuomo_x.htm (accessed 22 July 2014).

¹¹Mixed race marriages in the United States were allowed for the first time by a 1967 Supreme Court decision concerning marriage anywhere in the nation.

relationship; others, of course, do not have an intimate relationship with another as either a priority or desiderata. But for those who do and have succeeded in a relational affinity with another, the way to honor the liaison can vary to the same extent that a pagan might connect with her gods and goddesses. The relationship might be casual and informal, but, by contrast, a more ritual commitment could for some be the desired means of legitimating and sanctifying the special connection. If and when this is the case, the basic question – to take its re-phrasing by *The Economist* – is: “Why should one set of loving, consenting adults be denied a right that other such adults have and which, if exercised, will do no damage to anyone else?”¹² This rhetorical question encapsulates the predominant Western pagan position on same-sex marriage let alone gender-neutral civil unions. It allows the legal union between people, any two consenting adults, with the same rights that are currently usually only allowed to married heterosexual couples, namely, inheritance and pension rights, bereavement benefits and next-of-kin standing.

As seen in this discussion on ‘gay marriage’ the overall pagan stance conforms to a liberal political outlook. We will find this also to be the case with the other ethical issues of our day. There is in addition a strong libertarian sympathy among many pagans, and in general a pagan position is a blend of liberal-left-collectivist attitudes with libertarian, even occasionally anarchist sentiments. There are of course pagans who subscribe to more conservative beliefs, perhaps even to those which are now more fashionably known as ‘neo-liberal’ ways of thinking – especially concerning economic matters. But as a rule, few pagans subscribe to any form of authoritarianism. Exemplars of the liberal-libertarian position to which a majority of pagans appear to subscribe include both Nelson Mandela and the Dalai Lama. From a strictly libertarian viewpoint, there is frequently opposition to marriage as a state-sanctioned institution – whether this refers to same-sex or opposite-sex unions. Arguing that the government has no legitimate role in the approving of marriage, libertarians object to the institution itself. But the more liberal libertarian, reflecting a prevalent view among pagans, holds that those who wish to marry and have state recognition of their union ought to be permitted to do so regardless of their individual genders. For paganism as a whole, there is an unassailable and intrinsic dignity belonging to the individual person that deserves and demands respect from governmental bodies as well as other individuals. Same-sex marriage, by not violating the no-harm principle of paganism, is something that pagans can and do condone. The beauty of any union between persons is the potential affirmation of closeness and the loving relationship. For a pagan, this is something that should be respected and encouraged regardless of how other people might feel in certain circumstances.

¹²“The case for gay marriage,” February 26th, 2004 – from *The Economist* print edition: <http://www.bearpit.net/index.php?showtopic=1121&st=105> (accessed 15 December 2005).

Recreational Drugs

With or without, the dawn is always beautiful and promising, but to transport to the mind's antipodes before a glistening domestic altar or within a dazzling shrine, to dance with the gods along the Kashi Coast or sore with them from a Neolithic circle or site in France, Britain, Ireland or Scandinavia, to whisper with the spirits from a Provençal porch or Tamalpais slope, to savor the divine within a thermal spring of Goulamine or in a cemetery of San Juan or New Orleans or along a mist-enshrouded canal of Amsterdam is to engage in idolatrous worship that may be enhanced when appropriate by entheogenic assistance. The decision is with the individual, and the choice for sacramental use is a pagan one.

The liberal libertarian ethical position that we witness among pagans concerning gender-neutral civil unions and/or marriages carries through into the use of mind alterants. These are frequently referred to as 'recreational drugs', and although they may be used recreationally, the expression is a misnomer. Rather, for many pagans both indigenous and in the contemporary Western world, the 'power plant' is employed for vision quest and, as with Aldous Huxley, for opening the mind. For a pagan, these may be accepted as legitimate religious pursuits. Nevertheless, on the basis of pleasure alone, pagans as a rule tolerate – if not celebrate – the use of psychedelics and psychotropic substances by those who wish to employ them. Since much of the opposition to the hallucinogens and narcotics stems from a condemnation of enjoyment itself, such a puritanical position falls beyond the ethical scope itself that is endorsed by paganism.

Pagans do not hide and cower from pleasure. Sensual enjoyment, whether induced or otherwise, is affirmed as long as someone else is not harmed or reduced against her will in the process. If the partaking of marijuana, 'magic mushrooms', LSD, peyote and so forth was only a question of delight, the question would be straightforward, and a pagan answer would be affirmative in their use.

The ethical question, however, becomes more complicated when we consider the possible harmful effects of plant and synthetic intoxicants. Mind alteration can be and often is harmful to one's health. To the degree that it is, it strikes against a fundamental pagan virtue-value, namely, the protection and furtherance of one's physical and mental well-being. If physical health were the only pagan concern, the use of any ingredient that could be detrimental would not, as a norm, be tolerated. For many contemporary Western pagans, this intolerance is the case. They tend to view drug-taking as unhealthy let alone unproductive. Virtually all pagans may be expected to be opposed if and when chemical use causes the user to become violent and dangerous to others. If the user cannot maintain the self-responsibility to prevent himself from attacking or raping others when under the influence of the inducing agent, such a person is in violation of the basic pagan principle not to harm or reduce another against his or her will.

But within the pagan spectrum, there is the further virtue-value of liberty – one that includes the freedom to experiment and discover. For many pagans, this injunction must be weighed and balanced against the issue of health and well-

being. They are not unrelated, and neither virtue nor value exists in a vacuum. In such a situation, there is no clear answer, and each sacred deserves respect and consideration. Once again, tolerance from a pagan orientation is to allow both those who wish and those who do not to have the freedom of their own mental-physical space to do as they chose and as long as any consequences remain with the chooser himself/herself without undue impingements on others.

I wish to stress here that we are discussing a moral issue and not necessarily a legal one. The use of most mind-altering substances apart from alcohol and caffeine are against the law. Certainly, bringing banned ingredients into a ritual circle in which others who are not of the same mind are equally present is not only selfish but also does indeed risk harming or reducing the well-being of all by rendering everyone subject to possible arrest and incarceration. Even apart from the legal question and possibility of imprisonment, the smoking of marijuana or use of other banned herbs in a pagan ritual circle if and when all are not willing is as boorish as today the smoking of cigarettes would be inside a non-smoker's personal living space.

As with same-sex marriage, governmental thought frequently lags behind pagan latitude concerning changing consciousness through the ingesting of particular agents. Once again, official authority prevents people from doing what they want to do. In the one case, the prevention concerns people in a loving or amorous relationship who want the same rights that a heterosexual couple acquires through marriage; in the other, state opposition disallows people to choose a state of consciousness if and when they prefer. But though these two situations are similar, they are not the same. In the latter case, there is the additional factor of possible self-harm, let alone the possibility of harming others when, for instance, one might attempt to drive an automobile under non-optimal conditions. But for the person alone, the question hinges on the broader one that concerns whether the state has the right – or should have the right – to prevent us from injuring ourselves. This broader question is one that deals with self-responsibility. In a more perfect world, the state may have the duty to educate us but not to curb what we do with what we have learned or even despite what we have learned. In a world of Nietzschean sheep, the compliant and fearful herd, the state assumes the mantle of being our protector. In a pagan world, by contrast, we as individuals have the freedom if not also the burden of protecting ourselves from ourselves. The state may influence but not control and certainly not incarcerate in situations in which no others are involuntarily harmed.

But as it is now, we are not living in a pagan world, and changes on this front are once again a question of agitation for legislative reform. Instead of a pagandom, we live in a bullying world, one shaped by vested corporate, military and non-pagan religious interests, that fears individual initiative and self-determination. As a surrogate parent, government decides what is in our best interests and what is not. Education is increasingly designed to foster us into being compliant worker-cogs and consumers rather than to provide us with knowledge and the wherewithal to make our own decisions and assume self-responsibility. Perhaps this is nowhere as clear as it is with the consumption of entheogens and other mind alterants. With its appropriation of responsibility, governmental decisions are arbitrary at best. For

instance, alcohol is permitted as providing a legal form of enchantment. A more logical course, however, would follow the line of reasoning that if one, then all, otherwise none. But Prohibition has already been tried in the United States. A pagan might wish to argue that this time we should go for both alcohol and drug-use.¹³

In a pagan context, unless one is pursuing a sun dance-type austerity, a marathon preparation or some other trial-by-ordeal, a pagan way is to follow the path of least resistance. In fact, a virtual pagan motto is: 'let the pathway lead you'. Accordingly, it is incumbent upon us to recognize – if only for our own sanity and nothing further – that our youth will not change. Theirs is to experiment: that is the nature of youth today. And to face this situation, we had simply best get used to it, stop wasting our energies, and begin to work with them rather than against them. Ours is the task of education and guidance; not control and punishment. Our challenge is to learn how to share our wisdoms even with an audience that is not particularly inclined to want them. That challenge is the essence of teaching. We want to open up younger minds and relieve them of some of the hardship of relearning our own mistakes. But in this process, we must realize that there is no one-hundred percent success ratio. Everyone must learn his or her own way. People must be allowed to make their own mistakes, and this learning applies to all walks of life – including experimentation with consciousness-changing substances.

For the most part, contemporary Western paganism is historically a countercultural derivative.¹⁴ While its quasi-counterpart, broadly the New Age Movement or movements, derives equally from the 1960s hippie counterculture, this last has moved more quickly into mainstream centrality. Paganism, by contrast, adheres to, or at least includes, more of the forbidden aspects of the Haight-Ashbury counterculture: orgiastic behavior, back-to-nature and anti-corporate orientation, magic, non-conformity and use of recreational drugs. This is not to say that all pagans employ cannabis and psychedelics. This is far from the case. But the possible corpo-spiritual powers inherent in some plant and synthetic forms have always played an important role in pagan sympathies and encounter with the divine, and this role continues to this day. It is central to traditional shamanisms and, despite the efforts to 'transcend' this factor in Michael Harner's 'Core Shamanism' and other forms of Neo- or New Age Shamanism, mystical-magical flight as experienced through the ingesting of psychotropic substances remains an important institution in contemporary pagan forms of shamanism as well.

¹³Note Hackworth (2005) who, in addressing the opium problem of Afghanistan, suggests that one radical solution would be "the abandonment of the War on Drugs by western governments and institutions, including the UN. It is a war that is lost and which was, in any case, always ideologically incoherent when executed by countries that fetishise individualistic consumption." He mentions a report issued by Transform, a British pressure group, that argues that legalization would allow control of the global narcotics industry, better allocation of state resources internationally, increased taxes as a source of revenue, reduction of black markets, even the reduction of user risk as well as "acknowledging the human right of control over one's own body."

¹⁴York (1995b: 101, 307).

That such substances may require some sort of regulation for viable use is certainly allowed within a pagan ethos. This would be little different, however, from the current restrictions employed for alcohol, tobacco and caffeine, restrictions that limit use and are designed primarily to keep such substances out of the hands of unsupervised minors. In pagan societies of yore, the mystery religions presumably functioned along these lines. The Eleusinian mysteries sacred to the goddess Demeter, the mysteries of Dionysus, the Orphic mysteries and those of the Cabiri of Samothrace and elsewhere most likely in some cases were centered around a mind-altering substance. While these were designed for adult initiation, traditional pagan societies did and still often do have initiation rites, secret initiation rites, *into* adulthood as well. One thing that pagans wish in a more responsible world than the one we have at present is a reinstatement of the right to have and hold secret mystery rites of initiation for both youth and adults. Nothing, however, could be further from the current mind-set of Foucauldian intrusion and control. Governmental authorities of today could not countenance anything that they cannot check and supervise. Allowing a subcultural group or collectivity the right to manage its own internal affairs and have the responsibility for their risk is inconceivable to the dominant herd mentality and its representatives that now prevail. Yet this very possibility remains a central pagan *desideratum*. In the pagan mysteries, the eucharistic substance was sacred and honored and employed as such. It would not have been abused, and because of its sanctity, it would have been for most a special thing for a special occasion rather than a regular indulgence. For those who in general wished greater access to ‘forbidden fruits’, there was the priesthood, witchcraft and the shamanic vocation.

Punch and Judy shows may have been fun and exciting encounters when we were children, but it is time for us to grow up and move beyond ludicrously quarrelling puppets. It is time for us to leap one spiritual step ahead. This move forward, however, is dependent on our own maturity and ability to re-appropriate authority into our own hands. It is also fundamentally dependent on our refusal to allow any government to have control over what states of consciousness we are permitted to choose. This kind of decision is beyond governmental remit; it rests with the individual herself/himself alone – albeit an individual that is nonetheless open to input, information and advice from others, including governmental agencies. In other words, we are asking for the individual to assume self-authority and the responsibilities for the consequences, good and bad, that may result from his or her personal decisions and choices.

In a contemporary pagan call for the legalization of vegetable intoxicants, there is no question concerning the permissibility of medical marijuana. If such reduces the pain, discomfort and lack of appetite for the terminally and/or incurably ill, a pagan position is almost invariably: ‘let it be allowed!’¹⁵ Here, however, we

¹⁵The basic pagan argument is that marijuana and psychotropics are sacraments regardless of any alleged medical benefits they might also provide. The standard assertion is, in fact, that there is no medical evidence that marijuana helps patients (<http://www.dea.gov/pubs/pressrel/pr042605>).

are talking about so-called ‘recreational’ use. Nevertheless, the refrain remains the same: ‘let it be allowed!’ The legal, social and religious use of the sacred intoxicant allows that there is a possible danger in such indulgence and, in particular, that some ingredients are preferable or less harmful than others. The opiate derivatives as well as ‘crack cocaine’ have become largely social scourges and vehicles for many dispossessed marginals as well as unemployed youth for escapism and will-o’-the-wisp relief, but when irresponsibly used, these almost inevitably lead to paths of self-destruction. Those so addicted, those under the hexing spell of narcotics, need help and assistance. These are often lost people, and it is a compassionate and generous pagan duty to help release them if possible from belittling and no-way-out indignities. All the same, a pagan is able to respect the right of people to choose and persist in any path – self-destructive or otherwise – if that is a person’s wish and no one else is being harmed or seriously reduced as a result. It is through education and the creation of universal opportunity that a pagan seeks to augment the lot of others and not through prohibition and unwanted hegemony over another’s freedom to choose and make mistakes.

Drug use might be part of ritual practice for some, but for the most part it lies on the border of the norms of social existence. The mental alterants test our wider tolerance or capability for tolerance on many fronts. But their most central importance is to keep us open as a society. Their use helps us not to become locked into a single mode of consciousness and operation. In a word, they help us to remain sane. In pagan collective ritual, psychotropic transformation is encapsulated by the carnival. The mardi gras and similar festivities serve as social psychic vents that allow a people to step outside of themselves. If and when a people cannot do this, they wither and go mad. Hostile forms of insanity are often provocative of our worst conflicts and wars. If and when we are unable to maintain our own equilibrium, we are vulnerable to irrational and dangerous behaviors of the worst kind. The hallucinogen, as with the carnivalesque celebration, is a means to remove the culturally imposed borders of stasis and rigid internalization to reach momentarily beyond the self and status quo. Without such an avenue, we are doomed to perpetual imprisonment and the possibility of personal and social collapse, let alone lethal danger to self and other. While we cannot live on the other side of the doors of perception, we still require the freedom of their ingress and egress in order to become fuller, more mature and ultimately self-responsible individuals capable of contributing to a sustainable and progressive society that is at the same time humanistic.

[html](#) – accessed 25.12.5). But contrary to this position, I had a friend in Los Angeles who, when undergoing chemo-therapy for breast cancer, was told by her doctor that marijuana had helped a number of his patients to get through the chemo treatment. This friend’s brother had muscular dystrophy, and to ease his 24-h a day pain, to aid in sleep and in feeling better in general he would smoke cannabis. See further, http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2672/Wetenschap-Gezondheid/article/detail/3441616/2013/05/15/Wietgebruik-goed-voor-bloedsuikers.dhtml?utm_source=dailynewsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign= (accessed 16 May 2013) and <http://www.menshealth.com/medical-marijuana/> (accessed 31 May 2013).

In my own psychonautic explorations that have spanned the previous half-century or more, I have been privileged repeatedly. They began with peyote ingesting in a fog-surrounded remote neighborhood of San Francisco and have since occurred in rural California, the Alps, New York, New Orleans, London, Amsterdam, Rome, Paris, Morocco, India, Ireland, Sweden, Mexico and many more places I can no longer recall – both urban and rural. Through them, I have had a range of contrasting experiences, including that of eternal hell. I have felt the utter callousness that humans can have with one another, and I pre-saw the 911 attacks on the World Trade Center. But I have also experienced the most liberating of laughter, brief but marvelous exchanges of understanding with total strangers, and, like Apuleius in *The Golden Ass*,¹⁶ I have seen the midnight sun and have gloried in the sacred presence of both celestial and infernal gods. If and when mind altering substances are treated as holy gifts and used accordingly, a pagan is able through this medium to approach the godhead and the realities enshrined in myth as theophanic experiences that encapsulate sacred meaning and value. This is not to say that the pagan is dependent on such conduits, but it is to allow that the psychotropic is an ancient pagan route to deity that is a functional part of a valid portfolio for interaction with the divine. This is also not to say that such aids only produce beatific results. Such is not the case, and hallucinogenic hell is a real possibility. One friend has replied to a general enquiry¹⁷ on my part that in the Berkshires of Massachusetts, at least eight suicides of young men between the ages of 18 and 22 have been blamed on drugs. She also points out the disastrous results of the all-permitting Swiss experiment of the Platzpitz ('Needle Park') in a Zurich city park from 1986 to February 1992.¹⁸ Addiction and brain damage are the possible downsides. But

¹⁶Apuleius 11.23 (Graves 1954: 252).

¹⁷I received twenty replies to the question: Do you feel recreational drugs should be legal or not and how would you argue your position? Ten respondents said unequivocally that recreational drugs should be made legal. One of these cited the American Declaration of Independence and the right to pursue happiness behind her reasoning. Four people feel that *some* substances should be legalized – with one of these qualifying this as 'decriminalization' rather than legalization. The same person was unsupportive to the extent that drugs could become objects of rebellion and compliance (as subsets of fear) rather than free choices. Another person said no if they were to become the everyday norm. There was only one unclear negative reply that I interpreted as a 'no', while cocaine, heroin and crack were signaled by some as substances that definitely should not be legalized. A few people mentioned the medical benefits of marijuana. The major reason given for the affirmative response was to prevent the profit motive and stop the trade being driven underground. The other reasons given were fewer prisons, saving taxpayers' money by reducing the criminal justice system's workload, and for reasons of regulation in which the quality and dose could be assured. Two respondents see the possibility of cash crops – especially for poor indigenous farmers. Several felt that if alcohol, coffee and similar ingredients are permitted, cannabis, peyote and mushrooms should be as well. One person mentioned the pharmaceutical companies as simply 'legalized drug pushers'. A few people were tolerant but were not interested in such substances – preferring instead their body's own natural chemistry.

¹⁸http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hepc/hepatitis_c/pdf/harm_reduction_e/switzerland.html provides a balanced overview of the Needle Park experiment and subsequent drug policy in Switzerland. For another discussion of the Swiss plan and social integration, see also <http://www.city.vancouver>.

be this as it may, the choice and responsibility to engage and experiment with externalities as viaducts to the sacred and/or infernal must still, for a pagan, lie with the individual rather than with some outside agent or agency. Any wise proponent for such aids, experimentation and/or ritual use will argue for the necessity of not only self-responsibility, but also judiciousness, knowledge of the risks involved, viable safeguards and the selection of a conducive setting. One may indeed be reckless and foolish, but the gods are not always there to protect us.

In the traditional shamanisms, the neophyte undergoes a long period of preparation and training before engaging in soul-flight itself. What is missing in Western culture of today is the presence of the shaman or *curañdero* in the role of respected and revered teacher. While the short-changes of modern technological and consumer-oriented Western society make our youth cry out for deeper meaning and spiritual truths or experiences that have been largely eradicated over the past 2000 years, there are still a few who, with social legitimation, would be able to help and instruct and supervise those who are vulnerable and at greatest risk.

The joy of the gods is what a pagan can insist is something in which human beings may and can also share. Much of the magic of nature in this direction occurs in the form of ‘power plants’. Another source of enchantment is to be found in the various cultivations that the human as engineering, worshiping and developing agent has been able to effect. These last, however, have often been inspired and encouraged by the consciousness-changing products of plants and mushrooms. Nature has produced these uncanny substances that alter our perceptions, emotions and mental ways of processing. Paganism has always celebrated this bounteous gift from nature – even to the extent of imitating and alchemically producing yet further possibilities. The pharmaceutical pursuit takes its foundational inspiration from nature itself. But unlike with the jealous figure of Genesis who forbids, there is only dangerous but no forbidden fruit in the garden of the pagan paradise. In fact, for the proto-Indo-Europeans, the central divine duality is understood as humanity and his/her *alter ego* in which the latter is the personification of the psychedelic experience.¹⁹ These divine twins are the children of the *terra mater*, and their initial harmonious flourishing was understood by our linguistic ancestors as humanity’s partaking of the resources that nature has bestowed – including, centrally, the magical-mystical psychotropic event.

bc.ca/commsvcs/socialplanning/initiatives/alcohol/Swiss/Page05.htm. Tandy (2005) presents the negative view on marijuana fostered by the International Association of Chiefs of Police (the IACP) Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs Committee. Another view on Needle Park is found at <http://opioids.com/switzerland/needle-park.html> (Huber 1994). The pot festival in Piedmont Park is compared by http://www.nationalfamilies.org/publications/by_nfia/needle%20_park.html (Rusche 1995). For the harm-reduction approach, however, that tolerates and allows drug use see <http://www.aidslaw.ca/Maincontent/issues/druglaws/e-iduback/Paper3/druguse-3.htm>. Overall, this program aims to reduce the negative consequences to the individual, community and society as a whole. All these websites have been accessed on 25 December 2005 and some are no longer available. See further <http://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/multimedia/needle-park-remembered/32052568> (accessed 23 July 2014).

¹⁹York (1995a: 312, 528 *et passim*).

With such a historic legacy behind it, it should be of no wonder that contemporary pagans, those who re-comb the past and search out lost ways of understanding and practicing the sacred, will as a rule endorse the use and re-legalization of entheogenic catalysts. It is the non-legalization of established religious intoxicants that is the most troublesome to pagans.²⁰ Nevertheless, there is not necessarily a blanket call for making all substances legal. One respondent to my query on the issue considers that more tolerance is requisite for substances with a long history, such as opium or qat, but he is less tolerant of legalization for cocaine (as opposed to coca leaves which he feels ought to be available at any grocery shop).²¹

By contrast, some pagans hold the same position as my own, namely, that all drugs should be legal. One person pointed out that to make substances illegal only drives their use underground and onto the black market since people are going to use them regardless of the law. She admits that some are beneficial and some are extremely harmful but that this is not what accounts for their legality or illegality. For that matter, alcohol, caffeine and sugar can be deadly for certain people, so to prohibit marijuana, peyote and mushroom use, but not the former, is not logical. Instead, if legalized and regulated, quality and dose could be more assured, better monitored if necessary, and provide a source of tax revenue let alone cash crops for, especially, indigent farmers.

Wendy Griffin, formerly Long Beach State University and currently Cherry Hill Seminary, however, is concerned that many younger people utilize drugs as a means to facilitate social interaction. She laments that, as a result, they tend not to learn “the small social graces that make things go smoothly.”²² Griffin echoes a sentiment widespread among older pagans – at least in the West – that mind-altering substances carry the same finesse as do fine wines and that “the when, where and how to use specific drugs for specific purposes” is something that the young or people in general could learn from educated and experienced (and functional) elders. As the black market objector already mentioned feels, education and decriminalization are the positive factors that could make a difference in the how and why drugs might be used.

One friend prefers instead the attaining of ecstasy by resorting to the body’s natural and internal psychotropic pharmacy. Serena Roney-Dougal draws on the similarity between the body’s natural chemistry and Amazonian psychotropic plants that are used for healing, out-of-body experiences, clairvoyance and precognition.²³

²⁰The Bwiti tribes of central Africa employ the hallucinogenic iboga bark in sacred ritual, the Native American Church of the Indians of North America use peyote as its sacrament, from Latin America the Santo Daime and Uniao de Vegetale sects turn to ayahwasca as a vision-and-healing agent, and in India the use of *bhanga* and *ganja* are staples in the worship of Shiva. Marijuana is also part of Rastafarian religion.

²¹In all, I received three replies that advocated legalization of coca leaves. Two further respondents signaled out cocaine as something that should not be legalized.

²²Personal communication (25 December 2005).

²³Roney-Dougal is someone who has done much work on such neuron-hormones as melatonin, neuron-transmitters as serotonin and tryptamine, and the pineal beta-carboline neuron-modulators

While there is a tendency, even among pagans, to lament the ‘poor souls’ who cannot absorb starlight or feel the warm and sugary beach sand under their feet but resort instead to outside chemical stimuli, there is also the desire for legalization to stop profiteering by exploitive criminals. Others lament the greed of the pharmaceutical companies themselves and see them as largely complicit in preventing the general use of marijuana and the psychedelics.

But once again, the issue is *not* the potential medical benefits of mind-alterants. The issue is society’s failure to accept drug-taking as a legitimate form of risk-taking – particularly in puritan-influenced North America with its predilection for both abstinence and drug-prohibition policies. All pagans recognize the potential dangers involved with ingesting power-plants and the like. But at the same time, these are seen as nature-given sacraments. They are honored and revered as vehicles for visionary quest, for devotion and for attaining states of holy grace. Governmental denial is the denial of the pagan’s right to self-responsibility let alone access to her gods and goddesses as she might deem appropriate. In this, contemporary pagans in the West belong to a growing and larger constituency that increasingly demands that the government minds its own business. They share the outrage, for instance, that has emerged when the U.S. federal government through the F.B.I. raided shortly before Christmas of 2005 the medicinal marijuana shops of San Diego after the people of California had voted and decided that they were fine with this. The illegalization of cannabis sativa has a long history in the United States. For instance, hemp could be used for tax payments until the early 1800s, and, in the state of Virginia, it was illegal *not* to grow it between 1763 and 1769. However, industrialist propaganda against marijuana began with the introduction of the cotton mill in the 1820s to replace hemp textiles, fabrics and clothing. Subsequently the lobbying efforts of the Hearst Paper Manufacturing Division of Kimberly Clark for use of timber over hemp in paper production along with Dupont’s agitation for the development of petrochemical synthetics over natural hemp industrialization led to the passing of the Prohibitive Marijuana Tax Law by the U.S. Congress in September 1937. Henceforth, hemp or marijuana has been illegal despite the possibility of hemp’s use for energy needs, for paper production, for biodegradable plastics, as medicines, as an edible protein source and for durable clothing. The so-called Partnership for a Drug-Free America is sponsored chiefly by the liquor, tobacco and oil industries.²⁴ While the planetary ecological imperatives are one thing virtually all pagans will support, the right to sacramental substances is something else that goes to the heart of pagan worship and cultivation of self-responsibility.²⁵

(e.g., pinoline): e.g., “Where Science and Magic Meet” (accessed 26 December 2005; re-accessed revised version 23 July 2014 – http://www.psi-researchcentre.co.uk/article_2.html). *Vide* Roney-Dougal (2012).

²⁴Doug Yurchey, “The Marijuana Conspiracy: The Real Reason Hemp is Illegal”: <http://www.world-mysteries.com/marijuana1.htm> and <http://www.illuminati-news.com/marijuana-conspiracy.htm> (accessed 8 November 2005).

²⁵As one responding friend puts it, “Legal restrictions promote a sense of non-responsibility and powerlessness.” The role of government is, along with consumer organizations, to monitor claims

Among the various responses I have received from pagan and non-pagan friends alike, many feel that cannabis, peyote, mushrooms should be legal; heroin, cocaine, crack cocaine should not. The legality question turns on the harmful effects (health problems, violence, crime rate) vis-à-vis removing the profit motive and standardizing doses, etc. Several have felt that the body is a temple, that one's natural endorphins are enough, and that meditation, yoga, tantra, sex, sports, reading and so forth are sufficient to achieve a high. Nevertheless, initiatives in the American states of Colorado and Washington and in such nations as Uruguay, Netherlands and Bangladesh have rendered cannabis legal or at least virtually legal. For North Korea it has never been illegal. It has been variously decriminalized in Argentina, Australia (parts), Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Columbia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Iran, Italy, Luxemburg, Mozambique, Peru, Philippines, Portugal, Russia, Spain, Switzerland and Venezuela.²⁶

Certainly, to say in conclusion, for the pagan as well as hopefully for anyone, no one should ever be made to feel compelled to use mind alterants who does not want to, and certainly no one should use them who is not ready and prepared for them. The psychonautic experience and investigations are a serious matter, and perhaps the term 'recreational drugs' is itself a misleading misnomer. But pleasure is something that is sacred for a pagan. The issue in pagandom is centrally important in terms of freedom, health and worship – worship as pleasure and worship as worship.

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Chapter 12

Terrorism and Death Issues

There are the questions relating to the freedom of people to marry or use mind-affecting substances, one the one hand, and, on the other, the even more central ones involving hegemony and the environment. But further key concerns for people in general, let alone pagans in particular, that involve the ethics of choice and possibility are the right to take one's own life and that of another. Quality of life is affected not only by how we derive the energy needed for our lives and lifestyles but also by how we are free to live day-by-day without the threat of bodily harm and/or loss of life. War is one thing; suicide bombing is another. The former is political and results from the decisions of public policy or the loss of effective governmental policy. The latter is also political inasmuch as it is an attempt to challenge the state and its policies. In this chapter, I wish not only to examine such death issues as abortion, capital punishment and euthanasia but also those actions in which there is explicit intent to cause unexpected fatalities. War, of course, has the aim of destroying belligerent enemies, but in today's world terrorist activity also seeks to decrease the quality of life of others or eliminate it altogether.

Terrorism

The discussion that is to follow is not concerned with any pagan 'stance' on terrorism nor what governmental responses to terrorism should be. It is instead an brief examination not only of whom is involved with the kinds of terrorist activities that affect our qualities of life, for both pagans and non-pagans alike, but also – and principally – with what an ethical, especially an heptatheonic ethical, response could be. In what follows in this section is a rough and thorough discussion of a leading news focus of our day. The reader who is not interested is invited simply to skip the present section. As much as many of us would like to react to suicide bombing as an unmitigated evil, the wider context is not simply a black-and-white scenario. It is instead greatly more nuanced than most of us are prepared to admit.

Paganism does not endorse terrorism in virtually any form, for the denial of life to self or an involuntary other strikes against the central sacredness of value. But simultaneously, on the basis of judiciousness and inherent honor, it behooves the pagan above all to examine violent contention scrupulously and to ferret out the underlying reasons rather than simply to react in knee-jerk fashion and condemn without understanding.¹ The terrorist question in particular forces us to accept Aristotle's understanding that ethics melds ultimately with politics. I am not here advocating that pagans become terrorists to achieve their goals – far from it. But I wish to signal that the existence of terrorism in our societies today is a major pagan/human concern that has ramifications along an heptatheonic understanding of an ethical way of life.

Suicide bombing is the flip-side of genocide. In the one, there is a controlling power exterminating a minority. In the other, there is a minority that has no option for expression and attempt to institute change. In a sense, this last is the genocidal victim fighting back. Is there any real surprise in any of this? Despite all the horrors that suicide bombers have inflicted in Israel, they had at least managed to get Israel – the Israeli government – to move and the rest of the world to listen. The Israelis had been forced to retreat from a totally inflexible position – at least prior to the 2006 Lebanon aerial attack. When a people are oppressed, when they feel powerless to resist the odds that exist against them, when they perceive their situation to be virtually hopeless in its unfairness and coerced subjugation, terrorism is employed as their only viable option – at least as a channel and expression for the pent-up anger they contain. Can we not understand such people even if we hate them? Do they not even merit some degree of respect if not honor for their courage and determination? No one can win by kowtowing to the West as Arafat did. There is logic in violent resistance – especially when we consider that all governments have acted as terrorists in some respects or from particular perspectives. In fact, many of the first generation of Israeli leaders were originally terrorists themselves before the establishment of their state. In this case, what was once 'terrorism' succeeded, and the state of Israel came into being.

The question here is always one about freedom – the very value that is central to all pagan endeavor. Where we have resistances – from Northern Ireland and the Tamils of Sri Lanka to Corsica, the Basque peoples, the Kurds, Chechens, Armenians, Palestinians and countless others as well, the issue is invariably self-determination. The nation-state is a comparatively recent development – following the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 and coinciding originally with the Industrial Revolution. While the institution may well already be obsolete – especially in regard to equitable global advance, it appears at present to be here to stay. If and when a

¹According to Sol Sanders (2005), "That there is a general self-pitying commonality throughout the wretched Moslem world – based on legitimate and fanciful grievances, many dating back to European colonial pasts – is not to be denied." He adds, "That Moslem extremists exploit this among young tortured souls is again undeniable. But equally clear is the particularism of local situations which feed into international terrorism."

nation-state is relatively ethnically homogenous – say as in Japan, Thailand or Iran, there is a greater possibility for success. But even in the three illustrations I have just named, minorities exist: the Ainu in Japan, the Muslim insurgency in Thailand, the Irani Zoroastrians, Kafir, etc. in Iran. Indeed, because of the more cosmopolitan nature of our world today, pure ethnicity exists virtually nowhere. Moreover, in such truly multinational nations such as India, Indonesia, Belgium or Canada, the likelihood of disenfranchisement is strong and throws into more salient light the whole question of the nation-state as a workable solution to political, economic and ethnical management.

For a pagan, the bottom line is always liberty – one's own and that of others. The task is one of working out a *modus vivendi* between divergent but semi-autonomous peoples. The only global solution toward which our world must now aim if we are eventually to end the wastefulness of belligerent destruction and the oppression and consequent unrest of hegemonic imperialism is the self-determination of all peoples. This in principle must become our beginning platform and motivating goal. It also must inform all our ethical decisions – be these on the political, economic or social front. And, as such, if and when in the name of freedom for all peoples, our decision-making and the apparatus for making such are conditioned by the respect for the intrinsic dignity of all peoples, ethnicities and nations, we are then able to understand what motivates people toward terrorism and to prevent the situations and imbalances that foster such inimical motivation in the first place.

From a pagan as well as a secular humanitarian orientation, we are understood to be all on this planet together, here and now. The perspective a pagan might wish to foster is the one that views the present as a marvelous opportunity and venture – one that is before each of us. All human effort ought to be directed toward solving the differences and resentments that do exist in an effort for accommodation and harmonious inter-cooperation. This is undoubtedly a major challenge, but for a pagan this is one that is accepted because pagans will at the end of the day come to ask for what other reason are we existing and living on this planet? The harmony of honor that is based on mutual and universal liberty can be the only answer as a pagan understands things and formulates response within the parameters of concomitant virtue-value.

To this end, everyone must be allowed and given a voice. Because the world stage is inaccessible for the most part to the voice of the individual, this last might be funneled into various coalitions of mutual concern. In other worlds, in whatever kind of global forum we manage to develop and maintain, there must be a voice for youth, for Islamicists, for Christians, for secularists, for the elderly as well as individual nations, minorities, counterculturalists and the dharmic perspectives of the East. These may in some cases be little more than *ad hoc* coalitions; in others, more permanent councils. And, as our world continues to diversify along lines of irreconcilable differences, perhaps we need to think seriously in terms of geographic zones – one for the Islamic world, one for the Christian, one for the secular, etc. These last can only be conceived and tolerated if and when we can all agree to certain inalienable rights and safeguards such as the protection of all minorities within one's borders. But these last must be kept to a minimum as much

as is possible – with the largess beyond them for permitting peoples to manage their own affairs within their own zones of influence to the best of their abilities and in conformity to their own cultural constructs. But such an arrangement will only work if we as a species upon this planet can catch that zest of spirit that embraces the collective desire to want the global aesthetic project to work rather than underhandedly, dishonestly and unsupportively to connive and maneuver for whatever we can get away with on a sectarian basis.² To some degree, the current ‘Quartet of Nations’, the United States, the United Nations, the European Union and the Russian Federation, is an attempt to bring together the many different voices of the world into an effective forum for the formulation of global public policy.

Maybe some day there will be pagan nations as well. At this stage of the game, however, pagans are constrained to seek instead to garner respect from others for the largely cosmopolitan tribe that we are. If that much can be achieved, there is a commensurate contentment to be had in that alone. There are decidedly non-pagan sentiments throughout the world at large – let alone anti-pagan anger as well, and for a pagan, this is the bigger struggle to combat, modify and eliminate for the now. In ancient Persia, the earlier pagan perspective was radically inverted with the advent of Zarathustra and the Magian/Zoroastrian establishment.³ In the Near East of the Semites, rather than an inversion, paganism was simply overwhelmed. Historically, we are permitted as a result to witness that both these peoples succumbed to a flip-flop perversion. Why? That and that alone must be the ultimate human question. Not what is, nor what is not God, but why did we go the route we have? It is only in asking this question and beginning to understand it that we might begin to unravel the biases and distortions that have led to the hegemonic imbalances that we do have and the implementation of destructive forces that become consequently mandatory to their imposition and maintenance. Official violence and terrorist violence are both violence. To have a free, healthy, comfortable and honorable world, a pagan has no real choice but to oppose the destructive in its various forms – the ‘legally’ sanctioned and the illegal both.

²The present American stance that appears to thrive on the idea or fact of ‘getting away with something’ is a highly seductive myth. It is a marketable one as well. Many people apparently like to buy into it. *Vis-à-vis* the rest of the world, this, alas, has seemingly become the characteristic American position. Europe, by contrast, teeters on the double-edged sword of support for this American ethos. The present hope is that Europe is in some sense yet a child – a child that wishfully is on the verge of growing up. Once it does, it will develop a voice of its own. Increasingly from a European perspective, the historical annals that are yet to be written will place Bush and Cheney into the same infamous category along with Hitler. Both the Americans and the German were originally democratically elected – however questionable this might be in the American case. For the view that the “American invasion of Iraq has boosted recruitment for Al Qaeda, IS and other jihadist groups, increased Muslim hatred of the West, injected a dangerous instability into a turbulent region and given suicide bombers new cause for their zeal,” see Cohen (2005). Cohen, however, offers this scenario as only one possibility and suggests that a new political awareness throughout the Middle East of liberalism and democracy may be producing different results.

³For the ‘Persian inversion’, *vide* York (1995:164–84).

In other words, paganism today does not sanction war, assault, riot or the violence of organized crime. The question of property destruction is more nuanced, and many Western pagans support or are in sympathy with such groups as the Earth Liberation Front and the Animal Liberation Front.⁴ Nonetheless, the ambivalence between terroristic evil and revolutionary hero is a difficult one to fathom for a world that desires peaceful change. The irony is such that former terrorists (Uri Avnery, Yitzhak Shamir, Nelson Mandela, Yasser Arafat) may become eventually known as champions of peace.⁵

The Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention of the United Nations defines the terrorist act as “the peacetime equivalent of a war crime,” while the European Union identifies terrorism as having the aim of “destabilising or destroying the fundamental political, constitutional, economic or social structures of a country.”⁶ In virtually all cases, the line of demarcation between a terrorist and a separatist, rebel or liberator, depends on the perspective of the viewer. The terrorist act itself is one that is premeditated, political, targeted at civilians and performed by subnational groups. Its purpose is to change the existing political order but not through the existing army of the country. Unlike terrorism, guerilla warfare, though often with similar political goals, directs violence essentially against military rather than civilian targets. What is important to grasp in understanding terrorism as a virtue-

⁴To distinguish terrorism specifically from the broader range of violent action, we need to resort to some kind of definition. While the word itself was first formulated during the Reign of Terror by the Jacobin Club in post Revolutionary France (1793–1794), earlier illustrations of terrorism can be allocated to the Jewish Zealots of first-century Palestine, the Thuggee cult in seventh-century India, and the Shiite Assassins of the eleventh to thirteenth centuries. The United States State Department defines terrorism today as “premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience”: “Terrorism: Questions and Answers” (Council on Foreign Relations): <http://cfrterrorism.org/home/> (accessed 2 February 2006). See further: <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/info/c16718.htm> (accessed 27 July 2014). In line with this understanding, the following would also have to be included as terrorists: the late-nineteenth-century anti-tsarist populist Narodnaya Volya (‘People’s Will’) in Russia, the 1867-launched Irish Republican Brotherhood or Fenians, the 1893-founded Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization, and the second-half-of-the-1940s Zionist Irgun organization within the British Mandate of Palestine. While the Narodniks and Anarchists of Russia were engaged in ideological political struggles that ultimately had their own success, the independent states of the Republic of Ireland, the Republic of Macedonia and the nation of Israel were the final results of terrorist activity that, in hindsight, can be attributed to ‘freedom fighters’. In other words, geopolitical change has occasionally come about as the consequence of terrorist violence.

⁵The United States Department of Defense has also defined terrorism as “the calculated use of unlawful violence or threat of unlawful violence to inculcate fear; intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious, or ideological” (Zalman *u.d.*) For the Code of Federal Regulations’ definition of terrorism as “the unlawful use of force and violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives,” see <http://www.fema.gov/hazards/terrorism/> (accessed 2 February 2006) or Federal Bureau of Investigation (2006).

⁶For the UN, Gaynor (2009:23 n 11) and for the EU, Summaries of EU legislation (2002).

value issue, however, is that it is not something that is simply conducted for pleasure. Of course, a pleasure may be taken in celebration of a terrorist success by those who have launched the act or by those who are in sympathy, but the act itself is conducted for specific political, religious and/or ideological reasons and not out of the kind of motivation that we might ascribe to a serial killer or rapist.

And while we might question the goal or goals toward which the terrorist ultimately aims, national terrorism is the search to form a separate state for the terrorist's own national group. In other words, the motive behind his acts is national liberation.⁷ There are also both religious forms of terrorism and state-sponsored terrorism. The Council on Foreign Relations speaks further about narcoterrorism and cyberterrorism.⁸ The former refers for the most part to groups that fund

⁷Some of the more prominent examples include the Front de Libération du Québec (or *felquistes*), the Irish Republican Army (IRA), the Basque Fatherland and Liberty (ETA) and the Kurdistan Workers' Party. "Suicide terrorists were thought to compel American and French military forces to abandon Lebanon in 1983, Israeli forces to leave most of Lebanon in 1985, Israeli forces to quit the Gaza Strip and the West Bank in 1994 and 1995, and the Turkish government to grant measures of autonomy to the Kurds in the late 1990's" (Pape 2003). A more recent example of a successful resolution is to be seen in the peace agreement signed on 27 March 2014 between the Philippine government of Benigno Aquino III and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front that granted greater political autonomy for the Muslim areas of southern Mindanao

(<http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/philippines-muslim-rebel-group-sign-peace-deal-23077896> – accessed 5 April 14) or Sabapathy (2014).

⁸<http://cfrterrorism.org/home/>. In fact, the website lists six types of terrorism: nationalist, religious, state-sponsored, left-wing, right-wing and anarchist. The site designates over three dozen terrorist groups: Al-Qaeda, the Palestinian Hamas, Islamic Jihad, Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine – General Command (PFLP-GC) and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), the Lebanese Hezbollah, the Egyptian Jamaat al-Islamiyya and Egyptian Islamic Jihad, the Algerian Armed Islamic Group, al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), the Nigerian Boko Haram, the Somalia-based al-Shabaab, the Kashmir Militant Extremists (e.g., Harakat-ul-Mujahedeen group, Jaish-e-Muhammad organization, Lashkar-e-Tayyaba), the Iranian Mujahedeen-e-Khalq, the Iraqi Abu Nidal Organization, the Iraqi-Islamists/Kurdish separatists Ansar al Islam (Supporters of Islam) as well as their offshoot Ansar al Sunna (Supporters of Sunni), the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, the Chechnya-based separatists, the separatist East Turkestan Islamic Movement in China, the separatist Kurdistan Workers' Party in Turkey (PKK), the Jemaah Islamiyah of Southeast Asia, the separatist Abu Sayyaf Group of The Philippines, the Israeli extremists of Kach and Kahane Chai, the Irish Republican Army, the IRA splinter groups such as the Real IRA, the Continuity IRA and the Irish National Liberation Army, the Northern Ireland Loyalist Paramilitaries (the Ulster Volunteer Force or UVF, the Ulster Defence Association or UDA, the Loyalist Volunteer Force or LVF, the Red Hand Defenders and the Orange Volunteers), the separatist Euskadi ta Askatasuna or ETA (Basque Fatherland and Liberty) in Spain, the leftist November 17 and Revolutionary People's Struggle in Greece, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka, the sectarian Aum Shinrikyo (home-based in Japan), the Columbian rebels of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia or FARC, the National Liberation Army or ELN and the United Self-Defense Forces of Columbia or AUC, the Peruvian leftists of Shining Path (Sendero Luminoso) and the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (Movimiento Revolucionario Tupac Amaru), and various radical American militant extremists (the Weathermen Underground, the Symbionese Liberation Army, the Armed Forces for Puerto Rican National Liberation or FALN, the Ku Klux Klan, the Christian Patriot movement). See, e.g., Moran (2006) and the Country

their terrorist activities through the illicit drug trade; the latter concerns purposeful computer-based disruptions of military communications, electrical power and emergency networks chiefly to implement fear and coerce governmental decisions. State-sponsored terrorist groups are those that are purposely used by the state machinery as forms of conducting foreign policy.⁹ But the line between state-sponsored terrorism and state terror is often a difficult one to draw. The German Gestapo, the Soviet KGB and the East German Stasi are the classic examples of the latter, but nowadays, the American CIA and perhaps the FBI are as likely to be included by many throughout the world as state terrorist organizations.¹⁰

It is today, however, that religious terrorism has emerged as the most prominent threat to the general well-being of the world as a whole and to the Western world in particular.¹¹ While nationalist/separatist terrorists and their guerilla affiliates are constrained by the necessity to appeal to a nationalist or ideological constituency for support – often being more selective and discriminating concerning targets in the process, those who receive their commands and motivation from some extra-terrestrial or supernatural entity appear to have more freedom in the selection of their foes and efforts to bring about upheaval. There is in fact perhaps nothing as dangerous to human equity as a person who believes he has received his *carte blanche* authority and vision from a transcendent force that is beyond questioning.¹²

Reports on Terrorism 2012 (published May 2013): <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2012/209979.htm> (U.S. Department of State 2013). For a succinct listing of the ‘U.S. Government Designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations’, see <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2012/> (U.S. Department of State 2014) (accessed 5 April 2014).

⁹The United States has singled out the nations of Iran, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Cuba, North Korea and Sudan as sponsors of terrorism: Luxner (2010).

¹⁰Noam Chomsky (Institute for Policy Studies) argues that the CIA support of Guatemalan death squads or of the Baathist violent overthrow of the Iraqi government in the 1960s already qualified the USA as “a leading terrorist state” (Chomsky 2001); “Another problem with the official definitions of terror is that it follows from them that the US is a leading terrorist state” (Chomsky 2003:55); and Chomsky (2002). For more on political critic Noam Chomsky, see also Lennard (2013). To this, the underwater mines planted by the CIA in the Corinto harbor of Nicaragua would be one more illustration. Further examples of state terrorism could be argued for the dropping of atomic bombs on Nagasaki and Hiroshima, the Luftwaffe’s bombing of London or the Royal Air Force’s bombing of Berlin, Dresden and other German cities.

¹¹Pape (2003), however, argues that nearly all suicide terrorist campaigns are secular with their specific strategic goal “to compel liberal democracies to withdraw military forces from territory that the terrorists consider to be their homeland.” Whether Lebanon, Israel, Sri Lanka, Kashmir, Chechnya or Saudi Arabia, it is political self-determination that is behind the terrorist campaigns. Cohen (2005), by contrast, suggests “fanatical Islamic fundamentalism, anti-imperial nationalism, anti-Zionism, or simply the defense of threatened privilege” as all possible causes for the continuation and augmentation of terrorist violence.

¹²Religious forms of terrorism are found among Israeli extremists, American white-supremacists, ethnic pagan fascists, the Japanese doomsday sect of Aum Shinrikyo, Irish Christian separatists and loyalists and the Hindu Tamil Tigers of Sri Lanka. Indeed, in 1995, “nearly half of the 56 known, active international terrorist groups were religiously motivated”: Bruce Hoffman (RAND): cited in Kawilarang (2006:387).

By far, most of the current religiously inspired terrorist groups are Islamicist or have at least strong Islamic connections. While the outsider may refer to them as ‘terrorists’, these people designate themselves as *jihadi* or *mujahedeen* ‘struggler’ or *fedayeen* ‘one prepared for martyrdom’.¹³

In conditions of ‘asymmetric warfare’, the political or national freedom-fighter is apt to win more sympathy from non-affected people across the board. At first, terrorists were called incendiaries because their usual tactic was to resort to arson.¹⁴ For those of us who are not terrorists, it might seem that it is much easier to be consistently evil than to be continually good. And we always have the human propensity to dismiss someone or something as totally evil rather than to discern what redeeming features may also be present as well as what the motivating factors behind despicable behavior could be. Much of course depends on perspective. As CNN anchor Daryn Kagan put it, “At the very nature of what is terrorism, one person’s terrorist is another person’s hero.”¹⁵ In other words, the ethical issue has increasingly come to focus on heroic martyrdom versus terrorist suicide.

By whatever standards, it can still be safely said that the suicide bomber does not conform to the Nietzschean herd. As unimaginative as his/her act or response may be, the *fedayeen* is not one of the herd – even if the person’s act has been largely coerced through intimidation. The offering of one’s life for a ‘greater cause’, however misguided, is not one of bourgeois conformity. It is, instead, to give the most that any person can give. It is the ultimate sacrifice – itself at the heart of religious ritual and the ethical notion of selfless generosity.¹⁶

¹³Among the foremost Islamist terrorist groups, there are Al-Qaeda, ISIL/Islamic State, Hamas, Hezbollah, Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab and Séléka – with factional bands ranging in addition across Syria, Iraq, Iran, Turkey, Nigeria, Somalia, Kenya, Central African Republic, Chechnya, China, Kashmir, The Philippines and Southeast Asia. Pape (2003), however, on the basis of studying every suicide bombing and attack worldwide between 1980 and 2001, denies that there is much “connection between suicide terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism, or any religion for that matter.” Of the 188 incidents he uncovers, 75 were committed by the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka, “a Marxist-Leninist group whose members are from Hindu families but who are adamantly opposed to religion.” Pape’s prediction, that “Even if U.S. intentions in Iraq are good, the presence of Americans there will continue to help terrorist groups recruit more people willing to blow themselves up in the war against America,” would seem to have been accurate. But if the “presumed connection between suicide terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism [was] wrongheaded” in 2003, it no longer appears to be the case in the 5 years since the compilation of Pape’s original database. For a more recent discussion of Pape’s ideas, now with an extended database to 2004, see his 2005 interview with Scott McConnell (Pape 2005). For the database from 1981 to 2011, see <http://cpost.uchicago.edu/search.php> (posted 14 October 2011).

¹⁴See Gat (2006) and Dillinger (2006). The site <http://www.vaemergency.com/threats/terrorism/toolkit/terrguide/weapons/incendiary.htm> (accessed 3 February 2006) is no longer available.

¹⁵During a 17 May 2005 interview with Leonard Weinberg, author of *Global Terrorism: A Beginner’s Guide*: see Kagan (2005). Weinberg himself stresses that “terrorism is a tactic, not an ideology or a doctrine.”

¹⁶As Cohen (2005) explains, citing the words of Palestinian psychologist Dr. Eyad Serraj, in “the culture of martyrdom – . . . shame is transposed into honor through self-sacrifice and defeat is

For a pagan, acts of terrorism must be understood separate from any automatic tendency to demonize the other. In terms of beauty, humanitarianism, intrinsic honor let alone health, freedom, pleasure and comfort, they are to be condemned. But suicide terrorism is virtually in a category by itself. During the early days of the Vietnam War, self-immolation by Buddhist monks was not an infrequent occurrence. Whether such efforts in hindsight are to be rejected as mistaken, they did not occur at least at the injurious or fatal expense of others. While Tamil Tigers, the IRA, ETA Basques, Columbian rebels and Greek or Peruvian leftists employ incendiary devices for attack and demoralization, as a rule they have, at least until now, not resorted deliberately to suicidal death in their terrorist implementations. This, however, is not the case with Islamicist terrorism. This last strikes against the most basic imperatives of pagan spirituality, namely, those that rest upon respecting the sanctity of life – or, if not all life, at least all human life.

As an umbrella term, ‘Islamism’ or ‘Islamicism’ refers to the religious-political hybrid of ‘Political Islam’ – whether the Wahhabism of Saudi Arabia, al-Qaeda, the Muslim Brotherhood, Hizb ut-Tahrir, the Taliban of Afghanistan, Iranian Shiite revolutionary doctrine, etc.¹⁷ Despite radical differences between its various manifestations, the religion of Islam is used as a political ideology. And while it may be argued that the Islamicist resurgence is not representative of the majority of mainstream, peaceful Muslims, it is still a direct albeit heterodox descendant of the Abrahamic perspective that in all fundamentals is inimical to paganism in both ancient and modern form.¹⁸

The pagan vis-à-vis the Muslim is *kafir*, an infidel. While the Wahhabis and al-Qaeda are content to pre-empt Allah’s judgment and ‘declare *kufir*’ on traditional Muslims, a process known as *takfiri*, it is certainly the pagan who is the definitive *kafir* or *mushrik* and practitioner of *shirk* or polytheism. For Islam, *tawhid* is the monotheist doctrine that certain attributes and prerogatives apply only to God and may not be shared with others (gods or persons) than Allah. This belief in *tawhid* means for the Muslim that only Allah may be worshipped, that he is the only God and that he is not to be anthropomorphized with human attributes. If pagans are the enemy according to the belief in *tawhid*, a more extreme form known as neo-*tawhid* opposes mainstream Muslims themselves as polytheists – including the condemning of intercessory prayers at tombs and shrines of saints as *shirk*. Whether this could mean that pagans might find potential allies within the wider Muslim community, paganism remains intrinsically opposed to the revivalism, moral conservatism and

conquered by assuming ‘the ultimate power, the power to kill’; . . . martyrs [are] on the level of prophets and so [cannot] be questioned ‘although their acts are devastating to us politically’.”

¹⁷ Stanley (2005a).

¹⁸ Stanley (2005b) sees al-Qaeda “[a]s the heirs to a bizarre 1960s and 1970s cult [Takfir wal-Hijra ‘Excommunication and Holy Flight/Emigration’] that condemned mainstream Muslim society to apostasy, they bear about as much relation to the Muslim world as the Charles Manson cult bore to the Western world.” Moreover, he adds, “[t]hey are willing to break traditional Muslim prohibitions in order to infiltrate Muslim and Western societies alike.”

literalism that would attempt to implement Islamic values in all spheres of life. The very controversy that has arisen over the publication of ‘forbidden cartoons’ by the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* and the West’s defense of freedom of speech goes to the heart of pagan rejection of *tawhid* let alone neo-*tawhid*.¹⁹

The question concerns the indefinable role of art. Creative expression in the West is as much about satire and social critique as it may be about beauty. For the secular and pagan West, art cannot survive if it is not free to shock and explore the forbidden. This is of course not its only role. Far from it. But once attempts are launched to restrict or censor art, art itself is doomed. It thrives and breathes the very air of freedom. Art itself encapsulates the right to the freedom of expression which is central to Western identity and vibrancy. This freedom for art and democratic being in the West includes the right, as we discussed earlier, to blasphemy. In art, at least pagan art, nothing in particular is sacred and inviolate because everything is sacred and, consequently, vulnerable. The transcendental wish for something to be so sacrosanct that it cannot be touched is contrary to pagan organics that accepts the dirt, mud and slime along with the flower, bright sky or rainbow. Mockery is an affirmation of pagan freedom. A hurt that involves physical harm or impairment is a no-go for the emancipated pagan, but a hurt that is simply the emotional response to an imagined or moral effrontery is fair game. To be certain, the pagan in today’s world seeks to minimize antagonism and respect the feelings and sensitivities of others. But the line is drawn when this respect becomes saddled with an inability for freedom of expression and artistic creation. Perhaps most of all, pagans celebrate a sense of humor – one that includes both the ability to be ridiculed and the ability to ridicule. Poking fun of oneself and others is part of the matrix of reflective growth and liberated advance. Pagans wish for a world in which children can be children but adults can be adults. They champion a status quo by which the adult need not be coddled as a child but instead as a free and mature agent – one who, if not directly capable of artistic achievement, is at least capable of appreciating it.

Pagans and Muslims will never agree on the nature of godhead. They each hold diametrically different positions. But in a context of flexible maturity and recognition of the common denominators in needs and necessities involved in sharing a planet, the two have the ability to agree to disagree within the parameters of mutual respect. It is the Islamicist terrorists who are completely unacceptable since they want to destroy something that is centrally sacred to the pagan – our world. In a completely amoral world, as Woody Allen expresses in his film *Match Point*, “The innocent are sometimes slain to make way for grander schemes. [One

¹⁹<http://michellemalkin.com/archives/004413.htm> (accessed 3 February 2006 but no longer available). While the Danish cartoon publications, followed by their republication in *France-Soir* and other European newspapers, have caused Muslim dissension across the world, the volatility of the situation cannot be attributed to this particular event but rather to the current polarization between Western and Islamic cultural values. The prophet Mohammed has long been depicted, and often satirically, despite the prohibition against his portrayal. For the imagery of Mohammed since the Middle Ages in both the West and the Muslim world, see http://www.zombietime.com/mohammed_image_archive/ (accessed 3 February 2006).

might become] collateral damage.” But no sectarian, let alone fundamentalist or callous, mind-set can produce a ‘grander scheme’. This last necessitates the general participation of all willing agents on a co-equal basis.

In a sense, everyone seems to want to conquer our world, and through the rampage of history, many have attempted to do so – with varying degrees of success. The extremist Muslims are simply the latest who seek to do so through nefarious means of violence. While our Western world is Christian, it is so in a superficial sense. It is almost as if the West had pre-guessed what was about to emerge out of the Near East and then adopted the same posture as a means of self-defense. Secularism is important to the West because it represents in part a ‘coming home’ – a liberation from an imported, non-indigenous religiosity that in all fundamentals is incommensurate with the essential humanistic spirit of the West. But the completion of secularism is paganism, that is, the development of a mature spiritual intuition that is not dependent on external commandments or world-denying transcendentals or pie-in-the-sky fictions. The pagan-secular axis asks, how many more 911 s are needed, whether natural or man-made, before we begin to wake up and attend to the imperative demands of our world and a non-tribal human community?

While at first it appeared that America was a world at war when the rest of the world was not, increasingly we are more and more a planet divided by countless sectarian identities (right-wing, left-wing, anarchist, ethnic, nationalist) and an all-consuming over-divide between a Christian West and a Muslim East. In the face of corporate-military might, if not madness, however, nobody wins when these divides become belligerent. The East will lose its dignity; the West will lose its freedoms, namely, those embodied in its hard-earned civil rights. A pagan knows that we are now at war – not a war against terrorism so much as a war between cultures, and the onus for a pagan is not only for survival but how, under conditions of war, to express her/his worship. Hopefully the days of caliphates and empires are over or nearing their end, but in assisting this conclusion, a pagan might recognize that the Church is little different than the Taliban when it comes to individual freedoms (e.g., gay rights, smoking pot, advancement of science such as in stem cell research and the like). As we saw earlier in the responses to my question concerning moral worth, honor becomes little different than beauty – it appears differently to each individual: the eye-of-the-beholder situation. But if this is so, in the aesthetic-ethical approach of paganism, there is a mutual ground of respect for the diversity of opinion and even practice of individuals that shatters the residual tendency to demonize the other. It is upon this ground that a pagan will argue for a world of the *summum bonum* – one that is dedicated to locating opportunities for as many as possible and not simply for an elite few, corporate hegemony or the misguided terrorist.

While it is within all of us at some point to understand the grievances of the suffering other, to understand what motivates the terrorist – both nationalist and religious, even to understand the hopelessness and intimidation that leads one to opt for suicide bombing, pagans remain at the forefront in denying that the counter-productive and destructive are evil – satanic agents of the devil or something intrinsically malevolent. Pagans see such behavior as the expression of illness or ignorance or both. Metaphorically speaking, the suicide instigator is as if hexed,

and the register of magic in all its symbolic strength is something that the pagan will seek to draw upon in effecting a transformative cure. Metaphorical magic and, most importantly, education: employing the *spiritus paganus* is to teach as well as demonstrate the joys of life rather than the fears and terrors of death. It is no easy task that a pagan selects in fostering imagination and a *joie de vivre* in which everyone might participate. But within all these efforts, the pagan position is uncompromising on the issue of suicide terrorism. This last is wrong because it unimaginatively violates life itself – life understood, celebrated, affirmed and honored as freedom, comfort, health, pleasure, service, generosity and honor itself.

No matter how oppressed or how much there is something that is wanted, there is a line of decency that a pagan will not cross to get it. He/she lives with that expectation from others. He/she believes that there are always more clever ways to achieve one's ends that do not entail inflicting harm on others wantonly.²⁰ Even when this hope or anticipation is not forthcoming, the indecency of selfishness is no compensation for the selfishness of others. Paganism teaches that all things are given and taken in the final count by nature, and, as the wheel turns, patience is often what is required to wait the cycle out – patience that might be assisted, when the proper opportunity presents itself, with the wisdom of ingenuity.

Death Issues

Abortion

The global controversy that has arisen over the Danish cartooning of the prophet of Islam illustrates the impulse of most religion, at least the relatively inflexible forms, if not all religion, to wish to impose one's own sectarian standards on the world as a whole. Muslims may be enjoined not to depict Mohammed in any form, but to extend that prohibition to non-Muslims is to overstep the borders of constraint to which all religions must be bound in the name of freedom of expression for all peoples. The West relishes in the art of satire, and to prevent parody would be to prevent what amounts to a sacred means to probe toward ever further depths of understanding and consequent growth. But in like manner, Christians are free in most of the world not to engage in birth-control or the practice of abortion. It is only when they seek to extend their own behavior onto what non-Christians are permitted and not permitted to do, that problems begin.

Pagans celebrate the range of diversity of opinion and practice not only among themselves but as these might manifest throughout the world at large. We are not

²⁰Succinctly, even though this was the response enunciated by United Kingdom Prime Minister Tony Blair and British Muslim community leaders (see Sanders 2005): “no cause however moral justifies . . . immoral horror”. In the very least, for a pagan, any cult of martyrdom and carnage sacrifice transgresses the limits of good taste.

the same, and, as such, our values are different from one to the next. Short of a totalitarian world, or one divided into endlessly warring factions by the efforts to produce one, the only sane recourse for humanity is to champion a planet that is cosmopolitan – allowing space and practice for all self-expression. What then is a pagan position on abortion?

The irony here is that the so-called liberal position supports pro-choice but is in general against capital punishment, while the conservative camp is pro-life when it comes to the unborn but for the execution of criminals who have committed murder.²¹ What appear to be inconsistencies on perhaps both sides, however, are not. The pagan along with the secularist and liberal tends as a rule to support the protection of viably conscious life; the Christian right, by contrast, supports the protection of nascent life but is willing to forfeit that of those who have forfeited the right for others.

The Religious Tolerance website defines human life as “*any living entity that has DNA from the species homo sapiens*” and a human person as “[any] form of human life that is also considered a person, and thereby has civil rights, including the right to life.”²² In these definitions, Religious Tolerance employs medical definitions since these are seen as having the widest use. Disagreement arises over what constitutes a human person and whether a zygote, embryo or fetus is to be included. There is further contention over when exactly a human life becomes a human person.

If we attempt to answer these questions from a pagan position, we find that once again the range of choice is determined by the individual herself/himself. In my own talks with community members, I have found that many, if not most, pagans oppose abortion personally as an interference with nature and the sacredness of life itself. But the question invariably for a pagan must be answered individually. As London’s House of the Goddess high priestess, Shan Jeyran, pointed out to me when I had asked her about this, the traditional wise-woman of the forests, skilled in herbal and natural medical knowledge, was the person during the Middle Ages to whom one customarily resorted if and when an induced miscarriage was desired. Jeyran identifies the wise-woman and wise-man position with that of paganism. But even earlier, in classical pagan times, unwanted newborn babies were often left in the woodlands for exposure. In pagan Athens, infanticide was against the law but exposing the baby for it to die was permitted.²³ Abortion was also allowed, though

²¹See Cholbi (2004): Section 3.2 (“The Deontological Argument [for Suicide] from the Sanctity of Life”) at <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/suicide/> (accessed 18 February 2006). See also Borger (2005) who considers that, before the Terri Schiavo case, “the sides in America’s culture wars were largely played out in black and white: for or against capital punishment, for or against abortion.” The Schiavo debate threw America’s former moral certitude deeply into question. Still, Borger asks, “How can a true ‘pro-life’ politician . . . also support the death penalty?” and she quotes Senator Sam Brownback (Kansas), “If we’re trying to establish a culture of life, it’s difficult to have the state sponsoring executions.”

²²Robinson (1996–2014) – italics in original.

²³The child was usually placed in a clay pot and sometimes was rescued by a childless woman or by an entrepreneur who brought the foundling up as a slave (Connolly and Dodge 2001:32).

only with the consent of the father, and Aristotle considered that it should not take place after the fetus had begun to develop life and feeling.²⁴

In fact, Rodney Stark attributes the phenomenal success of nascent Christianity to its stringent opposition to both abortion and infanticide – allowing a rapid rise in the numbers of female Christians since women otherwise frequently died during abortion procedures and female babies were the ones that were exposed.²⁵ Christianity became in this way the religion that was then passed from the mother to her children, i.e., for all its allegedly patriarchal bias, it was a religion that initially grew among, and owes its transmission primarily to, women. Ironically, however, the bible has little to say about the issue of abortion. Its mention occurs only in the Old Testament, and then in connection with property rights rather than with any notion of the sanctity of life.²⁶ In fact, it is the *Didache* or “The Teaching of the Apostles,” a non-canonical document of the early Christian community, where the express prohibition first occurs: “. . . thou shalt not murder a child by abortion nor kill them when born, . . .”²⁷

The over all pagan position is radically different from that of the Roman Catholic Church and conservative Evangelical Protestants. If pagans were to follow the practices of their classical predecessors, exposure if not also infanticide, would be an ethically permissible action.²⁸ The sacredness of life in pagan estimation arguably ultimately hinges on the viability of life, of conscious life, rather than on any alleged intrinsic sanctity to the living organism per se. It is for this reason that pagans as a rule oppose capital punishment but endorse pro-choice. The burden of decision lies with the parents and not with the state. In its fullest implication, a pagan would allow the parent the right to choose over the life of the newborn child for whatever reason. Without doubt, there are few pagan parents that would ever want to take the life of their child, but the sanctity of human freedom grants that right without state interference; it is the parent or parents’ right alone to decide. The neonate is totally dependent on its care-giver and, as such, is not yet at a stage of viable life. It cannot exist on its own. For a pagan, the parent must have first choice as the biological care-giver – even over the state or anyone other that might wish by proxy to take the

²⁴Aristotle, *Politics* 7.16. Greek philosophical thought held that the male embryo developed life and sensation not until after forty days from the time of conception; female embryos, being considered slower, developed only after eighty days. See “Abortion in ancient history” (BBC u.d.): http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/ethics/abortion/legal_history1.shtml (accessed 11 February 2006) – now http://www.bbc.co.uk/ethics/abortion/legal/history_1.shtml (accessed 15 June 2015).

²⁵Stark (1996).

²⁶E.g., Exodus 21:22–3, Leviticus 27:6, Numbers 5:12–31. See also Numbers 3:15. The modern Jewish understanding is that the fetus is pre-human and only becomes fully human with the first breath of the child as it emerges from the birth canal.

²⁷*Didache* 2.2. See Robinson (1996–2014).

²⁸For instance, John Harris, a member of Britain’s Human Genetics Commission and bioethics professor at Manchester University, does “not see any moral difference in aborting a fully grown unborn baby at 40 weeks and committing infanticide. . . . He did not believe there was any ‘moral change’ that occurred during the journey down the birth canal” (Rogers 2004).

responsibility of nurturing the child to independence. The burden of pagan freedom must give the decision to the parent and respect the choices made by the parent however contrary and repugnant to one's own feelings and wishes they might be.

Hopefully, infanticide and exposure will not occur. They are no longer fashionable by today's standards, and they are no longer necessary in the world of technological wherewithal that we now have. But for paganism, pro-life must yield to pro-choice, if the notion of conscious human freedom is to have full validity.²⁹ The decision is to be personal rather than one of legal enforcement. With the intrusion of this last, the intrinsic sacredness of liberty is not only impaired, it is destroyed. Nevertheless, if the abortive or infanticide act were to occur, it would have to be free of gratuitous torture and as free from inflicting pain as possible. The sacredness of life entails the non-infliction of needless suffering. The newborn itself is not harmed or reduced against its will because there is yet no viably *conscious* will that has evolved. But that being said, the consequent leeway becomes short, for once there is a feasible or reasonable condition of cognizance, the act becomes one of murder.

Consequently, paganism escapes the whole argument over whether human personhood begins with conception, fetal viability, with 'quickening' (independent neurological activity that develops in the fifth or sixth month of pregnancy) or with birth itself. Whether pagans resort to any of these personally or not, a pagan sense of freedom permits the use of contraception, intra-uterine devices (IUDs), abortifacients, surgical abortion, partial birth abortion,³⁰ early infanticide or exposure. This does not preclude guilt being felt as the result of any of these since pagans place extreme value on the sanctity of life and the potentiality of human personhood, and the acts themselves may be considered horrible. Abandonment of a newborn is itself a difficult but common-enough occurrence throughout the world – one that occurs for a whole variety of unfortunate reasons, but in the extreme nuance of ethical decisions, it is not for most pagans an immoral act albeit an unnecessary and deeply sad one.³¹

If a father has continued rights – legal or otherwise – in today's world, the choice over elective abortion for contemporary Western pagans is a decision that

²⁹ According to bioethicist Bill Allen, "having awareness is an essential criterion for personhood" (Leo 2005). Other criteria include "rationality, the capacity to experience desire, or the ability to value's one's own existence," but Leo in connection with awareness alone contends that "Fetuses, babies, and Alzheimer's patients are only minimally aware and might not fit this definition of personhood" (ibid.) Pagans are likely to agree.

³⁰ Partial birth abortion (PBA) is the colloquial expression for 'dilation and extraction' procedures (D&X, Intact D&X and intrauterine cranial decompression). It is employed when a fetus is 5 months or more.

³¹ The Romans presumably had a ritual custom in which the mother placed the newborn child before the threshold of the home. If the father believed the child to be his, he brought it inside, but if for some reason he did not want the newborn, the baby was left on the street. Christians were the ones who were alleged to have 'scooped' up these unwanted children to raise them in their own faith.

belongs to the informed woman herself – perhaps with the guiding assistance of others including her partner, family, friends, physicians and/or spiritual advisers. Considering the responsibilities and long-term commitment that are involved with parenthood, there is a sacred right that each woman has and must have to make the decisions that concern her own body and her future. No one can object to spontaneous abortions or natural miscarriages,³² and, where abortions are allowed by the state or community, the reasons are usually for instances of rape, incest, extreme youth of the mother, danger for the health or life of the mother, or because of deformity and non-viability of the fetus. But paganism extends this further. There is for paganism an insistence upon the fundamental freedom of individual choice in reproductive matters. This includes the right to abortion for convenience and, even, the often culturally induced bias toward sex-selective abortion.³³ The sacredness of child-rearing is one that a pagan endorses as a voluntary and willfully undertaken pursuit. As much as is possible, holy human personhood and viable conscious development are to be the chosen consequences of freedom – ones that can be sustained only under the conditions of a freely wanted and freely given emotional bonding and love.³⁴

The ethical questions that arise through the pro-choice/pro-life debate, however, connect further to the related issues of stem-cell research, genetic engineering, human cloning and to any production of what have become known as ‘designer babies’. Deane-Drummond refers to the possibility of an “unfortunate conflation between abortion, stem cell research, therapeutic cloning and embryo research,”³⁵ but these do in a sense overlap and interrelate. If, in a worst case scenario, infanticide were to be permitted, where is the line to be drawn between the parent(s)’s choice over the survival of the child and the use of neonates for harvesting stem cells to be used for medical benefit? But even short of terminating the life of a new-born, the ethical questions concerning both asexual reproduction and therapeutic cloning remain. The extraction of stem cells from human embryos that have been raised for

³²Driscoll and Rogers (2004:2): In Britain, “Spontaneous abortion is known to be common and many embryos are lost before a woman even realises she is pregnant. Anything up to 80 % of fertilised eggs are lost naturally during the first two weeks of pregnancy.”

³³Ibid.: recognizing that the approximately 185,000 abortions that occur in the United Kingdom each year are simply abortion on demand, the legal situation still is that “two doctors must attest to the mental stress that a women [*sic.*] will suffer if the pregnancy is to continue. But nobody seems to have come across a case where a woman was refused an abortion, other than the few – 100 or so a year at the British Pregnancy Advisory Service, for instance – who are turned away because they are too late.”

³⁴See further Harrow (u.d.)

³⁵Deane-Drummond (2004:134n64).

that purpose horrifies most people, even if these cells can transform into other cell-types that might be used for the treatment of illness or bodily impairment. There is even more objection to the notion of reproductive cloning or the production of designer babies.³⁶

But without a belief in an all-creating, omniscient and omnipotent God, pagans are not constrained by arguments that humans ‘should not play God’.³⁷ Pagan constraint rests instead largely on the possibility of unintended consequences from human, let alone animal, cloning – much in the same way that the production of genetically modified (GM) crops and foods has been undertaken hastily and without properly controlled testing concerning both environmental impact and harmful results in terms of health. Fears concerning cloning are often consequential concerns rather than strictly ethical ones: producing changes in population demographics, confusing family relationships and genealogy, producing an inferior category of person, eliminating personal uniqueness, reducing individuality and the like. The real objection is one of eugenics, namely, attempting to improve the human race through the methods of controlled selective breeding, and a pagan objection is principally one against the implicit lack of respect for human dignity that would appear to be part of a mechanistic and non-organic engineering effort.

The difficulty for the pagan arises when reproductive and therapeutic cloning is held to be unnatural or even anti-natural. We are then back with the question of what is nature and, perhaps more important, to what degree must we as humans be *confined or constrained* by nature? If the latent cosmic drive is to manifest unbridled volition, humanity’s endless quest for greater freedom cannot be viewed as inimical to nature but as the ultimate product of nature. The onus in this realization, however, is in proper, judicious and intrinsically respectful management – avoiding unwise and careless experimentation and foolish-to-detrimental consequences. If this is a form of speciesism, it is – and must be – a humanistic/humanitarian

³⁶Taylor (2003:30) refers to the ‘slippery slope’ arguments used to argue against stem cell research: involving first the willful taking of human life but eventually to the harvesting of organs from defective fetuses, next handicapped infants, “and then, who knows.” He concludes that “by that kind of reasoning we should not allow even the occasional use of alcohol, or divorce, or homosexual unions, or indeed, anything to which someone has an aversion.” For more innovative and non-embryonic ways of securing stem cells, see, e.g., <http://www.bbc.com/news/health-28106253>, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/1842061.stm> and http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/in_depth/sci_tech/2001/san_francisco/1177766.stm (accessed 28 July 2014).

³⁷As Cahill (2005:2) points out, “Religious traditions, themes, and symbols expressing an experience of or belief in a transcendent being or power and the nature of human life in relation to the transcendent do not offer many specific guidelines for the development of genetic research or its use.” There is a noticeable silence, in fact, from within the various traditions of the world’s major religions concerning bioethical research issues and their application. Cahill adds, however, that religions “create a context of values, dispositions, and practices within which specific ethical questions can be taken up.” This is no less true for paganism despite the non-transcendent bias of the pagan context as well as Cahill’s assumption that the transcendent framework is “key” to any religious perspective.

speciesism: one that eschews gratuitous infliction of pain and suffering and, where these are unavoidable, minimizes them to the best of the abilities inherent in the circumstances, or, if not possible, considers dropping the pursuit and/or finding other possibilities to the goal that is sought. But a pagan's defense of speciesism as a human priority rests ultimately on the view that sees humanity simply as a vehicle, rather than the end itself, of cosmic evolution. Whatever might assist that evolution to the best of our current state of knowledge along with a judicious use of risk is to be permitted.

Cloning and cloning techniques are means to eliminate a range of genetic possibilities such as Huntington's disease, Parkinson's disease, cystic fibrosis, Down's syndrome, muscular dystrophy, Tay Sachs disease, and other degenerative illnesses or disorders.³⁸ Embryo selection and gene transplant are also employed to produce umbilical cells that may be used to treat an ill sibling. The dangers in these processes are seen by pagans in the possibility of transforming human life into a commodity and/or eugenically creating designer babies. Once again, however, these concerns are possible consequences of the actions and not questioning the ethics of the procedures themselves. For a pagan, the ethical control on all the negative possibilities rests with the virtue-value of honor – respecting the intrinsic natural aesthetic within the non-commodifying bounds of dignity. People are not simply products to be used for purposes of uncontrolled experimentation. Genetic engineering, manipulation and selection are viable means to help improve life, and as pursuits for both health and human dignity, pagans can accept them as ethical pursuits. Experimentation in stem cell research and human cloning are to be condoned in the name of the integral sacredness of liberty.³⁹ The residual fear of science as a privately produced Frankenstein monster, unleashing unexpected and uncontrollable horrors, is to be counterbalanced for a pagan when we remember

³⁸Referring to George W. Bush, former New York governor, Mario Cuomo (2004), asked, "Aren't the people of this nation who do not share the president's religious views on what is 'sacred' entitled to reasons for denying the benefits of stem cells that are based on science and not just his personal religious commitments?" In calling for a critical "conversation" about values, Cuomo asserted: "The president now has the opportunity . . . to lead the nation in a discussion concerning abortion and embryonic stem cells, beginning with the answers to some of the critical underlying questions" (http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/opinion/editorials/2004-12-05-values-cuomo_x.htm). Robert Lechler (2005:13) acknowledges the ethical issue involved with the use of stem cells for tissue replacement and repair which, beside assisting to overcome the problems and shortfall of organ donation, might become applicable to "defects in the brain that cause debilitating conditions such as Alzheimer's, Parkinson's and Huntington's diseases, to replacement of insulin-secreting cells as a cure for diabetes, to cartilage and bone repair for worn-out joints, and retinal repair for a form of eye degeneration that affects many people as they age." He acknowledges further that "a relatively advanced and regulatory structure in the UK . . . allows the generation of human embryonic stem cells and their use for research purposes."

³⁹See further, "The Ethics of Biotechnology" and "The Ethics of Cloning" in Deane-Drummond (2004:86–110, 111–135).

that the “social nature of science compels us to serve the promotion of the human person within a just society.”⁴⁰ Science itself may be freedom, responsibility and a tool for global justice.⁴¹

The ethics of cloning and genetic manipulation is undoubtedly closely connected with the ethics of biotechnology and, especially, animal ethics. The cloning of animals, the creation of hybrids or animal-human chimeras are again contentious issues, but if these are condemned outright as anti-natural, we must all remember the role that husbandry has played in civilized advance with the domestication of kine, the chicken, the horse, sheep, pig and even the dog and cat. Selective breeding has played an important part with all these. The moral issue must always concern the infliction of suffering and the questioning of its necessity – including, in the case of humans, the creation of a class of people (i.e., clones) who might suffer from being considered inferior or second-class citizens. In the end, invasive techniques are, according to Stephen Clark, unethical if they are performed merely for amusement, sentimentality, commercial reasons or the aggrandizement of personal reputation.⁴²

Capital Punishment

But if the idea of abortion is contentious and highly disputed within society in general, on the other end of the life-scale, there is the question of capital punishment and, especially for the pagan, its necessity and whether it does not constitute the infliction of excessive suffering and pain. For many contemporary Western pagans, the issue is deemed particularly sensitive because of identity or affinity with the victims of the medieval witch burnings. While these last resulted almost invariably from trumped up charges that were motivated by wishes for enforcing religious conformity, they were doubtlessly something that got significantly out of hand as the craze to scapegoat swept Europe and allowed people to over-indulge their worst fantasies and desires for persecution of the defenseless.

The death penalty is the punishment today meted out to convicted felons for a capital offense. This last usually applies to murder, espionage and treason, though formerly – and in some places still – it has been a means to eliminate political dissent. Militaries throughout the world have traditionally considered cowardice, desertion, looting, insubordination and mutiny as capital crimes. There are many countries that include drug-trafficking as a capital offense (e.g., China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, etc.), whereas China will in addition use the death

⁴⁰Barth Maria Knoppers in Cahill (2005:162).

⁴¹Ibid. p. 163.

⁴²Clark, “Thinking about Technology: toward a theory of just experimentation” in Deane-Drummond et al. (2002:165–77) – see page 175. The major problem in genetic manipulation and reproductive cloning might be their costly availability to only the super rich rather than to humanity in general.

penalty for human traffickers as well as people convicted of serious cases of corruption. Muslim nations frequently resort to capital punishment for adultery and sodomy. But as our world continues to evolve in humanitarian terms, it is virtually only in Asian and African democracies as well as the United States of America that the death penalty has been retained, whereas in most democratic nations of Latin America and Europe it has been abolished.⁴³ The arguments for its retention as a major deterrent to crime have not been substantiated. Other forms of punishment have been found to have been equally as effective – nowadays, imprisonment; formerly, either exile or enslavement.

As the blood feud grew out of earlier situations in which there were no social curbs on violence and its employment against others, so have the various forms of state-sponsored justice grown out of the primitive vendetta. The blood feud could be settled through direct combat such as the duel, or through such substitutions as settlements with ‘blood money’ payments or transfers of property, or the offering of animal blood for human blood. In ancient pagan religions, human sacrifice was often conceived as a blood payment to the gods⁴⁴ – such as practiced by the Celts, Aztecs and Incas. Scandinavians considered hanging as an offering to Odin; bog drowning, to Nerthus or other chthonic deities. Public executions were understood to be exemplary warnings to others – signaling what was likely in the case of social transgression. But there was also an entertainment value attached to the witnessing of suffering – something for which the Romans became among the most notorious.

Capital punishment has, over the years, been meted out for a range of offenses – including minor crimes. In Athens, Draco’s draconian laws became known for their excessiveness in relation to the seriousness of the crime committed – virtually all crimes were punishable by death. These came to be reformed by the archon Solon (638–558 bce) whose legal legacy included more lenient punishments characterized by a humane quality, but, by contrast, the Old Testament prescribes the death penalty for the crimes of kidnapping, atheism, heresy, Sabbath violation, blasphemy, practice of magic, homosexuality and adultery. Present-day Dominionists or Christian Reconstructionists wish to restore Pentateuchal law with the use of stoning or burning at the stake for these same activities. In the Middle Ages, heretics, atheists, homosexuals and witches were routinely burned alive.

The *lex talionis* or law of retaliation seeks to match the punishment to the crime. It first appears in the Code of Hammurabi (c. 1700 bce)⁴⁵ but is known in the West through the “life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe” statement in

⁴³On 20 April 2006, the BBC World Service reported an Amnesty International claim that currently there are approximately 200,000 people worldwide on deathwatch. The country signaled out as having the highest rate of executions was China – followed by Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United States.

⁴⁴The notion of the Christian crucifixion grows out of this pagan substratum of substitutional atonement offering to the godhead.

⁴⁵See, for example, Singer (1994:76f).

the Old Testament defining the range of permissible revenge.⁴⁶ In essence, the *lex talionis* through the Code, Exodus and the legislation of Solon represents a civilized advance concerning sanctioned forms of retribution and restricts the death penalty as the consequence for murder alone.⁴⁷

The next real advance has to do the elimination of needless suffering in the distribution of punishment. Crucifixion, being burned alive, slow hanging, beheading – especially ineffectual beheading, being drawn and quartered, stoning, etc. have come in time to be replaced by the guillotine, electric chair, gas chamber and lethal injection. This tendency toward more humane forms of execution is based on the premise that seeks to avoid extraneous suffering out of respect for life *sui generis*. In time, however, the death penalty itself – as well as the mental cruelty of isolation and uncertainty for prisoners consigned to death row – has come to be considered as the infliction of cruel, unusual and unnecessary pain. The Italian Cesare Beccaria led the way in the late eighteenth century toward modern abolitionist efforts.⁴⁸

In general, we find the retention of the death penalty chiefly among poor, undemocratic and authoritarian states. Abolitionary sympathies have prevailed in the southern half of the Western Hemisphere thanks largely to the progressive tradition of Roman Catholicism in Latin America. The situation in the United States, however, is colored by an ongoing ‘culture war’ in that nation. A Harris poll of 2004 indicated that 69 % of Americans continued to favor use of the death penalty; with 22 % who are against, though by 2014, a February Pew Poll indicated that only 18 % strongly favor the death penalty, while 37 % oppose.⁴⁹

The major religions tend to take an unambiguous stance on whether or not the death penalty is permissible. While cruelty, suffering and the witnessing of death were once forms of entertainment that formed part of the hedonistic pastimes for ancient Romans, paganism is a congeries of evolving spiritualities that are now largely at the forefront of contemporary abolitionist efforts. Most pagans today would agree that capital punishment is an ineffective deterrent for crime reduction. The risk of possible judicial miscarriages alone is such that employing the death

⁴⁶Exodus 21:23–5.

⁴⁷For example, in eighteenth century Britain, stealing an animal as well as cutting down a tree without permission from its owner were both crimes punishable by death. See <http://deathpenaltycurriculum.org/student/c/about/history/history.PDF> – the Michigan State University and Death Penalty Information Center (2014 – accessed 29 February 2014). Between 1823 and 1837, the number of crimes that were punishable by death were reduced from the 222 they had reached in the eighteenth century to just over 100.

⁴⁸Beccaria published *Dei Delitti e Delle Pene* (‘On Crimes and Punishments’) in 1764. Tuscany (1786), the American state of Michigan (1847), the Roman Republic (1849) and Portugal (1867) – apart for a brief period in China (747–759) – were the first to ban capital punishment constitutionally.

⁴⁹Harris Poll (2004): www.prodeathpenalty.com/news.htm; Death Penalty Information Center (2014): <http://deathpenaltyinfo.org/national-pollsand-studies#Pew2014> (accessed 6 April 2014). On the European outrage over the US execution of Troy Davis, see Sayre (2011).

penalty becomes unwarranted for any orientation that values freedom and integrity of being.⁵⁰ The intrinsic right to conscious life, once that consciousness has viably emerged, prohibits employment of capital punishment in contemporary pagan ways of ethical thinking. To be sure, there are those who would agree that by willfully taking the life of another, one forfeits his/her own right to life. But most pagans will agree with Nietzsche that the desire for revenge is something beneath the aspiring standards of human dignity. Consequently, the execution of someone like Stanley Tookie Williams III on the 13th of December, 2005 would be deemed unnecessary. There is little to be gained through the execution of a criminal. The life or lives of his victims cannot be regained, and, while safely behind bars, Williams' repentance and anti-gang activism were socially beneficial. Capital punishment as viewed by a pagan ethos is little more than a cheap and belittling act of revenge and retaliation.

If anything, the choice of death ought to be left to the criminal himself. With someone like Gary Gilmore who, in 1977, asked to be executed rather than to remain incarcerated for life, there is at least the exercise of freedom for a person even if that same person had not allowed the liberty of life for others. With Gilmore's execution, the state was relieved from the financial burden of maintaining a life sentence. But at the same time, the state or society did not have to carry the miasma of itself inflicting cruel punishment or stooping merely to an act of revenge. The choice of life and/or death, for a pagan, is to be left to the conscious adult – both criminal and non-criminal alike.

Euthanasia

This last point applies equally to the terminally ill and the question of euthanasia or assisted suicide.⁵¹ The right to death is part of what a pagan considers intrinsic liberty. It belongs to the state of freedom that for a pagan is among the most sacred of all things sacred. In fact, according to Religious Tolerance.org, the three central ethical controversies in today's world are whether to give gays and lesbians the choice to marry, whether to allow women the latitude to choose an

⁵⁰Certainly any such efforts to empty the death row of a prison such as that of San Quentin in California because of agitation by property developers who wish to demolish the prison and build leisure homes on the site would be something that would be roundly condemned by ethically minded persons of all faiths. On the 21st of February 2006, the scheduled execution of Michael Morales was cancelled because no physician or nurse was willing to attend – a requirement in case of problems with lethal injection. See http://www.deathpenalty.org/pdf_files/MichaelMorales.pdf – accessed 23 February 2006; no longer available. The execution of Dennis McGuire in the state of Ohio on the 16th of January 2014 with a combination of previously untested lethal injection drugs was controversially “prolonged”: Strauss (2014). For the Joseph Wood case, see *BBC News* (2014).

⁵¹“In euthanasia, the doctor actively ends the patient's life, whereas in assisted suicide they [*sic.*] provide the information or means for patients to do it themselves” (Ellis 2005:5).

abortion, and whether to give people access to assistance in dying.⁵² Euthanasia and physician assisted suicide relate to the taking of one's life in general. The Classical pagan world had a double response to acts of suicide. On the one hand, "There was no social prohibition in the ancient world against abortion, suicide, or capital punishment."⁵³ For instance, Romans considered suicide to be an acceptable response to misfortune. On the other hand, there was what would almost amount to a pagan superstition, namely, that suicide produced a *lemure* or restless state of the soul. Epicureans and Stoics, although in general against suicide, accepted it as an alternative to unendurable pain.

The Platonic view of suicide is negative in which it is seen as a violation of the intrinsic harmony between the soul and the body and amounts to enforcing the separation of the former from the latter. This attitude is itself a development of the Orphic/Pythagorean or, more broadly, gnostic consideration that views mortal life as a punishment that must not be avoided.⁵⁴ It is this position that became adopted by the Christian Church. Ironically, in the bible there are seven suicides (along with one attempted suicide) that are mentioned in either morally neutral terms or as being appropriate.⁵⁵

Although Aristotle opposed suicide as contrary to the natural purpose of human life,⁵⁶ the classical world in general was either more ambivalent or even more accepting. For instance, Pliny the Elder⁵⁷ held that the possibility of taking one's own life against all the hardships of life is nature's supreme gift to us – something that even the gods do not possess. Seneca, who himself was obliged to take his life, saw liberty in the precipice, the sea, at the bottom of a well, from the branches of a tree or through any vein of the body. Each provides an escape from servitude and woe if the requirement of courage and strength is not too great an obstacle.⁵⁸ And Cicero, writing on the deaths of Socrates and Cato, argues that it is only when one's

⁵²Robinson (1997–2010). According to Cuomo (2004), post-election analysts name the chief American divisive issues as "especially, those concerning abortion, stem cells and gay marriage."

⁵³Campbell (2000–2002).

⁵⁴<http://www.lamp.ac.uk/~noy/death9.htm> (accessed 18 February 2006; no longer available). See also, Plato, *Phaedo* 61b-62c as well as *Laws* 9.854a3-5 & 873c-d.

⁵⁵Bible.org (2013). The ASBS site (<http://dumkopf.stormpages.com/>) suggests that the Christian condemnation of suicide was part of the Church's response to the heretical sect of Donatists in the fourth century who held to a militant separation of church and state that encouraged martyrdom. Since Donatism was founded and flourished principally in North Africa until the Islamic conquest of the region, "there has been some speculation that Donatist beliefs may have influenced that new religion" (Korngold 2006:xvi). The Christian bias against suicide is essentially the result of influences from Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas.

⁵⁶Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 5.11.1138a5-14.

⁵⁷*Natural History* 2.27.

⁵⁸Seneca, *De Ira* 3.15.4. See also Seneca's *Letter* 70.14-16, 20, 23 & 26 (e.g., 15: "If you enjoy life, live. If not, you can return to the place you came from.") In Seneca's estimation, self-death is better than being forced to kill another. It provides release from torment and humiliation.

inner god gives permission that one may pass with joy from darkness to light.⁵⁹ Romans lauded Lucretia as an example of a virtuous woman who, having been raped by Sextius Tarquinius, committed suicide out of her sense of shame and honor.⁶⁰

The issue at hand for today's world, however, is no longer suicide per se.⁶¹ For instance, "Throughout North America, committing suicide or attempting to commit suicide is no longer a criminal offense."⁶² But with the exception of the state of Oregon, to assist someone else to take his or her own life is a violation of the law. This last may be 'physician assisted suicide' (PAS) but is not restricted to this alone. Legality of course is a separate topic than the ethical issue itself and lies beyond the scope of the present work. Instead our focus is on euthanasia, both passive and active, rather than either suicide or the law, and whether it is ethical to help another person end or hasten the end of that person's life.

Passive euthanasia includes removing life support equipment, stopping medical procedures and medications, ending the provisioning of food and water, not providing cardio-pulmonary resuscitation or increasing the dosage of morphine ostensibly to ease pain but in reality to suppress respiration. The net result of any of these procedures for someone who is terminally ill or in a persistent vegetative state is to allow natural death to occur sooner than is otherwise likely to be the case. Active euthanasia, by contrast, is to cause death through direct intervention usually in response to a person's request – such as the mercy killing performed by Dr. Jack Kevorkian through injection to Thomas Youk, a 52 year-old person with Lou Gehrig's Disease. Less active assistance is voluntary passive euthanasia (VPE) or physician assisted suicide in which a lethal prescription is given to the patient for a self-administered means to committing suicide. Kevorkian would provide terminally ill people with carbon monoxide and face masks for their self-directed suicide or hook people to machines that allowed measured doses of requisite medications but required the person to initiate the sequence.

⁵⁹Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 1.30.74. See further 1.34.84. Aelian (3.37) relates the Ceans' custom for the old and useless to assemble and drink hemlock so as no longer to be a burden.

⁶⁰Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Deeds and Sayings* 6.1.1. For the elite view of suicide and the evolution of Classical ideas and ethical attitudes toward self-killing (Cicero, Lucretius, the Epicureans, Virgil, Ovid, Seneca, Lucan and Petronius), see Hill (2004) and Griffin (1986).

⁶¹Concerning pagan views on suicide today, for instance, Starhawk, NightMare et al. (1997:251) claim that "Pagan ethics do not tell us exactly what and what not to do. They are situational in principle. Our core ethical statement, our 'golden rule', is the Wiccan Rede: 'An it harm none, do what you will'. While committed to an interpersonal ethic of harmlessness, we resist any arbitrary restriction on personal autonomy. Pagans are free to do anything they want, including end their lives, unless it is clear that doing so will harm others." But they also add that there could be some purpose in keeping alive "even in a damaged and hurting body. Although Pagans do not value suffering for its own sake, many of us are committed to being 'willing to suffer to learn'" (p. 255). But see also Deborah Oak Cooper's "Suicide: One Witch's Perspective" (pp 262–268).

⁶²Robinson (1997–2010).

Involuntary euthanasia refers to the killing of someone who has not explicitly requested the death – usually a person who is in a persistent vegetative state.⁶³ Among the more notorious instances of this last was that of Terri Schindler Schiavo in the American state of Florida who, following nearly 15 years of being in a brain-damaged comatose state and with little or no likelihood of reversibility, had her gastric feeding tube removed in 2005 for the third and last time. The political and media circus that surrounded this unfortunate situation exemplified the auxiliary difficulties of an already inherently problematic and unclear ethical quagmire in which the rival claims and conflicting emotional ties of family members, let alone church and state, played throughout the nation and across the world. This situation typified the clash between pro-life and right-to-die positions. Because Mrs. Schiavo had not signed a living will, her expressed wish not to be kept on life support in case of irreversible coma was conveyed through her husband and was contrary to the strictures of her Roman Catholic faith.⁶⁴ The Schindlers contended that the husband, Michael Schiavo, had conflicting interests by having established a relationship and family with another woman since the initial cardiac arrest of his wife.⁶⁵

In the wake of the Terri Schiavo case, the Terri Schindler Schiavo Foundation has been established to protect the disabled, elderly and vulnerable against the alleged menaces of “care rationing, euthanasia and medical killing.”⁶⁶ Opposition to euthanasia in general comes from the same organizations that oppose access to abortion, from medical groups who see their profession as involving the prolongation of life and not its ending, and from people who fear euthanasia as the first step toward a society that will eliminate the disabled against their will, i.e., physician initiated murder rather than physician assisted suicide.⁶⁷

Needless to say, involuntary euthanasia is a special and more ambiguous instance of euthanasia in general in which the sufferer or terminally ill person requests assistance in ending his/her life or simply self-initiates the process as voluntary

⁶³For an instance of Dutch euthanasia in a severe dementia case, see DutchNews.nl. (2011).

⁶⁴John Leo (2005), in fact, questions whether “Michael Schiavo’s long-delayed recollection of Terri’s wish to die, supported only by hearsay from Michael’s brother and a sister-in-law, met the standard for ‘clear and convincing evidence’ of consent.”

⁶⁵Leo (2005) goes further in questioning the neutrality involved with this case and states: “Non-intervention is morally suspect when there is strong reason to wonder whether the decision-maker in the family has the helpless person’s best interests at heart.” Among the various websites devoted to this case, for a presentation of issues and history, see Lynne (2005).

⁶⁶<http://www.terrisfight.org/> (accessed 19 February 2006); now renamed Terri Schiavo Life & Hope Network (accessed 29 July 2014).

⁶⁷Robinson (1997–2010). See also for physician-assisted suicide, <http://depts.washington.edu/bioethx/topics/pas.html> (accessed 17 February 2006) as well as the Longwood University site <http://www.longwood.edu/library/suic.htm> (formerly accessed 19 February 2006). For the Swiss charity Dignitas whose motto is “Live with dignity, die with dignity,” see “Dignitas: Swiss suicide helpers” (BBC News 2003): <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/health/2948665.stm>, and for the Dutch hospice by the same name: <http://www.hospicehoorn.nl/> (both accessed 23 February 2006).

suicide.⁶⁸ A pagan position in situations like that of Terri Schiavo might recognize the right of decision being granted to one's partner through the sanctity of marriage. The marital vow is in part the bequeathing of decision-making powers to the spouse in the unlikely possibility of the incapacity to make or express choice by one of the partners. The spouse takes precedent over the objections, if any, of family and friends. This is why, short of signing a living will, marriage is an important legal and ethical undertaking – whether straight or gay, heterosexual or homosexual, monogamous or even polygamous/polyandrous.⁶⁹

In general, euthanasia is opposed by conservative religious affiliations as sinful and contrary to the will and gift of life from God. It is also seen as lacking trust in God's promise not to promote suffering that cannot be handled by humans. Although pagans do not accept the Judeo-Christian understanding of God, they do value the sanctity of life. Where they differ from the Christian train of thought, however, is by placing the *quality* of life over that of life per se. Apart from the religious arguments, the opposition to PAS is that there is too great a potential for abuse – that “Burdened family members and health care providers may encourage [the] option of assisted death.”⁷⁰ Elderly people with dementia, the mentally ill and physically handicapped may be intimidated into a terminal course of action against their wishes.

This last becomes a legal issue, namely, that if PAS were to be allowed by the state, there would need to be safeguards against its misuse. On the ethical side, for pagans and others, euthanasia of any sort would have to be a voluntary undertaking or request – one based on the intrinsic dignity of the person and the supreme sanctity of choice. In other words, ethically speaking, the situation is clearer and the burden of responsibility for the prevention of unethical misuse lies with the laws of the land. Initiative must be with the dying person alone.

⁶⁸For a pagan prayer “For One Assisting Someone to Die,” see Starhawk, NightMare et al. (1997:255f).

⁶⁹The adoptive parents of unmarried Karen Anne Quinlan were originally denied the right to turn off their daughter's life-sustaining respirator by a Morris County, New Jersey court in 1975. The court reversed its decision the following year, but even with the respirator removed, Quinlan continued to live and only succumbed to pneumonia in 1985. Following an auto accident which left the 25 year-old Nancy Cruzan in a permanent vegetative state in 1983, her parents were finally granted the right to remove their daughter's feeding tube in 1990 by the State of Missouri after previously receiving a negative ruling by the US Supreme Court. In both the Quinlan and Cruzan cases, no spouse existed and the legal guardianship of the parents was not in doubt. Even had there been a spouse, there is little likelihood that either case would have followed a substantially different trajectory. Patricia Devin (“The Releaser,” Starhawk, NightMare et al. 1997:256–62) discusses some of the emotional nuance involved with ending life support and supplies both “A Ritual for Cutting the Cord” and “A Ritual for Healing After Cutting the Cord.”

⁷⁰University of Washington School of Medicine (1998). Or Harries (2011).

Paganism frames the right-to-die issue in terms of quality of life and dignity.⁷¹ Apart from intractable pain, which in most cases can be alleviated through medications, suffering is a broader issue and relates to intolerable conditions of illness and impairment such as one encounters in advanced and terminal stages of Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS or Lou Gehrig's Disease), Huntington's Disease, Multiple Sclerosis, AIDS and Alzheimer's among others. If and when a person decides he/she wishes to die but is too debilitated to perform the act without assistance, the denial of PAS or physician assisted suicide amounts to a form of discrimination in comparison to a healthy or healthier person's legal right to end his or her life. For a pagan, the issue is ultimately about the virtue-value of freedom – one that includes empowering an individual to have control over his/her own body. Discrimination that results from mental or physical limitation means that some people do not have the same freedoms and suicide options as do able-bodied persons. The state's refusal to allow assisted forms of euthanasia means that religious conservatives have imposed their personal beliefs to which they are themselves entitled upon pagans, religious liberals, humanists, atheists, agnostics and so forth. Pagans in particular reject the idea that suffering is intrinsically necessary for divine learning or purification.

Consequently, passive and active euthanasia or physician assisted suicide that respects the wishes of the person concerned falls under the wider remit of suicide itself. Indeed, euthanasia raises the ethical issue of external intervention and involvement that may be absent with suicide in general, but for pagans intentional suicide and the voluntary asking for PAS are part of the freedom that is cherished in paganism for making life valuable. As such, pagans are predisposed against automatically rendering suicide with negative emotional and moral connotations. The pagan community or communities certainly recognize the ambivalent nature of what constitutes suicide and the need to distinguish suicidal behavior from suicidal gestures in which one may be actually pleading for help or be momentarily unable to see beyond the direness of an immediate situation. While pagans as a rule may balk at suicides that occur primarily as attempts to execute socially imposed duties (e.g., *sati*), seeking relief from terminal or excruciating pain and from endless mental anguish are accepted for the most part as valid reasons for why a person might wish to end his or her life. In such cases, a pagan will defend a person's right to choose an otherwise unsavory course of action. Dying for the protection of others and even martyrdom for an honorable cause may also be deemed ethical actions and within the remit of a pagan's understanding of freedom, but with the proviso, as we have earlier seen, that one's own act of self-destruction does not extend

⁷¹In Britain, for instance, "Growing numbers of GPs [General Physicians] . . . are now demanding the right to help patients end their lives with dignity" (Ellis 2005:1). The British Medical Association opposes both euthanasia and assisted suicide, but Ellis (p. 5) finds that "Research suggests 81 per cent of the public think someone with an unbearable illness should be allowed to receive medical help to die." She cites Dr. Paddy Glackin, a Central London GP, who says, ". . . death is a part of life and a good death is part of a good life" (ibid.) In calling for the government to legalize assisted suicide, Glackin asks that the legislation permit decisive roles in such matters to be granted to doctors, spouses, children, friends and lovers.

to the involuntary harm and/or deaths of innocent others. Certainly, suicides that are motivated principally from a desire for revenge are rejected by pagans, while Japanese *hara-kiri* and similar cultural acts elsewhere performed 'to save face', that is, out of a personal and/or cultural sense of shame, would be permitted within the range of the ethically acceptable.

Coda

All in all, when it comes to voluntary death as well as causing the death of others through abortion, infanticide, capital punishment and physician or other assisted forms of suicide, the decisive factor concerns the quality of consciously viable life. The personal judgment and conscience of the person whose life is being brought into question are imperative. For pagans, our natural personal liberty includes the right, contrary to Locke, to destroy ourselves if and when that is our wish. Unlike Kant, pagans do not allow that suicide is an attack on any source of moral authority. It is the expression of authentic human will. But this same liberty precludes our right to take the life of another without that person's express consent. In those situations in which the person is unable to express such permission – such as with the lack of established personhood of the fetus, the lack of independent conscious viability of the new born or the lack of consciousness with the person who is in a persistent vegetative state, the right-to-die or the freedom-to-cause-death depends on other factors and is allowable if and when the infliction of additional suffering is kept to a base minimum if it must occur at all. "To end [a] life before its natural end is not necessarily an insult to the value of life; . . . [In fact,] the value of continuing life is not intrinsic but extrinsic, to be judged on the basis of the individual's likely future quality of life."⁷² For pagans, death serves as the final vindication of life. We are back with Robert Pirsig and the exaltation of value over truth. Death is always for a pagan a choice when life is without quality, or at least when the quality it does retain is outweighed by its lack of quality. The freedom to choose what course to take is sacrosanct in paganism and becomes the bedrock of ethical decisions when it comes to a person's deciding whether to continue with life or not.

Richard Taylor notes that "people typically defend their ethical judgements by pointing with horror at any suggested alternatives."⁷³ He points out the vehement denunciations that Princeton University's Peter Singer received from both MSM as well as religious leaders when he "dared to suggest circumstances in which both euthanasia and infanticide would be better than blind adherence to the rules."⁷⁴ No one was apparently listening to Singer's arguments, and everyone was instead

⁷²Section 3.2 ("The Deontological Argument [for Suicide] from the Sanctity of Life") at <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/suicide/> (Cholbi 2004).

⁷³Taylor (2003:30).

⁷⁴Ibid.

reacting with rashness to his or her own sense of horror. For pagans, it would be preferable for people to consider the ethical issues concerning death and dying in terms of balanced and open-minded consideration, but however emotionally one comes to a decision, paganism insists on that person's right of choice and the assumption of whatever responsibility ensues from that choice. This insistence, however, is the demand that everyone has the right to choose and that the choice is not to be limited by other people's personal beliefs.

Overall, pagans do not go out of their way to become upset. They make no special claim to be offended and are not looking for inflammatory issues but prefer in general to follow the path of least resistance – a live and let live pathway. What is most important for pagans as a basic approach to life is endeavoring to keep one's social horizons open. In addition to this, while the Buddhist may seek to ignore life by detaching completely from any emotional connection with it, and the Abrahamist may choose instead to be eternally intimidated by life or what he/she calls God, the pagan is the one who remains vigilantly and passionately engaged with life – recognizing that our world may be weird but not deifying that weirdness as the Christians et al. have done. While pagans might not be happy with the status quo or current *modus vivendi*, they want life in all its complicated richness and variety and choose to stay fervently involved with it. If the Christians retort that pagans must then suffer this hellish burden of life forever, the pagan's reply is that we do not make life itself a burden and refuse to engage in a magic that would have life itself dwindle or vanish. Instead, the pagan will and wish are that the burdens themselves will wither away. A pagan call is, "Let us be free!"

Unlike both the Abrahamic perversion and the Persian inversion, paganism is the completion of the secular. It is only when rational secularism frees us from outmoded superstition and reified projection that paganism comes to flourish. It is for this reason that the secular ethos and pagan ethos coincide. Humanists and pagans alike cherish women's freedom of choice in reproduction, oppose imposition of the death penalty by the state, promote vanguard research that has the potential to reduce or eliminate illness and disability and/or improve the quality of life, and consider that a good death – especially if it is a freely chosen death – is intrinsically a part of a good life. Freed from cultural and religious tyranny by the sword of secular insight, pagan valuing of an organic enchantment that encompasses the magical and the miraculous has the chance to mature into a non-ruthless, non-demanding but natural option. Paganism does not reject reason and does not posit it as against the intuitional. Instead, the rational becomes a means of executing what the intuitive discovers. With the punching and incarceration received over the last two millennia, pagans have already been chastened for whatever wrongs were part of their past; they are now coming back to the chagrin and horror of their oppressors. They seek, however, no world hegemonic domination but rather the space and freedom to practice their faith and live lives in conformity with their principles of liberty and choice. Nature is their sacred resource, and they will agitate for its ongoing protection. In this last, they are likely to be joined by many who do not themselves identify as pagan. If paganism is to become a key player among the world's religions, perhaps someday the majority choice of educated, reflective

and fully engaged people throughout the planet, this will be something that happens naturally and organically – in peace, freedom and spontaneous affirmation rather than in belittling intimidation and fear.

In the present chapter, the arguments for or against infanticide and the like are largely intended to open debate and discussion. They are not being presented to prescribe anyone's final moral position – including that of a pagan. The general outline I have sketched here is one to which I feel most pagans, at least contemporary Western pagans, already subscribe or will subscribe upon serious reflection. There will of course always be exceptions. This is only as it should be and virtually must be if we are to have a world, some world somewhere, that respects human dignity as an intrinsic and as a vehicle for making self-responsible choices and decisions. Western culture has been living its pagan heritage and values under a long-standing Levantine Christian dominance – one that has all but suffocated the indigenous Western ethos. But for better or worse, this hegemony has produced the unusualness that we in the West have become. If there is also a 'mass mentality', it is a disease. It is an unhealthy development. The West has employed the Levantine starting-on-the-wrong-foot-right-from-the-beginning position for the last 2000 years. This has certainly helped the West to engage in the deepest philosophical reflexivity and artistic output, but it is possibly now time to ease up on this hybrid matrix. To end both the cultural imperialism and the debilitation that prevents people from fulfilling their full stature, I predict that someday there will be a divorce between the Occidental and the Abrahamic. The best of course would be if the two could remain on amiable terms as some ex's have been fortunate enough to do. But for the most part by far, the West needs to re-find its own original insights and practices and to relinquish wasteful and deleterious ambitions. Paganism is the West's original understanding, custom and way of life, and paganism today offers a route back to the self-promise that we have come to have lost.

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Chapter 13

Hegemony and Environment

Again from the corpo-spiritual or pagan idolatrous perspective on ethics, in the present chapter I wish to examine two key areas of contemporary concern in the light of heptatheonic virtue-values, namely, hegemony and the environment – with negative environmental issues collectively constituting a further instance of hegemonic vice. The exercise of domination and the well-being and future preservation of our planet occupy much of current global attention. Issues of power have always occupied humanity in one manner or another through war, conflict, inequality and contentions over ownership, but now, in the face of vastly increasing ecological peril, our awareness of the natural world itself has become a worrying part of our consciousness as well. The ethical stance I am pursuing may be assessed as pagan to the degree it is human. And likewise, it is an arresting matter for all of us inasmuch as it concerns what is naturally human, that is, our root-level pagan affinity that I contend is at the core of human existence. In other words, we are all basically pagan, and I maintain that that is what is natural to us as human beings, and as such, whether we admit it or not, whether we are conscious of it or not, we are all concerned naturally with our environment. Nevertheless, the whole issue of ecology – from eco-awareness, ingrained gnostic sentiment, nature as dynamic but amoral, ritual and science – is huge and hugely disorienting. I do not have answers here, but I seek instead to bring environmental concerns as well as the broader area of hegemonic dominance to the reader’s mind and hopefully problem solving awareness in facing honestly our here-and-now realities.

Hegemony

Hegemonic domination is a broad category but yet again another contentious area for ethical debate. It includes the proper role of government, ethnic emancipation, efforts toward gender equality and the issue of rape. Hegemony may be comprehended in what Starhawk refers to as ‘power over’ others and as opposed to

developing ‘power-from-within’. The ethics of hegemony concern the parameters in the exercise of both brute strength and military advantage.

Hegemony, of course, involves freedom and honor. But the central focus here is on power – what we have already seen as integral to comfort. Power is energy; energy is power. Without this ability to move and do, there is nothing. As such, we are forever concerned with the fuel of life. But as an ethical concern, the matter is the imbalance of power, and not only its discrepancy but the specific occasions in which one takes advantage of an unfair advantage. The people who first come to mind are the bully and the rapist, but ultimately we are talking about colonization, imperialism, sanctioned torture, unfair but rampant consumerism by the haves, and the equitable – or inequitable – distribution and sharing of our planet’s resources.

The issue is at the forefront of human existence and, apart from the recapture of the American elections in 2004 and their subsequent disappointment in the years that have followed, would be or should be openly addressed in every public forum as a matter of dire importance and emergency. The behaviors of the American administrations through the start of the twenty-first century, British collusion and the alleged rendition complicities of Poland, Romania, Afghanistan and Thailand have managed ‘to open a can of worms’. What is becoming known is nothing new, nothing that has not been present since perhaps the beginnings of human existence, but the risks of such continuance now call into question the very viability of planetary survival as well as the glaring discrepancy between who we say we are and who we really are.

Rape

Let us begin with the individual level, though even here, the corporate and governmental ethos, or lack of ethos, becomes a factor that augments, encourages or, further, often condones the appalling personal behaviors that can be exercised under its official sanction. For a pagan, rape could be an ethical quagmire were it not so unambiguously wrong. As an outrageous violation, it is a despoiling carnal act that is usually committed against women by men, though the victims may also include children of either sex. In recent years, I heard through the news of an instance in which a man had been raped by a woman, though this would be a rarity against the vast majority of cases. The unfairness and assault of rape usually stem from the stronger overpowering an unwilling and weaker other. In ‘gang rape’, the odds are even more imbalanced. In all cases, one or more persons are being harmed and reduced against the person’s or persons’ will.

Acts of rape occur almost ubiquitously. They are especially frequent in wartime occupations, so much so, that such unlawful carnal violations seem to be a natural aspect of human existence. The difficulty for the pagan is obvious. If the seizing of another is natural and originally part of human survival, how does the pagan who reveres nature condemn it? The question requires a teasing apart in order for us to

answer it properly. But as a starting point, statutory rape of a minor, one below the age of consent, is as despicable an act for pagans as it is for anyone else. While the age of consent may vary from one culture to the next, and from one political state to the next – both Denmark and Japan have much more lenient allowances regarding when an adolescent may engage sexually with an adult, child molestation expresses sacrilegious selfishness that is unacceptable by virtually all standards of civilization.

For a pagan, even adult-to-adult instances of rapacious behavior can sometimes border on that fuzzy line that often envelops morality as a whole. There can be a thrill within the sexual encounter of being overpowered by another. While this last is perhaps more openly acknowledged in ‘gay’ circles, it is not confined to them. But in such instances, the finesse is such that it becomes an extremely difficult line to navigate properly and ethically. As a general rule, all cases in which someone overpowers another who is unwilling do not conform to the moral standard of virtually all peoples, let alone pagans. The virtue-value involved at this point is the freedom of autonomy. Not only are we talking here about the individual’s liberty to choose, but we are also upholding the intrinsic dignity and honor of a person that merits respect from others in how they behave toward that person.¹ Liberty and honor virtually always go hand-in-hand – concerning rape as well as most if not all other ethical acts on the part of humans.

The question then is what about the pagan gods? Within the legacy of pagan mythology, there are many instances in which the gods behave in manners that among humans would be unabashedly condemned. The Vedic Dyaus or Prajapati rapes his daughter, the Greek Poseidon’s capture of Demeter Erinys, Apollo’s (unsuccessful) attempt to seize the unwilling Daphne, Hades abducts Persephone, Zeus in the form of a bull carries off Europa and in the form of an eagle snatches Ganymede, and even when Zeus disguises himself as Alceme’s husband, the resulting union inasmuch as Alceme is herself an unwilling party to adultery amounts to rape on the part of the chief of the Greek gods. Other instances are forthcoming from other cultures as well.

But the rapacious acts of the gods are not necessarily universal. Roman gods, despite the demythologizing process they have undergone, as a rule and distinct from their subsequent identification with Hellenic deities, are paragons of virtuous behavior. The same may largely be said of the Nordic gods. But even when we do have the legends and stories of a god seizing another – whether human or divine, a pagan understanding is that the gods cannot be judged by human standards. By and large, pagan deities live and operate within a metaphorical and symbolic realm rather than a human one. They are supra-human at best and at this level represent

¹The irony here is that the institution of marriage may be seen as legitimation (however ultimately necessary) of the initial violation of a virgin. Marriage legitimates what otherwise is forbidden. In cultures of arranged marriage or ‘forced’ marriage, the bride is virtually subjected to sanctioned rape – as her own mother once was, and her mother’s mother before her. There is additionally the issue of ‘rape *within* marriage’.

the forces of nature rather than those of civilization. The multiple dimensions of divine being afford the pagan gods a largesse and maneuverability that is otherwise forbidden to mortal humans. Nature *is* violent, and her acts of violence are often symbolized in myth by the unacceptable extremes of human behavior. The pagan gods are not by default automatic role models; they are something else – a something that seeks to convey the deeper and less immediately obvious understanding of pagan mystery.

Consequently, if nature is seen as rapaciously violent and the rape and pillage of marauding male militias could be understood as a universal part of their nature, is rape justifiable by pagan standards of conformity to nature? The answer is still ‘no’. Nature to the pagan is greatly more complex and ambiguous than even the Christian God is to his followers. She cannot be simply used to justify hegemonic behavior. We might understand the ambivalence as follows. It is natural for us to die of exposure outside in the frigid cold. But, in fact, we manufacture clothing to wear as protection, and we build shelters into which we can bring ourselves from the raw elements. These activities are natural in the human species. While rape may be natural for animals, animals are also known to reveal the most intimate of sexual behaviors in partnership unions. Intimacy is also a part of human nature – a preferred part no less. In short, it is natural for humans to evolve ethically, and, as part of human evolution, it is natural to eliminate such gross acts as rape from our range of acceptable behavior. Rape is belittling and incommensurate with the aesthetic standards that we as humans collectively continue to establish as our ethical aspiration. This last is equally, if not even more so, part of our natural inclination. To aspire to become better people, to respect each and everyone despite her disadvantages and weaknesses, is an evolutionary natural for many if not most pagans. Whether Darwin’s theory of evolution is flawed or will someday be superseded by a more satisfactory understanding, a pagan is at home with the basics of the evolutionary concept. Evolution is understood not as something that is contrary to nature but as fully integral to its processes – let alone integral to a tolerant and non-rigid ethical development. Sexual rape constitutes a passion on the part of the instigator, and passion is usually understood by pagans as a pleasure. But in ethical navigation, not all pleasures are considered to be equal. For an aspiring pagan in particular, compassion and kindness are also understood as pleasures – the kinds that our natural bent is to cultivate and pursue over those pleasures that are dependent on the degradation of another.

Gender

The issue of rape is part of a broader category that concerns a general dis-equality between whatever parties are involved. Taking carnal advantage of an unwilling person and sexual molestation of children are particularly abhorrent illustrations of the more widespread ill treatment of minorities. These last can include the economically deprived, people of color, those whose sexual gender preferences do

not coincide with the norm, adherents of non-mainstream religions and so forth.² Perhaps the most traditional and ubiquitous concerns gender inequality per se. The inferior position of women vis-à-vis their being social and political equals is the most ingrained throughout the world and its history – often reducing women to chattel and possessions and rendering them as commodified objects rather than human subjects.

Women's emancipation efforts have been a vociferous development from, especially, the latter half of the twentieth century – coinciding with the rebirth of contemporary Western paganism as a viable spiritual option in modern times. Female liberation continues the suffragette movement of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that agitated for a woman's equal voting rights in political matters. Feminists argue that women should be treated as individuals and have further roles than simply those of mother and wife. In many respects, feminism appropriated the pagan movement in the West, allowing paganism to serve more as a vehicle for women's lib rather than vice versa. This has been foremost in Wicca or contemporary witchcraft. This last, however, has served in a key role as midwife to the larger rebirth of paganism in its manifold variety. The irony here is that, through Gerald Gardner, Wicca-witchcraft is predominantly a gnostic derivative with freemasonic origins.³ It nevertheless has come to overlap with, or incorporate elements of, generic paganism – particularly in its reverencing of nature. To date, Wicca/witchcraft retains the largest following within contemporary Western paganism.

The secondary treatment of women throughout the history of much of the world is perhaps chiefly concerned with the preservation of male inheritance rights. Although there are significant exceptions, by-and-large, property is – or has been – passed to male heirs and not to women. This last appears to result from the widespread mindset that considers women themselves as property rather than individuals with equal rights to those of men. As something to be owned, women accordingly could not own property – rendering their position to be little different than that of a slave. Women's traditional disadvantage vis-à-vis men's has related to property in marriage, divorce and inheritance.

²The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) names the potentials for discrimination specifically as race, national or ethnic origin, color, religion, sex, age, mental or physical disability, sexual orientation and place of birth. http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/cida_ind.nsf/8949395286e4d3a58525641300568be1/0b4081ac59052fde852568fc0067579d?OpenDocument#1 (accessed 4 January 2006).

³This is derived from my own research and analysis in which I conclude that Wicca, deriving from the theurgic/magical/esoteric tradition functions as the mid-wife to the contemporary Western pagan movement. Although it has reinterpreted or re-evaluated the concept of reincarnation, the doctrine itself is a gnostic/dharmic derivative, while Gardner's adoption of the Freemasonic identity of the elements with the cardinal directions in which the (theosophically barren) earth is placed in the north rather than to the south with its more expected pagan associations of fertility, fecundity and growth is another inheritance of transcendental gnosticism.

In the rectification of dis-equal status between men and women, the issue concerns not merely the equality of opportunities but also the equality of results. Accordingly, “gender equality means that women and men have equal conditions for realizing their full human rights and potential to contribute” to all walks of life from the political and economic to the social, cultural and environmental.⁴ In the removal of the systemic ‘genderedness’ belonging to traditional institutions, the imperative is to recognize the rights to, and processes of, self-empowerment. These last are predicated on developing awareness of the inherent unfairness of power relations as they have existed – and still exist – to our present times. Gender-equal societies are those in which women and men can perform as equal partners – both in the enjoyment of benefits and the sharing of responsibilities.⁵ An overriding condition is the freedom to choose lifestyles that are not dictated by inflexible and stereotypical gender roles. The efforts for women’s emancipation and gender equality, however, must operate in a multi-faceted arena of cultural difference, situational difference and local differences. In a pluralistic world, cultural sensitivity becomes an imperative and presents its own array of problems in the ethical attempt to dismantle ingrained hegemonic habits. Here, as in virtually all cases of discrimination, there is no easy solution, and the issue rests less with changes in the law – as important as these may be – but more with a universal growth in moral consciousness.

Advances on this front have been slow and painful, but at least today in the Western world, a woman’s status is immensely improved over that which it had been. This is not to say that women, even in the West, enjoy full parity with men. But as the bases for female subjugation continue to erode, the gap between male and female status might hopefully reduce further. One important development is comprehended in ecofeminism, namely, the contention that oppression of women is integrally linked with oppression of nature. Since patriarchal tyranny over the natural world of the planet interconnects with the repression of women, the two must be addressed together and not as separate issues. Consequently, women – especially pagan women – are at the forefront of ecological activism as well as the social and political attempts to rectify imbalances caused by racist, sexist, heterosexist, ethnic and class discrimination and the like. With regard to both women and nature, much of the traditional domination they have received in the West and beyond can be traced to biblical religion. As an authoritative text, the bible has been used as a chief tool in hegemonic practice. By placing the sacred as wholly transcendent and other, pagan earth and her human embodiments in both women and men are desacralized, de-celebrated and rendered fair game for pillage and abuse. Rather than viewing the bible as an inviolate text, pagans understand it as contingent and flexibly fallible.

⁴Loc. cit. note 2 *supra*.

⁵<http://www.gender.go.jp/index2.html> (accessed 4 January 2006). This website discusses Japan’s Basic Law for a Gender-equal Society (Law No. 78 of 1999). See further http://www.gender.go.jp/english_contents/index.html (accessed 24 July 2014).

They need not go so far as to reject it as totally meaningless and without aesthetic value, but they do critique its alleged infallibility and the power discrepancies that have resulted from it.⁶

The bible, along with the *Malleus Maleficarum* (*The Witches' Hammer*) of 1486, became a vehicle for the witchcraft persecutions of the late middle ages. Although men were included among them, most victims were female. But regardless of the gender of those whose lives were destroyed, ecclesiastical and secular power in these instances was used radically to oppress difference – in a manner that is similar to the holocaust of the Second World War. The bible cannot be blamed for the full range of hegemonic injustices, but it has played – and continues to play – a central role in the execution of power disparity. And while not all ecofeminism is pagan by a long shot, earth-goddess oriented paganism is an important element within the overall ecofeminist agenda. Consequently, along with the efforts toward biblical reinterpretation by such theologians as Rosemary Radford Ruether, Judith Plaskow and Ivone Gebara, spiritually-minded ecofeminists like Starhawk and Charlene Spretnak among others have centered on the spiritual nature of embodied existence as a means to re-sacralize the physical in non-discriminatory understandings that seek to provide an ethical basis on which to preclude unfair and uncalled for subjugation, exploitation, maltreatment and cruelty.⁷

Bureaucracy, Government and the Corporate World

Basically, for women as well as for any group or individual who suffers from hegemonic persecution, the predominant concern is freedom. For the rest of us and those who are potentially oppressors, the issue is the intrinsic dignity of the other and the ethical requirement to respect and honor what may be conceived as the inherent distinction of human worth. While this is usually easier on a personal and more intimate level, when the other is unknown, alien and strange vis-à-vis our own orbits of being, it becomes all too often a case of exercising disrespect, callous indifference and/or exploitation when possible. But our societies of today are not only riddled with outmoded attitudes and legacies incommensurate with advance, they are equally burdened with bureaucratic abuse. The depersonalization that we encounter in our daily lives through governmental and corporate agency is a reduction in the value of personal being. In much of our lives today we are, and

⁶For cogent discussions on these points, see both Anne Elvey's article on "Ecofeminism and Biblical Interpretation" and Laura Hobgood-Oster's on "Ecofeminism – Historic and International Evolution" in Taylor (2005:532–39).

⁷On the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), refer to <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/>. Note also the European Commission's initiatives to promote gender equality in development cooperation: http://europa.eu.int/comm/europeaid/projects/gender/index_en.htm for which gender discrimination is seen as a violation of human rights as well as an obstacle to successful social and economic development.

must operate as, cogs and numbers and little more. This tyranny of bureaucracy is yet one more loss of freedom and worth that represents a violation of the pagan and humanitarian ethos.

But if bureaucracy is one of the most inimical obstacles to the *summum bonum* or general well-being, it does ironically act as a potential bulwark to another great impediment, namely, that of government-sanctioned military might. This last is the force or power behind the erosions of democratic liberties, the rights of free assembly, the preservation of ethnic autonomy and open, unrestricted and unmonitored channels of communication. Governmental bureaucracy moves and changes slowly, and in times of dictatorial usurpation, its overall lethargy can act to retard the more insidious and subtle maneuvers in political attempts to establish totalitarian control.

Today, and apart from the bureaucracy issue, as our world appears to reach a stalemate confrontation between Western and Islamic values, one that is predominantly though not exclusively played out in a global arena defined by Abrahamic thought, we have been 'privileged' to witness the most blatant and unethical seizures of unchecked power by both George W. Bush and Osama bin Laden and their respective cohorts that defy the painstakingly earned advances of human civilization – now a legacy of degradation that persists through the subsequent administration of Nobel Peace Prize winner Barack Obama and its confrontations in the Middle East. While the Al Qaeda and IS/ISIL caliphate fronts are at an economic-military disadvantage in relation to American might, their tactics remain inexcusable by any humanitarian standard based on people's intrinsic dignity and the necessity for viable interdependence between differing positions in the cause of human harmony and advance.

But this being said, the historic catastrophe of the Bush administration since the World Trade Center collapse, if not before as well as after, is at least equally without ethical warrant. The combination of military, corporate and Christian right-winged interests has produced a power monopoly that ignores civil liberties and rule of law. Disregard of the Geneva Conventions, the export of criminal suspects for purposes of torture on foreign land – what is known as rendition, the censure of virtually all public expressions of dissent, the intimidation of the media, the loss of civil rights Constitutionally enshrined for American citizens and the unashamed governmental eavesdropping and spying without legal permission on the country's own subjects are just a few of the violations that reveal hegemonic exercise at its worst. In the black-and-white choice of being 'either with us or against us', pagans and secularists are not just left outside the picture but are made into complicit enemies of the dominant power coalition and its ploy to use fear as a chief means to secure its nefarious ends. But to these 'outsiders', we must also allow a growing agreement within the more sensible legacy of mainstream Christianity.⁸

⁸See in particular <http://www.mayflowerucc.org> for the November 4, 2005 speech to the University of Oklahoma by the Rev. Dr. Robin Meyers of the Mayflower Congregational Church of Oklahoma City. Meyers angrily denounces the actions of those who claim to speak for Jesus but are anything

More and more middle-of-the-road Christians have come to recognize that there was a moral bankruptcy endemic to the Bush administration that suppressed the preciousness of life and upheld arrogance, greed and infallibility over faith, charity and self-questioning. War is increasingly to be seen as “the greatest failure of the human race.”⁹ Pagans, secularists, real Christians and real people of whatever faith understand war as the worst ruse for, and result of, hegemonic oppression.

Of course, the unfair use of a position of strength vis-à-vis a weaker status is not confined to the American regime occupying the White House during the beginning years of the twenty-first century. Empires have flourished since at least the start of recorded history. Invasion, subjugation, colonization and authoritarian domination have constituted much of the norm of human history. In fact, the entire story of the human species upon planet Earth is largely the history of empires, and the truth

but Christian. Meyers lists as immoral the engaging in war under false pretenses but alleging it as God’s will, the accusations against critics in this instance as unpatriotic or lacking in faith, the breaking of international rules established by the United Nations, claiming that Jesus is the Lord of one’s life while ignoring his essential teachings embodied in the Sermon on the Mount, totally disregarding the lives of Iraqi citizens, disregarding the fundamental gospel teachings by granting tax breaks to the wealthiest – allowing the strong to become stronger and the weak weaker, engaging in the torture of prisoners, purely pursuing aggrandizement of self and one’s own friends, jeopardizing future generations by spending on a war with no exit strategy, becoming callously indifferent to the hatred engendered toward one’s country that was once the most loved in the world, resorting to the Constitution as a weapon of hatred against homosexuals, favoring the death penalty rather than adhering to Jesus’ rejection of ‘an eye for an eye’ morality, dismantling countless environmental laws that were designed to protect the earth for future generations rather than to enrich corporate profit, resembling the enemy with the assertion that one’s own God is good while that of the other is evil, showing no compassion toward the needy or those who are in disagreement with one’s own position, depriving health care to the ill and indigent, and violating the justice system by insuring its exclusive support of one’s own position. This talk may also be found at http://newconnexion.net/articles/index.cfm/2005/03/robin_meyers.html (accessed 24 July 2014). In a related development, Fox News reported on 11 November 2005 that “Ninety-five United Methodist Bishops repent their ‘complicity’ in the ‘unjust and immoral’ invasion and occupation of Iraq.” Deploing their own silence, the statement of conscience was signed by more than half of the 164 retired and active United Methodist bishops worldwide. *Vide* Hudon (2005, November 11), “Methodist Bishops Repent Iraq War ‘Complicity’”: <http://www.cedp.ca/Archives2005/WritingWall45.htm> (accessed 20 October 2014).

Note also that the Washington-based Baptist preacher Jim Wallis, author of *God’s Politics*, has been described by Andrew Gumbel (2005) as a person who believes that following the Gospel teachings means “standing up for the poor, agitating for universal health care, protecting the environment and combating the military-industrial complex in all its forms.” In Wallis’ words, “I don’t think Jesus’s first two priorities would have been a capital-gains-tax cut and the occupation of Iraq.” In November 2004 at the All Saints Episcopal church in Beverly Hills, Wallis raised the issues of poverty, the environment, the American health-care crisis and HIV/Aids as moral values that are ignored in the Republican political playbook. Wallis’ major point is that every American progressive movement in the country’s history has been religiously inspired in one manner or another. What the more moderate evangelicals, Roman Catholics, mainline middle-of-the-road Protestants, black evangelicals, progressive rabbis and even young Muslims are looking for in America, according to Wallis, is not the political middle so much as it is a moral center.

⁹Ibid. (<http://www.mayflowerucc.org> – Meyers 2005).

of the matter is that America has always been a *de facto* empire. In the current climate, however, and as Niall Ferguson astutely observes, “It is . . . acceptable among American liberals to say that the United States is an empire – provided that you deplore the fact. It is also permitted to say, when among conservatives, that American power is potentially beneficent – provided that you do not describe it as imperial”¹⁰ – thereby pigeon-holing virtually all of us.

People are under imperial subjection when they are unable themselves to determine their government. The difference between totalitarian dictatorship or oligarchy and imperial rule rests not so much on the degree of governmental hegemony but on the collection of ethnicities that comprise the polity. An empire is a cosmopolitan corporation, and the real link between the American and Iraqi peoples at the time of writing is that both are subject to the same imperial government. Historically speaking, the imperial expansion occurs predominantly through the exercise of the very real power of colonial and military expansion – or at least intervention.¹¹ This should not be surprising inasmuch as the one thing all empires must do is expand. Comparing the Anglo-Saxon empire with all other empires, *The Daily Reckoning* concludes that “Eventually, the empire expands until [it] reaches beyond its limits . . . then, it either goes broke, is defeated, or both.”¹²

In the American accomplishment, much has likewise been achieved through the exercise of what is frequently designated as ‘soft power’. This is the ability to entice and attract to get what one wants without resorting to undue force or inducement.

¹⁰“Preface to the Paperback Edition” of Ferguson (2005:vii).

¹¹As Ferguson (2005:33) sees the American irony, “there were no more self-confident imperialists than the Founding Fathers themselves”: Washington, Jefferson, Madison, Hamilton. The westward expansion of the thirteen original American states was conducted with little or no regard to the agreement of indigenous peoples. Treaties were bought and subsequently broken with Native Americans as the land-hungry mass migration, religious motivations and military strength of the U.S. governmentally-backed Euro-American alone dictated. The U.S. was at least able to secure territory nominally held by its European rivals more often than not by conquest but by purchase. Beyond the North American continent itself, America’s maritime empire was established through strategic, commercial and ideological considerations: Midway, Guam, Wake Island, Samoa and Hawaii. Puerto Rico and the Philippines were acquired through war; Alaska and the Virgin Islands, through purchase. In addition, America’s imperial influence short of outright annexation has operated in Columbia-Panama, Cuba, Hispanola, Nicaragua and Mexico.

For a presentation of the often shameless expansion of the 13 original states and the accompanying conniving strategies and violations, see Josephy (1994). In this light, in condemning the shenanigans of California’s Bear Flag revolt, Josiah Royce warned “that when our nation is another time about to serve the devil, it will do so with more frankness, and will deceive itself less by half-unconscious cant. For the rest, our mission in the cause of liberty is to be accomplished through a steadfast devotion to the cultivation of our own inner life, and not by going abroad as missionaries, as conquerors, or as marauders, among weaker peoples” (cited in Starr 1973:160).

¹²“Empires expand . . . or contract . . . because that is what makes them empires. If they minded their own business and stayed within their own borders [as nation-states do], they would not be empires. . . . A true empire cannot help itself. It must engage in . . . extravagant ‘imperial overstretch’ that it can no longer pay the costs.” From “Today’s Daily Reckoning – Taking The Bull By The Horns,” *The Daily Reckoning* [<http://www.dailyreckoning.com>] (4.10.5 09:22 PDT). *Vide* Fuller (2005).

Americanization refers to the means by which America makes its values attractive to others – such means as corporate telecommunications, American cinema and television programs, exporting desire through image advertising and missionary evangelism. It is through such institutions that America seeks to familiarize with and persuade others of her version of international law, democracy and free market economy. Whether such soft power is to be called the ‘white man’s burden’, ‘manifest destiny’, ‘responsibilities of power’, ‘promotion of freedom’ or ‘strategies of openness’, it does possess a noteworthy degree of self-proclaimed altruism.¹³ But whether this exercise of ‘soft power’ is to be considered more ethical or simply a stealthy substitute for blatant imperialism is a debatable question under the often vociferous argument concerning globalization. In the long run, however, influence through trade would seem not to carry the same ethical burden of influence through military expansion. There is an implicit assumption that the influenced parties have at least some choice and say that does not apply to a conquered people.

But in the present political climate, the current Anglo-American alliance is increasingly understood in terms of government’s political strengthening on the basis of magnified and manufactured fear. A government at war is not a government that can be questioned and made to be accountable. Such a government is necessarily one of imperial design – one that, in the American instance, is the result of a mobilized and highly effective alliance of the military infrastructure, corporate interests and a religiously based zeal.¹⁴ Apart from the intrinsic sadness of the situation, the United States’ linking 911 with Iraq illustrates not only the insight of George Orwell’s novel *1984* but also the machinations and deviousness to which empires accompany their more direct use of military might. When foreign interventions are unpopular and opposed on the home front, the unethical potential for governmental lies, manipulation of the facts, spying on its own

¹³Ferguson (2005:23).

¹⁴On the intense preoccupation with information control of the Bush administration, “arguably the most secretive in U.S. history,” see Hugh Urban, “Religion and Secrecy in the Bush Administration: The Gentleman, the Prince, and the Simulacrum” to be found at <http://www.esoteric.msu.edu/VolumeVII/Secrecy.htm> (accessed 15.8.5). Moreover, Scott McConnell sees that “The failure of Americans to generate a politically significant domestic opposition to the war is now one of the most important developments in world politics. It means that the Bush administration can contemplate, without any fear of adverse domestic political consequences, expansion of its war to Syria or a large-scale bombing of Iran. The only constraints on its behavior are international.” For this last, see “How They Get Away With It,” *e-PRAXIS e-List* (4 July Issue: Copyright © 2005 *The American Conservative* – accessed on the 13th of July, 2005: <http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article9354.htm>). But even the point that has been made here is now questionable in the light of the following: “The bilateral instruments, signed by Minister for Justice Michael McDowell and the US Ambassador to Ireland James C Kenny last week, provide for sweeping powers to be given to the US authorities on request, including the right to seize documents, check bank accounts and carry out searches of property [of suspects arrested on Irish soil].” For this, consult ‘Human Rights Commission to probe CIA agreement’ – <http://www.breakingnews.ie/ireland/human-rights-commission-to-probe-cia-agreement-212682.html> (accessed 24 July 2014).

subjects, imprisonment, torture and intimidation is all the greater. There becomes a concomitant erosion of civil rights at home and a devaluing of human life abroad. Democracy and the liberties it seeks to enshrine pale before governmental abuse of power and dereliction in the exercise of its legitimate responsibilities. The general *summum bonum* is destroyed and remains the sole privilege of an elite few. There is no generosity, and for the victims, there is no comfort. The notion of honor or true worship does not enter the scenario at all, and freedom is little more than a sham.

Pagan Sacrifice

The rendition of terrorist suspects and the disregard for what we have come to expect as the civil rights of the ordinary citizen are virtually re-impositions of the institution of slavery in all but name, but the indiscriminate wartime slaughter of innocent civilian victims for whatever purpose is nothing short of murder. This last may be viewed as a modern version of human sacrifice – only without the religious context in which offerings or divinations were once justified. It cannot be denied that paganism in the past has been connected to the ritual sacrifice of humans. This is most apparent among the Mayan, Aztec and Inca Indians – though elsewhere as well (ancient Mesopotamia, the Moloch cult, in Nagaland, Orissa, Africa, etc.). While the Romans may not have resorted to this practice to the extent that Montague Summers alleges,¹⁵ we do know of a criminal execution that was conducted in conformity to an ancient ritual.¹⁶ In general, while the Romans did resort to brutal forms of capital punishment, in religion this was the exception rather than the rule, and the city's second monarch, Numa Pompilius, legendarily won from Jupiter the right to substitute garlic, hair and sprats for the human sacrificial victim.¹⁷

Paganism may revere its past and draw from it, but it is not beholden to it. As an organic and progressively growing spirituality, paganism changes and advances with the times. It is not only reflective of the stage of development its adherents have reached in any given period but also designates the ethical way ahead. Paganism does change and has changed – a process it values as a positive by not being locked into an outmoded and obsolete way of thinking, doing and being. I will admit that here and elsewhere throughout this book, I have often been making sweeping statements concerning paganism and that there are some (how many I cannot say) who will object. But in the least, this is the paganism I chose to celebrate. Beyond that, I will remain steadfast in my argument, that the sweeping statements I do make on behalf of the faith and practice are true virtually by default. Especially in the domain of ethics, though elsewhere as well, and unlike most other religions,

¹⁵Summers (1965:39–42).

¹⁶Dio Cassius 43.24; York (1986:180f).

¹⁷Ovid, *Fasti* 3.291–344; York (1986:245f).

paganism possesses a central capacity to reinvent itself constantly. If paganism has bought into hegemonic behaviors in its earlier histories, the paganism of today increasingly stands for equality, emancipation and self-empowerment as the ways toward a sustainable and equitable planet for one and all. It may share this conviction with decent-minded adherents of other faiths, those who choose to be open, flexible and tolerant. But if need be, paganism is today prepared to go the ethical route alone. It stands firmly opposed to all hegemonic abuse – whether conducted by individual, group, society, ethnicity or governmental ruse.

Unlike the issue of recreational drugs, and even that of same-sex marriage (which essentially concerns two individuals as a unit), hegemony is clearly other-related. It deals with power relationships. And as we have already noted, power is central to the virtue-value of comfort. To be on the receiving end of power discrepancy is, or at least can be, an uncomfortable situation. In ethics, what is required of the person, persons or institution that is in the stronger position is awareness and sensitivity and, if the occasion calls for it, vigilant acts of restraint. As we navigate the hegemonic pitfalls of life, to perform within the boundaries of the ethical, there is the need to be able to place ourselves, to imagine ourselves, in the shoes of the other. Often we may not even be aware of the suffering and injustice that we are causing to another in the normal pursuit of our own goals. A pagan of today argues for imagination and sensitivity in how we deal with others beyond self and those within our own immediate friend and kinship orbits. S/he also seeks to cultivate the moral courage not to succumb to the perpetual temptations of unfairness. *In* freedom, comfort and honor, *for* freedom, comfort and honor, and *by* freedom, comfort and honor, a pagan aims for health and a healthy world.

Environment

In the previous section it was noted that ecofeminism considers the domination of women as well as other subjugated minorities to be part and parcel of humanity's repression of nature. In a sense, the environmental issue is a special instance of hegemonic vice. The disrespect of the natural, the attitude that approaches it as little more than a grab-bag resource for the taking, ranks today among the central dangers to our own survival as a species. Global warming through the uncontrolled emission of carbon dioxide is just one of the consequences of this unchecked legacy which intersects perhaps the very heart of what it means to be pagan in today's world.

In the 1970s I came to Amsterdam with a trust fund inheritance. This last, even by the economic standards of the time, was not a lot of money but enough to purchase a house just on the eve of the dollar's ever since precipitous decline vis-à-vis the European currencies. Immersed in the counterculture culture of the times, the house became a commune – our attempt to live frugally and as ecologically as possible. I had learned the art of scavenging from the Sky River Festival and Lighter Than Air Fair in Tenino, Washington (1969), and we were able to furnish the house

largely with what we retrieved as castaways from the streets. We recycled ahead of the times, and we collected scraps of wood from throughout the city for the fireplace and warmth. We grew, if not what we ate, at least much of what we smoked. Everyone contributed ten guilders weekly toward the house budget, and out of this we bought our groceries and paid for other household expenses. The core number of the commune was about a dozen people, but with visitors and temporary lodgers, we averaged in general between 20 to 40 inhabitants. The ‘experiment’ lasted 4 years, and the house is much more *comfortable* today with two rather than with a crowd. But all the same, those were fun and thrilling days, learning ones as well. And we were not atypical. Communes were then a norm for the counterculture throughout Europe and North America. With its predilection for pleasure, one of the great joys for pagans is a party gathering. In many respects, communal life is like a non-stop party – one which, for the most part, seeks to be a collective venture that walks lightly upon the earth.

The times have changed since then. Much of what we were convinced of in Haight-Ashbury culture turned out not to be true and withered away. We gradually awoke from our idealistic naivety. The world around us changed, and we changed with it. This does not, however, betoken that we regret anything – or virtually anything – from those daring days of our youth. We sought to eliminate waste as much as was possible from our existence. If our levels of mutual tolerance were much higher than they are now, we employed that ability and energy toward seeking more compatible ways of interacting harmoniously with our planet, respecting the gods-given abundant resources that surrounded us, and sought newer ways to break free of established and ingrained habits that disrespected the earth and the creatures that walked, swam and flew on, in and over her.

In today’s world, the communal venture is more the rarity rather than the norm. The counterculture has been largely consigned to the dustbins of history, and where it persists in pockets, its adherents have been labeled ‘New Age Travelers’ and considered social scourges to be driven out of town by local constabularies with the support of the often ‘offended’ citizenry. For the time being, apart perhaps from the surviving *kibbutz* and the like, ecological living is no longer communal in the sense it was in the 1970s.

Eco-awareness and Geo-sensitivity

But this change certainly does not betoken that environmental concerns are any less important than they were in the 1960s and 1970s. In fact, as we distance ourselves increasingly through urban lifestyles and consumeristic insulation from the natural world – ones that are dependent upon a rampant and heedless form of corporate capitalism with industrial waste and toxic pollution as additional byproducts, the protection of the planet is even more important today than it was 40 years ago. The pleasure-and-comfort seeking pagan must square his pursuit with the sanctity of nature that is central to a non-world-rejecting spirituality. The cultivation of an

eco-awareness and geo-sensitivity are paramount to any viable pagan ethos. One could throw up his hands in hopeless despair, or throw wide open one's arms to some translating Rapture thought to remove 'the blessed' from carnal entanglement, but a pagan response is to place one's hands on the sacred earth in gratitude and dedication toward her protection, renewal and stewardship. In a word, caring for Mother Nature and maintaining a symbiotic bond with her that is healthy and mindful of all that may violate her unique and precious balance constitute a pagan ethical imperative that is central to all further endeavor.

More specifically, David Tilman argues that for a sustainably biodiverse world that mindfully apportions costs and benefits between ourselves, society and future generations, an ethic is required that "is ultimately as incorporated into culture and as long lasting as a constitutional bill of rights or as religious commandments. The Earth will retain its most striking feature, its biodiversity, only if humans have the prescience to do so."¹⁸ Tilman recognizes that the earth's biological diversity is essential for the management and preservation of the stability, productivity and nutrient dynamics of the natural ecosystems upon which humans and all the planet's biotic life depend. With the loss of biodiversity, both the human and interdependent biological communities will increasingly suffer, and the anthropocene that began with the Industrial Revolution will most likely culminate not only with radical climate change but also earth's sixth mass extinction.¹⁹ Combining the insights of science with ethical consciousness, any kind of human future appears to be contingent on recognizing the intrinsic worth of all life forms and the environmental balances upon which they depend.²⁰ This is not to say that paganism itself has all the answers, but a pagan at least understands that the biological is itself intimately interrelated with both societal and cultural well-being. The virtue-value of honor becomes here imperatively central, for in cultivating the honorable, the individual and community might determine how effectively to honor other humans, other-than-human persons and the future generations that hopefully will succeed us. To be truly honorable, the human animal will need to learn that honoring the other mandates our ability as individuals, communities and a species to curtail our expanding numbers and stop human over-population that translates otherwise into 'anthropofascism', our rampant devouring of the entire world, our subjugation and extinction of other species and the dishonorable continuance of what Bron Taylor refers to as our "obliviousness, indifference or malice."²¹ Honor for a pagan entails both respect and constraint.

¹⁸Tilman (2000:211).

¹⁹Pievani (2014).

²⁰For UNESCO's Biodiversity Initiative, see <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/natural-sciences/special-themes/biodiversity-initiative/biodiversity-culture/> (accessed 8 April 2014).

²¹Personal communication (6 March 2014).

Idolatry

Pagan environmentalism is, in fact, intimately connected to pagan idolatry. Earth herself is the *mother idol*. Pagans revere the earth and, through their planetary reverence, they worship nature. This sensitivity to and acceptance of the physical are the underlying factors of idolatry, environmental awareness and nature worship. It is the pagan's grounding in spiritual materiality that is the basis of biblical opposition *to* idolatry – an opposition that is expressive of the gnostic rejection of the physical, its consideration of the body as the soul's tomb (*soma sema*) and its desire for earthly release, whether Abrahamic or Dharmic. Old Testament and related condemnations of idol worship either deny the earth *carte blanche* or at least disallow engagement with the *earth as is* –preferring instead some otherworldly or idealistic translation. The transcendental is inevitably exalted over the material earth and all that derives from her. The gnostic standpoint is to spurn the world and earthly representation – with the iconoclastic efforts of Abrahamic religion taking the most insidious stance in this respect vis-à-vis paganism.

In place of the transcendent, a pagan reveres the dynamic. Paganism's cherishing of the physical is not a preference for inert or mechanistic matter but rather recognition of the interconnection of all matter as energy. Einstein, in his formulaic understanding of the interchange between matter and energy ($e = mc^2$), touched on or articulated a fundamental pagan insight. Pagan author Phyllis Currott conveys this point when she proclaims, "*Everything is energy and everything is interconnected – past, present, future, man, film, image, viewer.*"²² In this understanding, the image or idol is not something inferior but integrally part of the divine cosmos. It is both sacred as all things are sacred and a portal to the deeper insight of the interconnectedness of all being. Citing David Dalton from his biography *James Dean: The Mutant King*, Currott ruminates that "movies are a form of magic with their projection of a 'thin insubstantial human image, its nature a sort of vapour, film or shadow.' Its animated current can penetrate and divert our energy. We become what we behold and what we choose to behold."²³ In this passage, we can begin to comprehend the dynamic meaning of idolatry for a pagan. Matter is not something separate from energy; matter *is* energy. The image or idol embodies energy; it is so-to-speak a form of *frozen* energy, sliced physically into time, that conveys the interactive animation of the cosmos, our life and perceptions on earth, and the hologramic dance of physical plenitude with itself. The pagan gods and goddesses are components of this magical activity of self and other, of witness or being witnessed, of the resurgent rhythm of nature. In all this, for a pagan, the earth is the mother deity, the source and matrix of manifold being and its perpetually fascinating mystery. But as mother, as the *tabula opportuna* – one that portrays

²²Currott (2005:22) – author's italics.

²³Ibid. p. 21.

intricate balance and finesse, the earth merits a respect and consideration that a pagan in today's world is at the forefront to bestow freely and without coercion.

While there are many different reasons why the United States of America is the current leader that stands against the Kyoto Protocol and ecological reform, for a pagan one of the more prominent causes is the American fixation on a god that appears to preclude sober, rational and mature thought. In place of an alleged figure that is personally interested in the individual, paganism is more concerned with nature which/who has little if any concern with any of us per se. This fact has given Christianity a historic advantage in consideration of the vagaries and tribulations of human existence. A pagan rejects the 'easy way out' and assumes full self-responsibility for how he or she is to deal with life, the world and our wider concerns. This does not mean that pagans do not have personal relationships with their deities; many do – although this connecting bond is not mandatory or intrinsic to pagan identity and being. Closer to the actuality of paganism, an affiliate operates *as if* she or he might have a personal relationship with a particular deity – a *modus vivendi* that places the burden of action on the individual and not on some surrogate other. This *as if* modality and self-responsibility are what a pagan accepts as magic. The individual is the one who, as part of creation, creates the magic that works: in deity relationship, in ethical consciousness, in the stewardship of the earth and in securing the *summum bonum* for self and other.

Gnosticism

There is an irony that much of humanity, if not most, rejects nature as an ultimate reality. This is mankind's recurring gnostic predilection: the denial of the physical and the divine's embodiment in nature. But in contrast to this position that derives seemingly from *Weltschmerz* and its accompanying fear, there is the Romantic consideration that reifies nature into Nature. In today's world, much of this last is found in the so-called New Age movement, and much of contemporary Western paganism retains New Age elements – including the portrayal of nature/Nature as an idealized fiction. In a sense, the Romantic objectification constitutes as much an escape as does the gnostic hankering for the transcendent. But behind the abstract idealization of Nature, we will still find the physical reality of the natural world. Deep paganism, consequently, is that pagan conviction that tends to eschew the airy-fairy notion of Nature for the tangible presence of 'nature natured' (*natura naturata*) – a reality that is now threatened by climate change, water pollution, diminishment of water resources, ozone depletion in the atmosphere, methane 'burping'²⁴ and deforestation, desertification and environmental damage on the ground and in the seas. If the great potential of 'nature naturing' interlinks the all

²⁴Op-Ed Columnist Nicholas D. Kristof, "The Big Burp Theory of the Apocalypse," *New York Times* (18.4.6) – forwarded to me by Hecate Gould on 18 April 2006. See further <http://>

of being, it is the present-day precariousness and imminent loss of ‘nature natured’ that is the deepest concern of all pagans – both indigenous and Western.

Aldo Leopold

Such organizations as Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth, Earth First!, the Sierra Club, the Dutch Groenfront (Green Front), etc. are ones toward which pagan sympathies will orient. In 1992, Mikhail Gorbachev founded in Geneva the Green Cross International along with an American affiliate, Global Green USA. The focus of Gorbachev’s group is “safely eliminating weapons of mass destruction, stemming climate change, reducing the use of nonrenewable resources and preventing conflicts over fresh water.”²⁵ In its efforts for environmental reform, the Liberal Democrats of the United Kingdom are arguing for the sponsorship of cleaner forms of transportation, the reduction of pollution by cutting waste and promoting recycling, the decrease of energy use and the securing of greater employment of renewable energy sources.²⁶

The cue behind virtually all these institutional efforts toward the development and execution of environmental ethics can be traced to Aldo Leopold’s 1949 essay that addressed ethics as social and ecological guidelines for the individual as participant in “a community of interdependent parts” – a community that is to be understood to include within its boundaries “soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land.”²⁷ In other words, the terrain is to be seen as integral to the cooperative venture of any neighborhood area. Leopold’s land ethic is the progenitor of biocentric or ecocentric forms of environmental ethics. Celia Deane-Drummond defines biocentrism as “a revised focus on the whole complex of living beings” in contrast to anthropocentrism or the exclusive focus on humanity,²⁸ and she contrasts the two opposing philosophies of nature as ones “between mechanism and organicism, reductionism and holism, dualism and unity of mind and nature, reason and intuition/feeling, instrumentalism and intrinsic value, alienation and

www.realclimate.org/ (“Kristof on the Apocalypse” 19.4.6): <http://www.realclimate.org/index.php/archives/2006/04/kristof-on-the-apocalypse/> (accessed 27 July 2014).

²⁵Hoge (2004). In 1997, Gorbachev himself declared, “I believe in the cosmos . . . *nature is my god*. To me, *nature is sacred*. Trees are my temples and forests are my cathedrals.” (“Nature is my God: an interview with Fred Master,” *Resurgence: An International Forum for Ecological and Spiritual Thinking* 184, Sept.-Oct. 1997:14f – cited in Taylor 2010:176 with Taylor’s emphasis.) See also <http://izquotes.com/quote/232663> (accessed 27 July 2014)

²⁶Campbell (2005).

²⁷Leopold (1970:239).

²⁸Deane-Drummond (2004:29). Taylor (2005:598) defines biocentrism as “life-centered ethics;” ecocentrism, as “ecosystem-centered ethics.”

primordial harmony of being.”²⁹ Leopold himself argues that “Conservation is getting nowhere because it is incompatible with our Abrahamic concept of land. We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect.”³⁰

Pagan ethics naturally encompass biocentrism, and pagans almost invariably incline toward the organic, holistic, intuitional and emotional as the foundations of intrinsic value. Nevertheless, someone like Mark Henderson will argue that “Nature . . . is a poor foundation for ethics. . . . A morality based on Nature would be cruel indeed.”³¹ Henderson cites bioethicists Giuseppe Testa and John Harris from the journal *Science*: “There is no *a priori* reason to prefer the natural, for the natural *per se* is morally neutral.”³² The argument in Henderson’s case has to do with objections to embryo donation, surrogacy, embryonic stem cell research, therapeutic cloning, GM crops, modern medicine and the like as *unnatural* – as meddling with nature.³³ He concludes that invoking Mother Nature in such arguments will have little to do with rational discussion over the ethical implications of scientific advances and their safety, necessity and unintended consequences. Nevertheless, someone like Bron Taylor (2010:31) argues that Leopold “is as good as anyone at drawing . . . out an evolutionary ethic [from] nature,” though he finds there to be a deep biodiversity priority that is lacking in the actuality of present-day pagan practice.

Nature as Dynamic

Put in the way that Henderson has, most pagans are likely to agree. More dangerous to a pagan way of thinking than the reductionistic analysis of science is what “Glenn Scherer reports in the online environmental journal *Grist*, [namely, that] millions of Christian fundamentalists believe that environmental destruction is not only to

²⁹Deane-Drummond (2004:30).

³⁰Leopold (1970:xix). See further, Taylor (2010:31).

³¹Henderson (2004).

³²Ibid.

³³The pursuit of the unnatural is, from a deep-pagan perspective, the goal of gnosticism. Much of this last survived in the discipline of alchemy popular especially during the Renaissance with its efforts “to replicate or improve on nature.” The alchemical pursuit has as much to do with the transformation of the soul, its emancipation from the earthly, although it was conducted under the auspices of metaphor as well as attempts toward actual transmutations of matter. A basic pagan approach concerning transformation is to conform to the natural evolutionary processes of the world rather than resort to artificial interventions that aim to change nature itself. See the *New York Times*’ Edward Rothstein’s review of William R. Newman’s *Promethean Ambitions: Alchemy and the Quest to Perfect Nature* (*International Herald Tribune*, 2 August 2004).

be disregarded but hastened as a sign of the coming apocalypse.”³⁴ Nevertheless, Henderson raises an important consideration for pagans over the approach to ethics via an orientation that cherishes nature as sacred. To be sure, Henderson refers to Nature rather than nature, but the underlying question concerning the honoring of ‘Mother Nature’ and ethical behavior remains.

The answer, however, is to recognize that nature is not static. If it is to be foundational to ethical pursuit, it is as a nature that is progressive and evolutionary, that is, as a background that supports human advance and growth into maturity. Pagans will not deny that such naturals as cancer, Aids, nightshade, cyanide, strychnine, rape, murder and infanticide are to be avoided and combated within the parameters of ethical choice, but the pagan view of nature is of something much larger, infinitely larger, than as a mere resource and amoral provider. Nature operates on a pleasure-pain principle, and human or pagan freedom rests on choosing and cultivating the pleasurable over the painful whenever feasible and with the minimum of long-term negative consequences. Nature becomes for a pagan not only a physical resource but also a spiritual one. As an aesthetic wish if none other, pagans endeavor to model their behavior to natural rhythms – joyously triumphant in ascent; serenely acquiescent in descent; eternally hopeful in renewal. Pagan ethics are not based *on* nature, but nature affords the pagan the self-responsibility for the creation and development of a humanitarian and ecological ethos.

Nevertheless, whatever the magnitude of nature may be, as children and subsequent stewards of the earth, the natural world of our planet is one to which pagans are especially sensitive. In this sense, pagans and environmentalists the world over applaud all efforts toward ecological restoration – from less abandonment to rote and unnecessary consumerism, “clean coal” technology,³⁵ questioning the impact and/or benefits of genetically modified (GM) crops,³⁶ launching “a corporate responsibility index . . . to encourage firms to measure and control their impact on society and the environment in which they operate,”³⁷ to the corporate world’s development

³⁴Bill Moyers, “There is No Tomorrow,” *The Star Tribune* (30 January 2005): <http://www.ddh.nl/pipermail/wereldcrisis/2005.txt> (accessed 23 January 2006). While the apocalypse-wishing element of Christianity is often criticized and considered dangerous by pagans, it is important to note that many radical greens hold that humans are little more than cockroaches infesting the cosmos, especially as a plague upon the earth, and that the collapse of human civilization is necessary before terrestrial life can become re-harmonized.

³⁵Bob Sechler, “Scientists crank up volume in push for clean coal plants,” *The Wall Street Journal* (Thursday, 12 January 2006:4).

³⁶“Ten Years of Genetically Modified Crops Fail to Deliver Benefits to Africa,” African Center for Biosafety and Friends of the Earth Nigeria, 10 January 2006: http://www.biosafetyafrica.net/_DOCS/PressReleaseACB_FoENigeria.pdf (accessed 16 January 2006). “Ten years after the first significant planting of Genetically Modified (GM) crops there are no apparent benefits for consumers, farmers or the environment, . . . there has been no impact on hunger and poverty . . . the reality of the last ten years shows that the safety of GM crops cannot be ensured and that these crops are neither cheaper nor better quality.”

³⁷Andrew Stone, “Profit from running an ethical firm,” *The Sunday Times – Business* (29 August 2004). Vide Alton (2012).

of a new environmental policy to address environmental degradation and climate change.³⁸ Even if there are profits to be made in the green energy sector, pagans are grateful and supportive of all actions by humans that do not augment the “running down [of] nature’s capital.”³⁹ The protests against the G7 or G5 or WTO, etc. that have occurred in Montreal, Genoa, Seattle, New York, Barcelona and elsewhere have been protests against a closed and private multi-corporate club that has no ingrained provisions for decision-making based on ethical responsibility rather than profit calculations. The quasi-state reality of the multinational corporation as an independent and uncontrolled entity – one dedicated to profit with little or no ethical imperatives of restraint – has been seen by pagans and environmentalists as perhaps the greatest obstacle in overcoming the ecological crisis of the planet.⁴⁰ To the degree that there is beginning to be a business awareness of the real financial costs involved by ignoring both the environment and those who are dependent upon it, there are some hopeful signs for the pagan who respects the earth and celebrates her as sacred.

Along with environmental devastation that is resulting from corporate-led humanity, there is of course the whole issue of human overpopulation accompanied by the scarcity of land for humanity’s domesticates. As the expansion of human settlement continues unabated and places like the rainforests, etc. are converted to pasture-lands and the like, the very bio-diversity that is both the fuel and

³⁸Traci Hukill, “The Greening of Goldman Sachs” (Tuesday 3 January 2006). <http://www.alternet.org/envirohealth/29901/> (accessed 4 January 2006). According to the new environmental policy, the investment bank “Goldman Sachs will:

- Disclose the greenhouse gas emissions of all its operations;
- Make \$1 billion available for investments in renewable energy;
- Set up a think tank to identify other lucrative green markets;
- Work on public policy measures relating to climate change;
- Conduct more rigorous assessments of its new projects’ impacts on the environment and on indigenous people;
- Refuse to finance extractive projects in World Heritage sites or any projects that violate the environmental laws of the host country.”

³⁹Ibid. As Hukill (*loc. cit.*) puts it, “Maybe someday corporate reverence for nature will be unsullied by filthy lucre, but for now it may be appropriate to stop and gratefully reflect on a minor miracle that has taken place,” namely, the recognition that environmental interest is in the interest of business.

⁴⁰Shiller (2005) makes the interesting observation in discussing financial theory as the cornerstone of modern business education: “nowhere is ethics seen as a centerpiece or even integral part of the curriculum.” Business school ethics courses seem to be devoid of actual moral content; this, along with overspecialization at the university level as well as the lack of encouragement of inspirational high-mindedness, “can lead to an ethical disconnect.” Shiller explains that being taught in the business world to calculate one’s own advantage ceaselessly, that is, maximizing one’s own “expected utility,” engenders total selfish behavior and little more. He concludes that “we should be reminded that ethical behavior for many business people must involve overcoming their learned biases.” To this end, he suggests integrating “business education into a broader historical and psychological context.”

fruit of natural evolution appears increasingly to be on a terminal decline. This environmental deterioration is attributed by Donald Worster to a transcendental ideology that has become the handmaiden to imperialistic capitalism. Nevertheless, he stresses the pagan- or counter-perceptions of the forces and places of nature as being alive and sacred.⁴¹ This animistic current he grounds in evolutionary theory and thereby sets a paradigm for drawing out from it a biocentric practice of ethics as an opposing voice to industrial/secular appropriation of nature. According to Taylor, Worster has “applauded how Aldo Leopold and many others drew on understandings of ecological interdependence as a basis for values”.⁴² Humanity’s expanding population is deplored by Worster and other biocentric ethicists, but to date no one has yet been able to offer a feasible or acceptable solution to any viable reversal. Augmenting the issue is the growth of multinational corporations not only as ‘persons’ in their own right but as virtual feudal overlords with little concern for their subjects and with the ‘winner-takes-all’ attitude that regards the natural environment foremost as a resource to be exploited.

Protest

But the corporate world is only the more prominent tip of an iceberg of public attitudes toward the natural world. Terrence Blacker has focused on the dendrophobia of the Church of England.⁴³ In the parish of Fair Oaks, a yew tree first planted in 1864 was felled after 140 years because the local vicar was frightened of its poisonous berries, of children falling off its branches, of pensioners tripping over its roots and of its thick trunk and boughs providing shelter for lurking pedophiles. The so-called hysterical tree-fear is one that has swept much of the Western world. In Britain, there have been various protest activities and organized efforts to protect the destruction of trees and forests from the Oxlea Woods Campaign to the emergence of the Dongas Tribe.⁴⁴ More recently, to prevent the felling of six hectares of trees in a Limburg forest, a 5-week occupation by nature-enthusiasts, anti-military protestors and local residents was brought to an end by police intervention.⁴⁵ In many cases, such environmental campaigns are pagan – often employing a combination

⁴¹Worster (1994 [1977]:13, 15 *et passim*).

⁴²Taylor (2010:210; see further pp 285f).

⁴³Blacker (2004).

⁴⁴For this last, see McKay (1996:127–58). The Dongas tribe formed in 1992 – its name deriving according to McKay from “the landscape the tribe came together at the camp to preserve, Dongas being a Matabele name [that was] originally adopted in the nineteenth century by Winchester College teachers for the medieval pathways that criss-cross the Downs” (p. 136). See further, Alexandra Plows in Taylor (2005:504–506) for more on the Donga Tribe.

⁴⁵Dave van Ginhoven, “Anti-NATO forest siege cut down,” *The Times: Hague, Amsterdam, Rotterdam* (Vrijdag 13 Januari 2006:3).

of ‘eco-magickal’ practices in conjunction with their activism: for instance, the cleaning-up of a holy well in North Penwith; protesting the proposed road bypasses in Lancaster, Blackburn and Newbury; campaigning against the Criminal Justice Bill; and supporting such organizations as the Wildlife Trust and the Freedom Network.⁴⁶

The Amoralism of Nature

But echoing Henderson, Deane-Drummond also questions the use of nature as a, or the, source for morality. “. . . using ecology as a foundation for ethics is itself fraught with difficulties. Indeed, the divorce of romanticized versions of philosophies of nature from practical ecological consideration undermines their credibility still further.”⁴⁷ Deane-Drummond aims for a treatment of the natural world from a Christian perspective. To this end, she turns to a virtue ethic but one, in her case, modified by Aquinas rather than going directly to Aristotle. In either event, she finds the foundation in prudence or wisdom.⁴⁸ Pagans would certainly agree that care for the environment and judicious ecological management of the earth and her resources are wise pursuits – especially as our survival as a species is largely dependent on these.⁴⁹ But in the heptatheonic schema of virtue-values rather than the cardinal virtues of the Greeks, it is the sacredness of nature that is paramount, and in this respect pagan behavior is motivated primarily by the concerns of health and honor. To be sure, such groups as Dragon and Dongas as well as countless other pagan eco-activist efforts combine spiritual exercise and pragmatic action to achieve their ends. This is often termed eco-magic(k). If the magical side is to be labeled as romantic, it is employed in conjunction with serious, strategic and hard work and not as a substitute for it. The care and protection of the earth and the labors involved toward the prevention of irreversible damage to her are motivated in pagandom by

⁴⁶Along with the Dongas Tribe, the London-headquartered Dragon Environmental Group is among the foremost expressions of an ecologically oriented pagan spirituality. Typically, both Dragon and Dongas emphasize the use of ritual ceremony based on ancient myth or what has been criticized as an ‘atavistic taste for supernaturalism’. See McKay (1996:147). For more on Dragon, see Adrian Harris in Taylor (2005:506f).

⁴⁷Deane-Drummond (2004:30).

⁴⁸Ibid., but for Deane-Drummond, prudence refers to the “practical grounding for ethical decision-making,” whereas wisdom is “its theological counterpart” that encourages the grounding of prudent grounding in “fellowship with God” (p. 44). Later (pp. 45–48), she connects an ethics of nature with justice in particular – justice in Aquinas’ sense as a virtue of the will. Without the Christian teleology, justice here compares to a pagan understanding of honor and worship. Deane-Drummond also cites courage, temperance and wonder as necessary in forming an environmental ethic.

⁴⁹What the human species is facing or is about to face on the planet earth is massive calamity. There will be, hopefully, some survivors. My belief is that, because of their own innate closeness to the earth and organics, the pagan will become one of the major future sources for human survival.

the concern with health – one’s own, one’s children’s, one’s loved ones’, that of the human community and that of the planet and the planetary community as a whole. The implicit holism of health, its sacrosanct essence, ensures that any action on its behalf is an act of worship. One can behave in manners that are conducive to the furtherance of ecological health and well-being without necessarily being consciously and prudently aware of what one is doing. If there is a deliberate consciousness involved on occasion, so much the better, but for a pagan, honor takes precedence even over wisdom.

Environmental ethics for the pagan, as for virtually anyone, are a complicated issue. Once again, there is the question of what is nature. What is a natural equilibrium or balance? While Leopold’s understanding of Land Ethics as applying to viable local communities has itself become increasingly doubted,⁵⁰ there has been a growing awareness that nature is not stable, that there is an inherent precariousness to natural ecosystems, and that the biotic whole involves a more cosmopolitan situation than a strictly communitarian one. Equilibrium is understood now more as a temporary state with flux being the reality more often than not over the stability of any allegedly closed, insulated and self-regulating condition. Moreover, the ‘wild’ nature ideal as the goal of an environmental ethos that is or could be independent of human influence is becoming recognized by the emerging philosophies of nature as a counter-productive fiction. The Gaia hypothesis of James Lovelock and the ecological science that has descended from it are important developments in the move away from secular, instrumental approaches to nature.

Gaia Theory

In 1979, Lovelock postulated that the earth along with its inhabitants is a single living organism, a self-sustaining and self-regulating system. Although the Gaia hypothesis and, subsequently, theory have been largely appropriated by New Age thought as teleological holism, the implicit idea has also played an informing role in much earth-based spirituality. We find it in particular with ecofeminism and ecofeminist ethics. Deanne-Drummond, for one, critiques Gaia spirituality and Gaia science as not able to foster a sustainable foundation for environmental ethics and favors instead virtue ethics as the means toward an ethics of nature.⁵¹ She allows the possibility of ecofeminist ethics and Gaia spirituality if and when these do not resort to the essentialist position that overly identifies women and

⁵⁰See, e.g., Callicott (2002) and, for a critical assessment of Leopold, Dale R. McCullough: <http://www.myxyz.org/phmurphy/dog/Aldo%20Leopold%20Presentations.pdf> (accessed 4 April 2014) – *passim* and, especially concerning ‘The Land Ethic Paradigm’, the section “Where Do We Go From Here?” (pp 35–43/52).

⁵¹“Virtue, in its primary focus on agents, forces a degree of self-reflection that is not always achievable if the problems are identified as external or alien to ordinary human lives”: Deane-Drummond (2004:225).

nature, do not resort to denying Gaia's ambiguity in relation to human persons, and do not subsume individual freedom and biodiverse values beneath the banner of hyper-interconnectedness. Deanne-Drummond's Christian-situated virtue ethics is unacceptable to pagan-inspired spirituality, and pagans do not see wisdom as some feminine aspect of a creator God that has impregnated the world from its inception. While the pagan debate divides between biocentric and modified forms of anthropocentric forms of environmental ethics,⁵² it is united in recognizing the need to counter egocentric individualism. In general, in paganism, there is an acceptance of virtue ethics but one that is free from transcendental impositions and justifications. The ethical person is one who acts ethically in respect to both the locally interdependent community and the global, equally interdependent, cosmopolitan community. The sacredness of the earth and matter is no reason to resort to non-scientific, specifically unscientific, rationale. Instead, it becomes all the more the reason to employ judicious scrutiny in how we approach our planet, its biodiversity and the various human and non-human communities that share it.

Bron Taylor refers to the 'pagan environmentalist' movement as one that reveres an 'inspired' world – a conglomerate of countercultural spiritualities informed by mystical experiences and pantheistic/animistic perception.⁵³ Of course, not all contemporary earth-based and nature-based spirituality is pagan, but the general overlap is a persistently detectable feature, and in the specific context of green spiritualities, Taylor finds that today, unlike perhaps a quarter of a century earlier, "it is clear that *the mystical is also political because the earth is* [now considered] *sacred.*"⁵⁴ The idea itself that nature possesses intrinsic value was described by Arne Naess, the Norwegian philosopher, as 'deep ecology'.⁵⁵ While some deep ecologists argue that spirituality is inimical to green political aims, both pantheistic and animistic spiritualities are prominent among its earliest proponents as well as among deep ecology environmentalists and bioregionalists of today. In general, pagan earth-based spirituality has been inspired by various indigenous cultures (Native American, Aboriginal, etc.), through the writings of people like Spinoza, Emerson, Thoreau, John Muir, Leopold, Gary Snyder, etc., via mountain veneration and/or desert experience and additionally through hallucinogenic epiphany. While radical environmentalism has many non-pagan and even secular dimensions, it is largely pagan spirituality that constitutes its catalytic momentum.

⁵²For the position of 'enlightened anthropocentrism', see Berry (2003:89) who considers this as the most feasible basis for the development of environmental ethics because the human individual and community are factored into the equation concerning natural equilibrium and change.

⁵³Taylor (2001a:178) and (2010:14f *et passim*).

⁵⁴Ibid. (2001a) p. 179 (author's italics).

⁵⁵Naess (1973); see also Taylor (2001a:189n13).

Albert Hoffman

In connection to the psychotropic role in the development of pagan perceptions of the earth's sacrality, it is interesting to consider the words of the Swiss pharmacist, Albert Hoffman, shortly before his 100th birthday. Hoffman discovered the hallucinogenic properties of lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD-25) in 1943. He has referred to the drug that spawned the hippie counterculture of the 1960s as 'my problem child'. In an interview with Craig Smith, Hoffman stressed humanity's oneness with nature and the precariousness involved with ignoring that fact. "It's very, very dangerous to lose contact with living nature."⁵⁶ He had said virtually the same thing to me when we conversed during the October 1998 Fourth Biannual Psychoactivity Conference that was held in Amsterdam.

In the big cities, there are people who have never seen living nature, all things are products of humans. . . . The bigger the town, the less they see and understand nature.⁵⁷

For Hoffman, LSD is something that might assist people to reconnect to the universe.

⁵⁶Smith (2006).

⁵⁷Ibid. While referring to a mystical experience he had had as a child, Hoffman recalled, "I was completely astonished by the beauty of nature." He added to Smith that any natural scientist who was not a mystic was not really a natural scientist. In an email circulated on the 24th of September 2005, the unknown author, self-identified as a chemist himself, reports the following: "On Friday, April 16, 1943, in the course of recrystallizing a few hundredths of a gram of LSD for analysis, Dr. Hofmann reports that he 'was seized by a peculiar sensation of vertigo and restlessness. Objects as well as the shape of my associates in the laboratory appeared to undergo optical changes. I was unable to concentrate on my work. In a dreamlike state, I left for home, where an irresistible urge to lie down and sleep overcame me. Light was so intense as to be unpleasant. I drew the curtains and immediately fell into a peculiar state of "drunkenness," characterized by an exaggerated imagination. With my eyes closed, fantastic pictures of extraordinary plasticity and intensive color seemed to surge towards me. After two hours, this state gradually subsided and I was able to eat dinner with a good appetite.'" The author of this email, however, surmises on the unlikely synchronicities that were at work on this occasion: the unexplained decision by Hoffman to re-visit and re-synthesize the chemical compound he had first created and dismissed five years earlier, the author's conviction that, as a Swiss chemist, Hoffman's laboratory would not have been anything but immaculate, that "the form of LSD that he was working with was a salt of tartaric acid, which is not absorbed across the skin," that "the intensity of mental effects reported by Hofmann usually occurs only after taking a fairly large dose of LSD, perhaps nearly one-tenth of a milligram – Yet Hofmann says they subsided after only 'two hours'," and the author then wonders, "Is it possible that Hofmann never accidentally ingested LSD at all? His childhood visionary experiences suggest that he may have been prone to spontaneous states of altered consciousness. What if he had a spontaneous visionary experience on that Friday afternoon while he was working with LSD?" It is exactly this kind of synchronicity-logic that frequently characterizes pagans' perception of nature's inherent mystery and sacredness. As do the gods, the elements and substances of intrinsic value speak to us even if and when we are not particularly cognizant of them.

Ritual

Neither Hoffman nor most pagans would insist that the use of entheogens is the *only* way to re-experience nature as something living and sacred. But for contemporary pagans, the mind-altering substance has indeed played a significantly historical role. More broadly, it is personal experience in general and music, drumming and dancing specifically that serve as the vehicles by which pagans and others re-discover and augment their bond with the natural world. The real difficulty for ‘pagan environmentalism’ as it encompasses both bioregional and radical environmental movements is the legitimacy of pagan ritualizing.⁵⁸ As with Dragon and Dongas, the practice of eco-magic(k) – whether collectively or individually, publicly or otherwise covertly, in wilderness or urban settings – is frequently part of pagan spiritual expression. Ritual for a pagan is often the central aspect of worship, at least worship in its formalized sense. The purport of virtually all earthen pagan theurgic practice is to dissolve any divide between spirituality and the body – a practice that may be assisted by such sacraments as hallucinogens or alcohol but is certainly not dependent on them.

Pagan ritual, as central as it is – at least currently, is not without its critics from within the pagan world. Caroline Wise, at a Dragon conference in London, deplored the stamping of feet upon the ground during a stone circle rite at the Long Compton “Rollright Stones” near Oxford that terrified the animal life of the area. There can be a collective mindlessness that appears to be counter-productive to earthen spiritual goals of re-establishing a sensitive interconnection with the planet and its non-human life. The appropriation from various indigenous cultures – such as the use of the Amerindian sweat lodge and/or vision quest – has also been frequently condemned.

But within this eclectic mix of input from different traditions and innovative design, an overall pagan inclination is toward the development of earth-based ritual experimentation for purposes of both personal and planetary healing. Shamanic trance in particular is understood as a process that “facilitates leaps of moral imagination.”⁵⁹ In a pagan context, the value of embodiment is invariably paramount. Ritual becomes a means to develop increasing awareness of environmental defilement from deforestation, water pollution, atmospheric poisoning and over population. Through the spiritual cultivation that is implicit in religious ritual, pagans seek the mindfulness that is imperative to resist ecological ruination. Ritual itself is to be seen as part of the campaign for direct action based on the concern for planetary biota – action and activist protest that rest on the pagan individual and group recognizing his/her/its kinship with nature and the evolutionary drive toward increased sentience. While paganism can – and often does – embrace the magical, the altered state of consciousness, the supernatural and paranormal, Gaia is increasingly being

⁵⁸For the divergent wings of green spirituality, see, in particular, Taylor (2001b, 2010).

⁵⁹Taylor (2001b:229).

addressed less as a goddess per se and more as a living, biological system or community of persons that merits, even demands, protection and restoration as the central act of pagan worship. Veneration certainly includes ritual and ritualized form, but for today's pagan who faces the irreversible despoliation of earth and her natural resources green activism has become the central act of religious expression. And in this growing maturity by the pagan movement, science is becoming less and less cast as the stereotypic and automatic enemy but is increasingly approached and encouraged as potential ally and resource to be employed judiciously toward saving, rather than losing, the planet.

Science

The complexity of environmentalism meets us on all fronts. While industrial technology that has been sponsored through scientific discovery and advance has certainly been among the chief culprits of anti-ecology, it is nevertheless science that may be able to provide us with the knowledge and ability to rectify the mistakes we have made and restore the natural rhythms of the biotic sphere. Science in and of itself, like nature, is amoral. It can be harnessed and used as a tool and ally as much as it has been employed as an adjunct for any greedy concern with profit without attention to undue consequence. While Luddite sympathies may be found across the pagan spectrum, by-and-large pagan sensibilities of today are increasingly recognizing the need for scientific insight if we are to steer our planet toward a viable and sustainable future.

Care

Nevertheless, when we confront the specifics, we encounter as much difference of mind among pagans as we are likely to find among humanity in general. As our world appears to be stampeding toward ecological mindlessness, over-population and cultural/political division, the question that will increasingly emerge is why should anyone necessarily care about others, especially others that are not known parts of one's own life? We are simply a species of animals – breeding rampantly and, yes, unreasonably. Why should I or anyone be concerned about other breeders and their offspring?

The ethical answer to these questions is more often than not a matter of personal choice. For a pagan, it may be described as aesthetic and based on the intuitive feeling of universal and physical interconnectedness. For a Christian, the answer lies more with an acceptance of the omniscient design of a posited creator-God. But at the end of the day, it will always come down to the survival of one's own group. If that assembly can be extended to include others in general, so much the better, but it is a person's kinship and cultural grouping that is the most important to the

individual concerned. This is the real appeal of bioregionalism as “an anarchistic, decentralist ideology that envisions ‘participatory democracy’ within political units redrawn along the contours of differing ecosystem types.”⁶⁰ If our entire world could be re-constructed in this fashion, perhaps this would be the most feasible solution, but in the face of today’s complexity and conflict of interests this is unlikely. Instead, the viable way forward must occur through a cosmopolitan and/or ‘terrapolitan’ recognition that we are all in this together – a recognition that allows and makes room for difference but, at the same time, is cognizant of global considerations and how local events can and do affect the whole. The biocentric sentiment that characterizes environmental ethics at present is vitally important, and there appears to be within pagan-thinking milieus a mushrooming belief that the biotic community is one, spiritually interconnected, world.

Animal Rights

But the question that immediately arises here is on where to draw the line? Is outer space as important as the home front? And, if not, then where is the border on impinging significance to be placed? The issue perhaps becomes clearest in its thorniest with the question of animal rights. If we live in a sacred cosmos, if we are part of an interconnected holistic planet, what is the intrinsic value of non-human life and how must or should we behave accordingly? Are animals primarily providers for human needs, or do they possess intrinsic value and inherent rights as creatures of sentience with capabilities for suffering? The pagan world divides completely on these questions. Though there is a general agreement that the protection of species and their habitats is important, when it comes to food consumption itself, there is a much greater disagreement. Academic author Graham Harvey pursues a strictly vegan diet that does not entail inflicting pain upon animals. Pagan elder Marian Green, by contrast, adamantly refuses to relinquish carnivorous pleasures. There are vegetarian and demi-vegetarian positions between these extremes, but the demarcation line designating mammalian species from other non-human life forms or particular kinds of mammals from others (e.g., whales, dolphins, porpoises, seals, monkeys, apes, bears, wolves, dogs, cats, lions, leopards, tigers, panthers, pigs, cattle and sheep)⁶¹ is difficult to determine. Deanne-Drummond, for instance, in her chapter on ‘Animal Ethics’, never touches on human efforts to reduce or eliminate rodent populations in homes and cities, but, however controversial in some circles, someone like Eleanor Gadon (California Institute of Integral Studies) has declared that there are indeed hierarchies of life and that vermin do not have automatically the same rights to accommodation as does the

⁶⁰Taylor (2001a:183).

⁶¹See Singer (1993:132–134).

human.⁶² The wider issue of animal ethics concerns the use of animals in science and experimentation (e.g., testing, vivification, etc.), the commercial industry of animal agriculture and the hunting and trapping of animals as sport.⁶³

These very vagaries concerning the moral consideration of animals and the wide range of difference of opinion within the pagan and human communities leads me to question the very viability of the ecocentric view that posits itself over and against the anthropocentric.⁶⁴ There are as many humanistic roots to paganism as there are naturalistic ones. The idea of stewardship of the earth may be condemned as a form of hierarchical speciesism, and, likewise, the extension by humans of moral consideration to animals through compassion and generosity is placed under the same label. But as a species, our onus is to carve out our own space in the cosmos. If we can succeed to do this without serious damage to our host environment, we are still serving our own best interests. Human valuing is integral to any valuing of the world and cannot be detached from it. Our moral responsibility is not to reduce nature to simply the status of a commodity, but our virtue-value of freedom allows us at the same time no *a priori* or prescribed dictates in what we individually choose to do and how we envisage value allocation. Our primary emotional responsibility is to our kin and immediate community, our primary aesthetic responsibility is to our species as a whole – whether this is spiritually anthropocentric or otherwise, and our secondary aesthetic responsibilities are those we voluntarily extend through generosity, compassion and an intrinsic sense of honor to non-human life forms as well as to the gift of nature as our nurturing environment both locally and as a whole. To a pagan, physical and spiritual sustenance are not separate and divided but are integrally interrelated. We draw spiritual strength from our physical surroundings, and, by the art of respecting, we bequeath spiritual enhancement back to the tangible, material world in which we live, forage and seek to grow through reflective contemplation. Paganism flourishes in a symbiotic union between the corporeal and the sacred operating mutually as a feedback looping process in which the participating individual agents select and express freely – or at least as freely as humanly and humanely possible – their personal preferences and values.

⁶²Personal communication. For Bron Taylor (personal communication of 6.3.14), Gadon's attitude contravenes the 'live and let live' philosophy of Leopold's Land Ethic.

⁶³For instance, the French gastronomic delight of foie gras is under attack by the Council of Europe which issued a directive in 1998 declaring that no animal is to be "provided with food or liquid in a manner . . . which may cause unnecessary suffering or injury." The objection to the force-feeding of ducks and geese is bitterly opposed by Gallic culinary culture. See, in this case, "France defies EU to continue force-feeding birds for foie gras," *The Guardian* (18 September 2004:17).

⁶⁴According to Berry (2003:89), an "*enlightened anthropocentrism* may be the best approach for forming proper environmental attitudes" (my italics). I argue that a non-hegemonic anthropocentrism embraces a pagan humanism that unabashedly affirms our potential and growth along with our being a part of our planet's biotic community in its healthy and functioning wholeness. Accordingly, I reject the notion that anthropocentrism and biocentrism are opposed. As humans, our very ability to flourish as a species depends on maintaining an ecocentric biodiversity. As a collective, we have responsibilities to other beings and systems as well as to ourselves.

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Part V
The Ethical Conversation

Chapter 14

Pagan Ethics vis-à-vis the Western Ethical Tradition

In this chapter, I wish to look again at idolatry as well as to a few additional and more recent contributions to the ongoing ethical debate (e.g., Habermas, Levinas, Santayana and humanism). A brief reexamination and re-appreciation of Spinoza, Hume, Kant and Nietzsche along with Grayling, Mackie and MacIntyre will also be included to summarize their importance to ethical study, while the framework of the chapter will center on the pivotal ethical issues of *arête* ‘excellence’ and *eudaimonia* ‘happiness’. I am not interested here in social policy in connection with something like blasphemy but rather in the freedoms of expression – including idolatrous worship – in which a pagan may wish to engage. Any such expression, however, for it to be in accord with heptatheonic virtue-values, will still require a sensitivity to the feelings and practices of others.

Idolatry Revisited

In their *Desirable God*, with the subtitle *Our Fascination with Images, Idols and New Deities*, Roger Burggraeve, Johan De Tavenier, Didier Pollefeyt and Jo Hanssens furnish a twenty-first century discussion of idolatry. They provide a further and surprisingly astute perspective on the controversy and dynamics of corpo-spirituality and, hence, a pagan ethics that I argue may be formulated in connection with idolatrous understanding. The authors rightly warn that even the prohibition against idols – as well as idolatry itself – can become a source for violence.¹ They allow that “fanatic exclusivism, with or without its violent

¹Burggraeve et al. (2003). “. . . violence from one religion towards the other is actually not far off [when one] considers ‘his’ god as the only one, the best, the greatest and the strongest, [and] all to [sic.] readily claims the ‘right’ not only to ignore the other gods, but also to reject and ridicule them as if they were ‘nothing’” (p. 18). The editors call for “a suspicion towards an absolutizing of the prohibition against images and thus towards an absolute, all-destroying, violent iconoclasm”

intolerance, . . . rears its head in every religious experience . . .”² They also accept that humans possess a natural inclination to depict everything, both the visible and the invisible. While Marcel Poorthuis recognizes that ‘idolatry’ as a word signifies the normative rather than the descriptive,³ the editors convey further that idolatry is an instance of yearning, that the idol is “an expression of one’s own desire,”⁴ and that the natural use of images in worship is engendered as an act of passion. Coming from a Catholic tradition of liberation theology, the authors represented in Burggraeve et al.’s book question much of the prevailingly established attitudes toward idolatrous behavior, but this questioning, as commendable as it is, still finally manages to become tailored back into a vindication of their own tradition.

Burggraeve, inspired by Plato, seeks to distinguish between the Greek *eidoon* and *eidolon*, respectively, ‘image’ and ‘idol’. For a pagan, they may be different but not in the sense that Burggraeve understands. If idols are “sculpted images” that afford “a concrete, localizable and visible point for worship, ritual and celebration,”⁵ they are no more or less ‘shadows’ or *portals* than are icons, representations or pictures, and the artificial distinction between *veneration* and *adoration* is simply an unnecessary fabrication to a perspective that is founded upon the dynamics of pagan worship.⁶

For Burggraeve et al., “Idolatry is simply an expression of the narcissistic striving for omnipotence of the human person.”⁷ Even further, “Idolatry consists in divinizing and absolutizing a worldly, created, finite reality.”⁸ This divinization and absolutizing of manmade objects is the core of liberation theology’s attack on pagan idolatry. Despite the fact that few pagans seek to do this, the argument alleges that the idolater endeavors to make the divine transparent and com-

(p. 28). In Ellenbogen and Tugendhaft (2011: 60), William John Thomas Mitchell claims that iconoclasm “betrays a kind of fearful symmetry, mirroring its own stereotype of idolatry in its emphasis on human sacrifice and terrorism, the latter understood as violence against the innocent, and the staging of spectacular acts of symbolic violence and cruelty.”

²Ibid. 19 (Burggraeve). For pagans, early Christians were terrorists.

³Burggraeve et al. (2003: 42).

⁴Ibid. 266.

⁵Burggraeve et al. (2003: 22).

⁶Ibid. 77 f. Indeed, thanks to Gertrude Stein, for the pagan, an icon is an idol is an icon. For the Roman Catholic Church, however, due to the ubiquitous veneration of saints, often in three-dimensional form, it is imperative to differentiate veneration from adoration – with this last being allowed only to be directed toward God.

⁷Burggraeve et al. (2003: 265). Elsewhere, Poorthuis considers that idolatry is a form of adultery (43), while Burggraeve recalls Jean-Luc Marion’s understanding of idolatry as “an absolutizing way of looking at the visible” (86f). Jürgen Manemann holds that the misconceptive nature of idolatry links it to ideology, and, whereas an idol is a fetish, idolatry is understood as “a form of mimesis which makes itself like the environment” (97).

⁸Ibid. 31.

pletely comprehensible in an image, representation or concept.⁹ The polytheistic understanding of godhead alone would seem to preclude this possibility. Allowing that worship or veneration of the lingam of Shiva Vishvanath in Varanasi or the statue of Vishnu Venkateshwara in Tirupati often crosses the boundaries of frenzied devotion, few Hindus would conceive that the deity is wholly embodied by the idol. The Freudian contention that idolatry is a narcissistic process of idealization overlooks completely that the idol is approached as a viaduct in much the same way that the Roman Catholic approaches his or her hagiographic icons. The idol is instead a localizing receptacle – a locus for the encounter of the magical presence of deity, of *darshan* or numinous witnessing, and not the whole of the deity himself/herself.¹⁰

Pagans of today, at least contemporary pagans of the West, have the same ethical concerns as Christians and others, but they reach the humility of service via a completely different route. For a pagan, the generosity of spirit springs from the divinity of an ubiquitous nature, a divine immanence that both saturates and *is* the tangible reality of the world, humanity and sentient life. Paganism's pantheism not only justifies ethical behavior, it also sacralizes the all of everything, and in so doing it allows that any charity and concern for the other is worship of deity.¹¹ Nevertheless, it is important for pagans to recognize, if not their critics as well, that idolatry is not an attempt to evaporate or eliminate the other but is simply an iconic form that brings the other into an immediate orbit that the pagan by

⁹Burggraave et al. (2003: 25). The authors contend that “Something only becomes something absolute when it not only is utterly dominating but also demanding, in the sense that it claims everything exclusively for itself” (31). For a pagan, this last is ironic because it is applicable to the Judeo-Christian or Abrahamic God above all. Drawing on Emmanuel Levinas, the dangers of idolatry for Burggraave's position apply more to the fundamentalist than to the pagan per se, namely, to the absolutizing and idolizing of Scripture (67).

¹⁰From the theological position of Poorthuis, Burggraave and friends, idolatry comprises the root of all moral deviance. Like pride, the idol is an abomination (Prov. 16:5; Deut. 7:26). In being completely humble before God – which for liberation theology translates into serving the humble, the poor, the stressed and the wounded, the Christian forsakes idolatry through the performance of self-giving deeds. In other words, the Christian is being ethical when she/he substantiates the Decalogue. The irony in all this for a pagan is that liberation theology translates the opposition to idolatry into an active concern for the ‘small people’, those who are persecuted – “the vulnerable, the wounded, the outcast and the forgotten” (ibid. 82).

¹¹In Burggraave's take, transcendence is understood only as the further, invisible, different or distant, and the idol is seen to preclude any access to these. The visible and the immediate are rejected as idolatrous (Burggraave et al. 2003: 87). From the Christian perspective, any identification of humanity with divinity is idolatry – “meaning to say humanity would be *reduced* to divinity, at the cost of humanity” (89, my italics). Nevertheless, a pagan might wonder whether the elevation of the persecuted ‘small people’ that occurs with liberation theology is not itself an illustration of the very idolatry that is otherwise condemned. The poor and outcaste become in themselves *idée fixes*.

virtue of her/his spiritual vision as well as the ethical behavior that grounds itself in that vision appreciates in emancipation from biblical distortion and attempt at hegemonic intimidation.¹²

Consequently, idolatry is part of what a pagan cherishes as freedom. In the liberation from outmoded, imposed and stifling ideologies and theologies, the virtue-value of freedom is for a pagan sacrosanct. This freedom is not a New Age or wishy-washy ‘anything goes’ or self-pampering; the full heptatheonic values ensure otherwise. But in delineating its own identity and space, a pagan’s insistence on and call for freedom include the iconoclastic rejections of strictures against both idolatry and blasphemy. The stature of human freedom for the pagan is a daring step into and beyond the void of the cosmos. This is a heroic venture – the audacity to say and do what one basically wills. Nevertheless, a pagan’s code of honor is one that stresses a mindfulness of the other, all others, and consequently the possibility of profaning and disrespecting another’s beliefs. The question of blasphemy has become centralized through the Danish cartoon controversy and Charlie Hebdo. While a pagan insistence on freedom includes the right to free speech, there is equally a call to be mindful and sensitive to the feelings and beliefs of others. There is no easy answer in the conflict that arises when one person’s freedom is understood to blaspheme another person’s holy convictions. What will always be called for is the judiciousness of wisdom – as well as the hope that people will learn to cultivate an indifference that transcends a ready ability to be insulted or offended. A pagan is not constrained by the recognition of his or her gods – a recognition that includes as well discussing the possibility of any faults adhering to deity.¹³ For the aspiring human community, there need be the acknowledgment that Christ and the God of Mohammed are central to great swathes of humanity, but this appreciation ought not prevent the wider discussion of any faults encompassed by either as well as by any other cherished human focus. In this process of daring to discuss and exchange openly, we all need to learn to laugh, and this includes to be able to laugh at ourselves when necessary as well. In laughter, we can learn to be free.¹⁴

¹²For Burggraave (*loc. cit.* 92), the image of God does not coincide “with the majesty of nature that overwhelms us and befalls us” – a much different understanding than the non-biblical faith of a pagan. Curiously, while Manemann perceives idolatry as occurring when a “man sets a work of his own hands in the place of God” (96f), he inadvertently allows the pagan veneration of the tree, rock or spring not to be an instance of idolatrous behavior. He also suggests that “An idol *wants* us to make ourselves in its image” (*ibid.*, my italics).

¹³In respect of the Danish cartoon controversy, Zizek (2006) puts the following perspective forward: “While a true atheist has no need to boost his own stance by provoking believers with blasphemy, he also refuses to reduce the problem of the Muhammad caricatures to one of respect for other’s beliefs. Respect for other’s beliefs as the highest value can mean only one of two things: either we treat the other in a patronizing way and avoid hurting him in order not to ruin his illusions, or we adopt the relativist stance of multiple ‘regimes of truth’, disqualifying as violent imposition any clear insistence on truth.”

¹⁴In this context, we might note that a Christian, Jew and pagan arrive at the pearly gates of heaven. St. Peter interrogates each in turn. “Have you been good?” he asks of the Christian. “Yes, I have been good,” the Christian replies. “O.K.,” St. Peter answers, “you may enter.” The Jew is asked

For the pagan, idolatry can indeed be in part the projection of self onto a reflexive object. If the Jewish Decalogue suggests seminal religious, cultural, social and, especially, ethical implications, the rejection of anti-idolatry by the pagan becomes itself a foundation for moral evaluation and cultural (re-)appreciation. In the beginning of the present work, we asked what are the ethical implications that follow from a deification of self. The comprehension of a pagan godhead, or at least an important part of the pagan godhead that includes the human, might be critiqued as hubristic arrogance. The fundamental answer to this question suggested throughout this book, however, invariably involves what the pagan understands as the inherent and ubiquitous sanctity of nature in the sense of being something both corporeal and intangible – a sanctity that includes both the human and the natural. In other words, a pagan understanding of the divine as nature allows that the human is also divine because the human is both product and part of nature. Deification of self, therefore, is not an instance of excessive pride but one of being naturally natural.

Inasmuch as the ethical is the meeting point for all humanity, it is an interest that transcends all sectarian division. It is for this reason that this book explores the historical contributions made toward ethical thought and reflection – concentrating primarily though not exclusively on pagan writers and thinkers. In the third part of this book, I have concentrated on normative ethics – leaving the issue of meta-ethics to the side. This last, however, still raises interesting questions concerning morality, namely, whether goals or values, consequences or responsibilities, behavior or principles are the more important. There is also the question whether morals are objective or subjective, and if the latter, whether they are emotionally determined or determined by situation and collective attitude. I have sought to demonstrate that ethical values for the pagan are sometimes known intuitively – especially for those who follow in the line of Nietzsche if not Plato as well, but in general they are located through empirical observation and considered to be akin to natural objects.

This last is the position of Aristotle, and in the suggestion of normative values that are expressive of or conducive to a pagan outlook, the Greek philosopher's virtue ethics appear to be the most productive starting point in the development of a comprehensive, feasible and applicable understanding of virtue-values. In terms of final values, classical pagan thought suggests variously wisdom (*sophia*), happiness (*eudaimonia*), pleasure (*hedone*), tranquil pleasure (*ataraxia*), tranquility (*apathia*) and enduring joy (*euphrosyne*) as the ultimate teleological goals in achieving the good life of the *summum bonum*. Aristotle himself opts for *eudaimonia* – and in terms of heptatheonic ethics, happiness may be thought as including pleasure and/or various forms of harmonious serenity. For some, the route to happiness is through wisdom; for others, wisdom is itself the ultimate condition of happiness.

the same question next to which he also replies "Yes." Once again, the Jew is permitted to enter. Finally, the pagan is asked, "Have you been a good person?" The pagan replies, "I've been mostly good, but sometimes I have been bad." St. Peter reflects on this and finally says, "O.K., you may enter as well; everyone gets into heaven anyway." "You mean, I have been good for nothing?" the pagan questions. "You said it; not me," St. Peter replies.

While pagans entertain various understandings of an afterlife (Summerland, the Otherworld, the Elysian Fields, the Blessed Isles, the Western Paradise, the Field of Hetep, etc.), they are in this world in general far too pragmatic and non-dharmic to aspire to, or at least expect, the attainment of permanent bliss. There is also a salient pagan faction that considers will to power as the ultimate, but the interpretation of what this means is virtually as varied as paganism itself.

The normative values suggested that are most comprehensive and expressive of paganism in its fuller reach are those that I have designated as the heptatheonic. Accordingly, the life of the greatest good, happiness, tranquility or human well-being is comprehended by liberty, comfort, health, honor, pleasure, productivity and generosity. Each of these retains a subjective understanding; they are emotions or attitudes or both. But simultaneously, a pagan is as apt to understand the virtue-values as independent essences – known through empirical evaluation or reflective intuition or both. The inherent pluralism and diversity of paganism in both indigenous and contemporary forms allows all possibilities without seeing any integral conflict between them. Despite the ontological and epistemological nuances and arguments I have been presenting as underlying and unifying its foundation, in paganism it is the *doing* of ethical action that is the most important. Pagan pragmatics, nevertheless, are varied and allow a pluralistic exegesis in the determination and knowing of rightfulness. With its emphasis on freedom, often codified as ‘if it harms none, do what you will’, all avenues are open to the pagan to the degree that others are not injured or reduced by the avenue one selects. Granted, this is a negative ethic in the sense that it does not automatically incline toward behavior that seeks to remedy and redress the suffering and deprivation of others in the manner that liberation theology attempts. This last is left for the pagan to the freedom of personal choice alone – a freedom that may take place at its aesthetic best within the heptatheonic context that includes both generosity and service as themselves the boon of honor. But always for the pagan, this choice is for the person and his/her immediate community to determine – freed as the pagan is from both apocalyptic necessity and Christologic *memoria passionis, mortis et resurrectionis*. If this attitude is to be labeled as idolatrous, a pagan accepts such affirmatively and finds her/his freely chosen ethical pursuit accordingly.¹⁵

Arête

As with most philosophy, the underlying divergence in the consideration of ethics and/or excellence (*arête*) appears to be that which occurs between Plato and Aristotle. Plato’s transcendentalism has been continued by Kant, and modified perhaps in Santayana’s ‘Platonic’ materialism as well as Levinas’ ethical version of transcendentalism. Aristotle, by contrast, is to be seen as more pragmatically

¹⁵ *Vide* Manemann *apud* Burggraeve et al. (2003: 95–118).

and even physically grounded – a position that conforms more readily to a deep or generic pagan orientation. Out of his empiricism and naturalism, it is Aristotelian virtue ethics that form the launch for the development of both contemporary Western pagan ethics and, more globally, universal pagan normative ethics in general. As MacIntyre has already pointed out for us, the ethical position of Aristotle himself is instructive – his virtues themselves need not, and should not, be accepted *carte blanche* but provide instead a feasible foundation that can be developed and modified for our own times.¹⁶ Aristotle, for the most part, raises the important questions. He does not provide many of the answers.

But the heart of Aristotelian ethics is that our ‘proper pleasures’ are those that involve the effort of virtue. It is these that produce happiness as itself the ultimate end. With any pagan quest for the ethical, Aristotle remains among the most important of considerations, but it is to the Sophists with their essential humanist position that the more relevant answers are to be located. A basic pagan position is an acceptance of the emotional appetites of life – celebrating these rather than condemning them. In paganism, a tangible morality that has been shaped by both Aristotle and the Sophists has much greater latitude than it does in the transcendental philosophy of a Pythagoras, Plato or Plotinus. Pagan ethics may be largely relativistic, but their ultimate check is always the sanctity of the other – both people and any aspect of nature as well as nature as a whole. In the divide between the earthy virtues of Aristotle and the transcendental aspirations of Plato, it is Habermas, Levinas and Santayana who provide us with some possible suggestions that intersect with humanism – whether communicative, intersubjective or aesthetic.

Jürgen Habermas

The fundamental question we encountered with the Sophists and Aristotle as well as with Plato is: what is *arête* ‘excellence, the best’? It is the very question that remains with us today. *Arête* is the ethical aspiration behind all individual and community endeavor. Contemporary pagan humanism must navigate in this pursuit between the value of pleasure as a sacred and the aesthetic demands of honor belonging intrinsically to the other. This navigation concerns understanding self and other as well as pleasure and sacrifice. In our present world of pluralistic differentiation and difference, our task as well as our pleasure must include the conversational over the belligerent, winner-take-all attitude and knee-jerk sectarian devaluing. In this respect, the modern philosopher and defender of modernism over

¹⁶MacIntyre (1998: 118).

postmodernism's alleged abandonment of reason, Jürgen Habermas, is important.¹⁷ Closer to Aristotle than to Plato, the moral argument of Habermas is known as communicative, discourse or minimal ethics.¹⁸ In Habermas' understanding, ethical concern is not about the good life as such but with the intersubjective process of establishing self-identity in an arena of possible conflict with others. The multiplicity of 'good lives' that are, or are potentially at least, in conflict requires the development of 'free spaces' of moral justice that transcend any particularity of communal separation arising through the existence of differing values, habits and prejudices. This transcending of incompatible lifeworlds (*Lebenswelten*), however, is not a Platonic transcendence but a humanist hermeneutics of communication – one that allows a communicative emancipation for the distinctive lifeworlds we as human inhabit. Habermas critiques both modern capitalism and ethical relativism and insists that the very existence of society implies a centrality of moral agreement upon which communication becomes possible.

Emmanuel Levinas

In today's increasing 'clash of cultures', the centrality of moral agreement might seem less and less the case. Emmanuel Levinas stresses the ethical necessity for the other to retain its otherness. *L'autrui* or the Other with Levinas is time, language, infinity and/or God. Abrahamic speech and secular speech may ultimately be incompatible, however, and there may in fact be a steadily reducing possibility for communicative exchange between radically different language lifeworlds (Western and Islamic, Christian and pagan, transcendentalists and pantheists, idolaters and iconoclasts, etc.) Levinian transcendentalism, however, would appear to be contrary to Aristotelian or Habermasian situational context or particularity and implicit humanistic communicativeness. In fact, Levinas rejects humanism itself as being insufficiently humane. Nevertheless, he still stresses the value and priority of ethics over ontology as well as the necessity of the face-to-face encounter for the ability to express an ethical attitude to the other.

Ethics for Levinas is central to all philosophical reflection. Whereas Aristotle fuses ethics and politics, Levinas unites ethics and metaphysics. His train of thought, however, follows the Hebraic theology of the Old Testament and pictures a transcendental Other, God, as source and voice of all ethical obligation. Ethics represent a descent from an invisible, trans-natural other – the dark and mysterious

¹⁷ Volumes one and two of Habermas' *The Theory of Communicative Action: Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason* have been translated by Thomas McCarthy in 1984 and 1989, respectively.

¹⁸ As Antje Gimmler states, "Discourse ethics is a normative ethics for pluralistic societies which no longer have a single, overarching moral authority": <http://caae.phil.cmu.edu/Cavalier/Forum/meta/background/agimmler.html> (accessed 13 March 2006).

world of the *'il y a'* beyond immanent being, the 'other-than-being' (*autrement qu'être*). For the anti-idolaters like Burggraeve and company, Levinas becomes their hero with his insistent emphasis on the complete and utter Otherness of God who, at the same time, is the source of all that is good and worthwhile in this world.¹⁹

The leading pagan expert on Levinas is Barbara Jane Davy who understands the Levinian argument to hold that, ethically, one is obligated to put the Other above oneself as the source of all ethical relations. Levinas "distinguishes the ethics of interpersonal relations from justice. In ethics, the claim of the Other who stands before me is primary and non-negotiable, while justice necessarily compares the relative claims of others."²⁰ Since direct access to God is prohibited in Abrahamic thought, a complete surrender to him through faith is required²¹

While Levinas' call for submission to a completely transcendental being is an anathema to pagan ideas of the good life, Davy points out further that some of the philosopher's writings are "anti-pagan because he identifies paganism with Nazism. He sees a danger in place-based philosophies, identifying this with his understanding of 'being at home with itself', the egoistic self wrapped up in itself and concerned for one's own."²² Davy, however, calls for

a reinterpretation of Levinas' understanding of transcendence as lateral transcendence, so that the Other who inspires ethics in oneself is not necessarily above me, but beyond me or other than me in any sense. Levinas argues that ethics come to pass in the world only through transcendence of being and nature, while I argue that it is only being at home with itself, one's egoistic self, that need be transcended for ethics to come to pass.²³

Davy finds, accordingly, that this notion of 'lateral transcendence', as distinct from the supposed vertical transcendence over nature, opens up Levinian (or Levinasian) relational ethics to include nonhuman others beyond the strictly interhuman.²⁴ Along with such scholars as Thomas and Butler among others, Davy reinterprets Levinas' relational emphasis away from ontological transcendentalism to provide a

¹⁹<http://home.wxs.nl/~brouw724/Levinas.html> – dated 8 December 2005, but no longer available. See also Gehrke (2006: 433 *et passim*).

²⁰ Barb Davy (personal communication 13 March 2006).

²¹ Levinas (1994: 59).

²² Davy – personal communication (13 March 2006).

²³ Ibid. Davy admits that Levinas' work is "not essentially compatible with paganism or contemporary Paganism, but I find his understanding of ethics and justice compelling and have adapted his work to fit my worldview." See further Davy (2005) for her fuller argument on 'lateral transcendence' of both ego and the limitation involved with one's personal view of the world. In this way, she argues, the development of interpersonal environmental ethics that are compatible with a contemporary pagan worldview becomes possible.

²⁴ For the 'other-than-human' person as an additional terminology for the 'nonhuman others beyond the strictly interhuman', see Hallowell (1960), Harvey (2005) and Harvey (2013). While Harvey does not mention 'gods' or 'deities', he considers that 'persons' "communicate intentionally and act toward others relationally . . . [and] are expected to give and receive gifts. . . . [Consequently,] animism refers to . . . efforts to live well in a world that is a community of persons, most of whom are 'other-than-human'" (Johnston and Bauman, 2014: 207).

basis for approaching the emergent yet limited ethical self in relation to others.²⁵ As such, the intersubjectivity of Levinas' face-to-face encounter with human and other-than-human persons allows a broad humanism that could be supportive of and compatible with heptatheonic virtues.

George Santayana

If, however, Levinas has potential for a pagan outlook and location of a moral position, another philosopher that has likewise strong potential in these directions is the Spanish-born, essentially American-raised George Santayana (1863–1952), a student of William James.²⁶ Whereas Levinas, rejects idolatry completely, Santayana encapsulates the pagan spirit behind it when he affirms, “Cultivate imagination, love it, give it endless forms, but do not let it deceive you.”²⁷ While strongly influenced by Plato, he considered Platonism as a ‘monstrous dream’ when applied to an understanding of nature,²⁸ and he grounded his Platonic affinities in both critical realism and naturalism in opposition to modern idealism and American pragmatism’s rejection of the world as a human construction.²⁹

Santayana recognizes spirit as the source of the world’s values of which the highest value is the experience of beauty. Truth is an emanation of spirit. It is ‘supertemporal’ and represents the total past, present and future of both matter and spirit as the existential complexity of essence. By attributing agency to matter alone, Santayana has embraced a naturalistic materialism in which the self is an epiphenomenon.³⁰ Unlike Plato, forms are not efficacious; they

²⁵See further Thomas (2004) and Butler (2005).

²⁶Santayana was a prolific writer – extending his output into poetry and the literary novel beyond philosophical treatises themselves. Among his chief works are *Sense of Beauty* (1896), *Life of Reason: or, The Phases of Human Progress* (1905–1906), *Scepticism and Animal Faith* (1923), *Realms of Being* (*Essence* 1927; *Matter* 1930; *Truth* 1937–38; *Spirit* 1940), *The Idea of Christ in the Gospels* (1946) and *Dominations and Powers* (1949). His ethics are found in *The Life of Reason* and *Dominations and Powers*.

²⁷Santayana (1944: 427).

²⁸Davis (1996–2014) – from *Soliloquies in England and Later Soliloquies* at 215 (“The Progress of Philosophy.”)

²⁹Santayana’s realms of being begin with essences and proceed with matter, then spirit and finally truth. Essences are concepts and/or meanings rather than material forces. They may be thought of as non-existent reality – the forms or qualities that constitute the ‘logical loci’ of matter. Matter is an emanation of essence (its chief characteristic is its potentiality), but it alone has causal power and comprises the origin of existence. Material animal psyches (consciousness – capable of being conscious of essences, concepts, meanings), in turn, emanate spirit which, like essence, is non-existent and, in this case, wholly ideal. For matter itself, Santayana defines it as “Specific potentialities existing at specific places and times” (Schilpp 1951: 586 *Apologia Pro Mente Sua*).

³⁰Saatkamp (2002/2010) – Naturalism.

have no agency. In all, Santayana becomes closer to Aristotle and Spinoza despite his developing a quasi-Platonic account of the ‘spiritual life’. For him, Plato’s utility lies in delineating an allegorical description of the soul’s moral progress.³¹

The ethical position of Santayana follows from his understanding of the insecurity entailed by the natural world. Reason as it leads to action is largely a process of harmonizing with the environment. It is an aspect of ‘animal faith’ and has the power to control matter because it is, in Santayana’s understanding, simply ‘matter organized’. Truth, as the final emanation that ensues from spirit, retains a pragmatic element that enables humans to deal with their environment. Santayana sees that “Natural piety has never attempted to moralise the cosmos, but only to recognise in that non-moral natural order the reservoir of force and the field of action proper for man and his morality.”³² The good is whatever life aspires toward, and its roots are to be located in humanity’s animal nature – with value transcending them.³³ The good life is one in which, for Santayana, the aesthetic and the practical are wedded together,³⁴ and it is dependent upon a person’s having a vision of the good life – or recovering the capacity to have that vision and thereby be free.³⁵ The good life comprises kindness, detachment, contemplation and a gentle ironical attitude in the face of the world’s and our own deficiencies.³⁶

³¹Robert Kirk in Honderich (1995: 790).

³²Santayana (1972: 215f *The Ravages of War*). Santayana defines religion as the harmonious recognition and devout propitiation of the powers upon which we are actually dependent as opposed to imaginary powers. “A religion worth having must recognise true Powers, however poetical the form may be which that religion lends them; and it must tend to establish peace and sanity in the mind, not fanatical madness. . . . Asceticism . . . becomes a vice when carried too far . . . And the same may be said of the riot of fancy and superstition in some religions. Without killing the imagination that bred religious ideas, theology may interpret them philosophically; and in this the materialist may consistently join” (ibid. 19f *Whether Naturalism is Irreligious*). Nevertheless, Santayana admits that “Religions are the great fairy-tales of the conscience” (Schilpp 1951: 8 *A General Confession*).

³³Santayana (1946: 207 *Moralism*).

³⁴For Santayana, the creation of objects of art belong as much to the world as does religion. In fact, “[a]rt proper is that organic or external rearrangement of matter by which a *monument* or *maxim* is established in the world and an element of traditional form is added to culture” (Schilpp 1951: 501 *Apologia Pro Mente Sua*).

³⁵Santayana (1944: xxxiv).

³⁶Reese (1999: 677). “The goal [of life] . . . is the celebration of life in its festivities . . . Aristotle’s practical wisdom: structuring individual life as it is, living it joyfully, and assuring that one’s commitments are conducive to the delights of the intellect and consistent with the demands of the time and tradition” – Saatkamp (2002/2010) – Bibliography.

Humanism – Confucian and Western

Santayana is not a pagan *sensu stricto*, but his aesthetic humanism bears striking similarities to paganism on countless fronts.³⁷ Humanism itself has secular, religious, scientific, pragmatic and artistic possibilities.³⁸ In general it eschews or deemphasizes the supernatural and concentrates on the pursuit for the good and worthwhile life. It finds value ultimately in nature – a nature that includes the human and human society as well as the sanctity to be found in the natural rhythms of the world and cosmos. While much of paganism incorporates an understanding of the numinous, if not personal and/or impersonal deity as well, its underlying ethics are humanistic. The basic pagan position, in fact, might be labeled in this respect ‘natural, or naturalistic, humanism’. From transcendentalist and Abrahamist circles, humanism is frequently judged to be atheistic. While pagans are by-and-large not atheist, they do subscribe to the secular humanist position expressed by Slavoj Žižek when he states that “Fundamentalists do what they perceive as good deeds in order to fulfill God’s will and to earn salvation; atheists do them simply because it is the right thing to do.” He calls this “our most elementary experience of morality” and claims that “A moral deed is by definition its own reward.”³⁹

If we turn away from the West for a moment, we will find a clear illustration of pagan humanism in the religious tradition of China – most particularly in the religion of Confucianism. While the ethical philosophy of Confucius is often traditionally understood as patriarchal and leaning strongly toward the authoritarian, it is actually much more centered on humanity per se. The guiding principles are solicitous care, decency and benevolence set against Confucius’ negative phrasing of the Golden Rule, namely, not to do to others what you do not wish for yourself. With its humanistic emphasis, Confucian – and, more broadly, Chinese – ethics seek to promote individual and group development toward humane and humanitarian behavior. In other words, they endeavor to encourage humans to be true humans as they interact with society, nature and one another. As with Western paganism, there is no decided reaction against the supernatural but rather a working – and working rationally – with it in the context of a traditional understanding of a magical cosmos. The good life for the Chinese, at least those influenced by a Confucian ethic, consists

³⁷Santayana has been described as an anti-foundationalist, non-reductive materialist and pragmatic naturalist as well as “an extreme moral relativist.” His position has been contrasted to “the more humanistic naturalisms of John Dewey and other American naturalists,” and his “inattentiveness to social inequality” stems from his “basic contention that individual suffering is the worse feature of human life, not social inequality . . . [This] causes him to focus more on the natural dilemmas of the individual rather than [as Levinas] on social action.” Ibid. (Saatkamp – Plato). He is also identified as an atheist (Butler 1986) and as a self-described ‘aesthetic Catholic’ (*Answers* 2014).

³⁸On humanism, *vide supra* Chap. 5 under “Kant, pagan critique and idolatry.”

³⁹Žižek (2006).

of the performance of appropriate rituals, the veneration of ancestors and a centering on *tian* (Heaven) as the pivotal *axis mundi*. For Confucius, *tian* or T'ien becomes an impersonal standard of justice.⁴⁰

For today's world, the morality presented by Confucianism can often appear obsolete, but much like Aristotle, the basics of Confucius' teachings provide a flexible yet solid foundation that can be reinterpreted and developed for a changing times and an understanding of society that in many respects contrasts radically from that of Confucius' own time. The key notion with Confucianism is its emphasis on relationship – delineating proper behavior with significant others. While we may today bristle over the idea of sovereign and subject relations, Confucianism is pragmatic in recognizing the world as it is with its asymmetrical power disparities such as the individual vis-à-vis the state or the person vis-à-vis impersonal bureaucracy. Likewise, the notion of filial piety may not be one that occurs to us until, as we grow older and the relationship one has with parents shifts as the latter grow more dependent, and we come to realize the consequences and necessities of formerly latent obligations.

Unlike Taoism, Confucianism values and places its chief concentration on society – recognizing that human beings are social animals. With this in mind, the emphasis is put upon the cultivation of harmonious social relations. In today's world, unlike that of Confucius in which political hierarchy was simply accepted as a given, there is apt to be much less consideration of loyalty to rulers in contrast to the original Confucian ideal. Political administration no longer operates under the aegis of a Mandate from Heaven, and people in operative democratic societies that have now become the norm are much more ready to question leadership and replace it when it proves itself unsatisfactory. The underlying humanism of Confucianism, seeking the good life in terms of taste, society and harmony, contrasts with the Taoist emphasis on the individual over the social – an emphasis that connects more easily with the natural, with untamed nature and with a spirit that has perhaps captured much of the imagination throughout contemporary Western paganism. Lao-Tzu appears to aim for a more 'natural' state over and against the conventional moralities of society – an objective that has strong resonance with the resurgent independent and freedom-loving pagan spirit of the West.⁴¹ Lao-Tzu advocates the adoption of *wu wei* – an attitude of 'non-action' or 'no unnatural action' that translates as a surrendering to the natural flow of life (the *tao*).

⁴⁰The traditional foundational relationships of Confucian ethics are superior/subordinate, father/son, older brother/younger brother, husband/wife and friend/friend, or, to phrase these in more contemporary understandings: superior/subordinate, parent/child, older sibling/younger sibling, spouse/spouse (partner/partner) and friend/friend. Each of these is to be ideally characterized by the virtues of proper behavior, i.e., good taste (*li*), humanity/goodness/benevolence (*ren/jen*), performance of requisite duties (*yi*), knowledge of the proper right (*shi*), mutual care of others (*shu*) and respect or filial piety (*xiao*): Cheah and Razak (2006).

⁴¹“According to Laozi [Lao-Tzu], language and conventions are social forms of control that undermine people's natural spontaneity”: <http://www.hku.hk/philodep/courses/EWethics/laozi.htm> (accessed 16 March 2006 but no longer available). See instead Hansen (2007).

While there is much to explore in Taoism in terms of suggestions for the good life and pagan ethics, as well as in the writings of Mo Tzu (Mozi) and the philosophical utilitarian morality movement of Mohism (fifth to third centuries bce), it is the Confucian and Neo-Confucian tradition that is more immediately applicable to the urban and quasi-urban world that has emerged and dominates the twenty-first century. This tradition includes both the ritual morality of Confucius and the benevolence morality of Mencius.⁴² But whereas Confucius appears to understand virtue as something acquired through ritual practice, for Mencius it is rather a product of moral intuition. Consequently, unlike the duty ethics of Mo Tzu, Mencius engenders a virtue ethics that is independent of socialization and is instead instinctive and natural.⁴³ This intrinsic virtue is seen as a product of the basic goodness inherent in the individual. Mencius understands this as the seed of compassion that produces benevolence, if and when nurtured and cultivated properly, that is, along the lines of Confucian principles. His famous illustration is the ‘child by the well’ situation in which he claimed that the natural impulse of a normal human being, who sees a child about to fall into a well, is to prevent the accident. The person’s reaction is compassionate by nature.⁴⁴

The emphasis on relationship that dominates the humanism of Confucianism brings us back to the intersubjectivity of Habermas who stresses that “the behavioral subject cannot be isolated from other behavioral subjects.”⁴⁵ If the chief feature of humanism is ‘expansion’ – such as the expansion of knowledge, individualism, feeling and ‘human ascent’, then humanism is concerned primarily with the relationships of space, that is, the relationship of self and other.⁴⁶ To this extent, Confucianism, humanism and the predominant pagan ethical position are opposed to Levinas and “his understanding of being *chez soi*, or being at home with itself [as] an egoistic and unethical being in the world.”⁴⁷ In contrast to Mencius, “Levinas supposes that nature represents what is, while ethics describe what ought to be.”⁴⁸ By meeting the ‘Other face to face’ in ethical relations, Levinas argues that the natural predisposition to egoism is interrupted. In this understanding, being at home with oneself is not productive of ethical behavior: “For ethics to come to pass what needs to be transcended is oneself, one’s concern with oneself and one’s own.”⁴⁹ We have seen earlier, however, that Mackie argues egoism is not immoral but forms

⁴²<http://www.hku.hk/philodep/courses/EWEthics/me3.htm> (accessed 16 March 2006 but no longer available). See instead Van Norden and Shun (2014).

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴McIntyre (2009).

⁴⁵Wang Hui (1995).

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Davy (2005: 160).

⁴⁸Ibid. p. 161.

⁴⁹Davy (2005: 162).

an integral part of ethical behavior.⁵⁰ Likewise, MacIntyre has argued that there is invariably some point in which the other remains no longer other but becomes self.⁵¹ In other words, there is a situation in which we become part of the same. In an attempt to broaden Levinas' understanding of the Other as always a human other, Davy develops her cognizance of 'lateral transcendence' so that the Other is not just 'up there' but down, beside, or merely out of one's normal way of being, and it includes the non-human (trees, rocks, mountains, winds, lakes, etc.) as well as the human. Rather than a transcendence of nature, Davy's is simply a transcendence of oneself – a transcendence that is allegedly necessary if ethical behavior is to be a possibility.⁵² Levinian ethics are contrasted by Davy with life-centered biocentric (eco-centric, Earth-centered or Gaia-centered) ethics. These last are linked, for both Levinas and Davy, with Romantic eco-fascism and other forms of pagan-fascist racisms.⁵³

The rejection of the prevailing pagan stance is put as follows:

Biocentric and Earth-centered ethics are not good enough because they are based on an idea of nature rather than meeting others in nature as Other in Levinas's sense. We need other-oriented ethics, the ethics of the impulse to put the Other first.⁵⁴

Levinas and Davy's Other, however, appears to be the kind of absolutizing or idealization that is elsewhere condemned as negative idolatry. The face-to-face encounter with an imminent suicide bomber is *not* a confrontation with a sacred other that inspires ethical action but rather an occasion for stoic resignation if there is no further opportunity for egoistic escape. But apart from a wholly transcendent God, there is no specific Other that does not have some kind of affinity with self. Davy is correct in identifying 'Nature' as a thematized totality, an ideal representation of collective otherness, a Romantic inheritance that distorts reality in place of furthering it. But a more accurate understanding within contemporary paganism holds that nature cannot be reduced to a system – leveling or otherwise; its numinous, evolutionary and inscrutably infinite scope defies such. Perhaps at best, Levinas' decentered morality suggests a Kantian *duty* ethics, but the relativist *ad hoc* centering of an earth-oriented, nature-centered, community-centered and/or biocentric paganism allows instead a *virtue* ethics that 'makes space' for both self and other in locating the good life for one and all within our dynamic, interconnected and enchanted universe.

⁵⁰Mackie (1977: 190).

⁵¹See Chap. 7 pp. 242f.

⁵²Davy (2005: 163). Davy is careful to point out that her "views do not necessarily represent a majority of Pagans, but they are valuable, I hope, as an example of Pagan theology in dialogue and development" (p. 159 n. 4).

⁵³See, in this connection, York (2003: 163f). The *völkish* ideas and Völkstumbewegung derive from theosophical notions rather than pagan forms of humanism.

⁵⁴Davy (2005: 165).

If we return to Mackie and his accounting of the self or ego as an integral component in normative formulations and the search for the good life, pagan compassion, benevolence or generosity is as important as the pagan hedonic valuing of pleasure. Pagans may be criticized by outsiders for preferring the good life over the proper life, but a pagan seeks to locate the ethical within a life characterized by happiness as much as possible – and certainly if and when the conditions so allow. And again, for pagans, happiness is chiefly determined by pleasure. This last, however, can range from ecstatic sensual joys to quieter forms of resigned serenity. Recognizing and insisting upon human differences, pleasure for the pagan assumes countless different manners, intensities and possibilities.

Because pagans hold to no external authority that dictates morality, there is no intrinsic difficulty with an ethical acceptance of Nozick's Experience Machine as a source of perpetual pleasure.⁵⁵ Most pagans would doubtlessly consider being hooked up to such a machine that could produce whatever experience was wanted, i.e., in terms of pleasure, ultimately as boring and an aesthetic violation of the gift and variety of life as well as of the pleasure of *earning* one's pleasures. But the objection for a pagan is not fundamentally an ethical one but rests instead on standards of viable beauty. For those who would wish to pass existence in such a manner, a pagan response is tolerance, even encouragement, of such people's choice. The effect from Nozick's 'pleasure machine' in all practical consideration would be little different than the recreational 'high' produced by alcohol or a psychotropic substance.

In our overall survey of pagan approaches to the good life, it is the hedonic which appears to encapsulate the prevailing fit, albeit a hedonism that is sometimes tempered with, or alternates with, the stoic whenever necessary. In fact, Stoicism is the chief complement to Epicureanism and Cyrenaicism for pagans in general – who either endure stoically through the difficult times, or at least conduct life with spiritual frugality and are characterized by respect and ease with nature when not engaged more directly with the throes of passion. While the hedonist entertains pleasure, the stoic's pursuit is for the virtuous. There is of course no fixed line between the two, and we have already noted repeatedly that the pleasurable can range from the sensual to either the intellectual or virtuous or both. While for the younger pagan, the immediate goal might remain something more akin to exuberant enthusiasm, for the weathered pagan elder it is more apt to become a resigned tranquility. This last is at heart a stoic attitude. But being beholden to no set and fixed doctrine, ethical or otherwise, a pagan is typically flexible and adopts different attitudes and different goals as the occasions and situations themselves change over time and according to place. From a pagan perspective, the free abandon of youth is only as it should be – something to be encouraged and furthered as much as possible and as a central part of life learning, opportunity and appreciation. But as we grow older – and hopefully wiser with time, quieter joys and a sense of either grateful detachment or concentration on output or both become more naturally commensurate with the autumn years of life.

⁵⁵Nozick (2002: 118f).

With Stoicism, we are once again confronting the humanist undercurrent that infuses much paganism. There is here an emphasis on self-responsibility. It is in the stoic element that is located throughout any natural pagan tendency that paganism's aesthetic maturity is to be found in the terms of developing self-change and self-authority. Pleasure may be a ubiquitous pagan pursuit, but, among the legacy of pagan ethical reflections, the onus that comes with awareness of virtue and obligations to both others and community has been more clearly outlined in Stoic thought. It is here that we can locate the speculations on reason and the integral harmony of nature that most encourage a pragmatic pagan ethos. Nevertheless, as we have already noted, the Stoic aim of *apathia* or sublime indifference is something that is best suited for difficult times rather than for those that would otherwise inspire hedonic celebration. In other words, Stoicism itself has limited applicability, unless more liberally interpreted and integrated with the fundamental attitudes of Hedonism. I have hoped to have pointed out that a more cogent ethical position becomes possible in the uniting of a liberal Stoicism and an animistic Hedonism – one that has a greater universal appeal to pagans of our day. In a word, pleasure is to be seen as one of the virtues rather than something to which virtue itself is opposed or by which it is thwarted.

Revisiting Spinoza, Hume, Kant and Nietzsche

It is with Hume that the hedonist and humanist are to be found interacting. Spinoza, by contrast to Hume's skeptical/empirical approach to knowing, holds intuitive knowledge to be the highest. While it is true that his intuitional follows a mathematical dynamic, the intuitional is also important for both Kant and many a pagan. But unlike the pagan, Kant's freedom is never part of the empirical world but is located as transcendental to the world of causality. In all, Spinoza, Hume and Kant each have important affinities to aspects of paganism. But they are not essential for the development of a pagan ethic. They are *sui generis* or stand alone in their various degrees of development and complexity.⁵⁶ Some pagans will want to examine them (as indeed there will be *some* pagans who will want to examine anything). These three philosophers are each illustrative of a kind of variation possible within the overall orbit of pagan thought.

Spinoza, Hume and Kant have been given a chapter in this book out of respect for their contributions to the historical progress and evolution of ethical reflection

⁵⁶Kant's transcendentalism often simply goes to show how complicated the transcendental can get or, by default, needs to be. I am well aware that the explanation of Kant as well as Spinoza and Hume in this book may appear more dense and complex than the original corpus of the 'hermeneutisand' himself. A shamanic flight of imagination may be a consideration in the final understanding of Spinoza, Hume and Kant, but this could be most optimally pursued only after a critical examination into the conceptual foundations of their particular perspectives, insights and explanations.

as well as meta-ethical debate. In the field of morality, each has more than earned his place. Nevertheless, theirs is more of a specialist interest and pastime from the more immediate concern of the good life – each appealing and each wanting in its own way. Some within the pagan community will want to employ the route into the pagan ethos using them as vehicles – taking these great philosophers on board. Others will want to proceed more directly and return to them in a further time.

When we turn to Nietzsche, we find a philosopher who is no more but also no less the pagan than Spinoza, Hume or Kant. The atavistic dioscuric religious metaphor that is so central to (proto-)Indo-European religiosity⁵⁷ is a multiple narrative with one of its contended homelands being the region that also produced ancient Sparta – clearly an early pagan yet fascist manifestation. As Levinas and Davy perceive, Nazi elitism remains a possibility and ‘danger’ of a pagan emphasis on one’s own ‘ethnic turf’. It is the geocentric and tribal/racial fundamentals that themselves persist – and perhaps must always persist – as goading challenges for the pagan ethos. Further, it is Nietzsche who delineates the rationale for this fascist position, even though – as I contend – that was not Nietzsche’s intention. This unfortunate association has more to do with the interpretations of Nietzsche than with anything integral to his argument itself – a hermeneutics that parties with vested interests and might be used for their own nefarious ends. But any rejection of paganism and/or Nietzsche is akin to throwing out the baby with the bath water. Nietzsche himself experimented with the worst of cosmic scenarios and simultaneously championed the essential nobility characteristic of paganism as a quest for the best.

Against the pantheism of Spinoza, the skeptical empiricism and humanism of Hume, and the radical daring of Nietzsche, we have the intellectual idealism of Kant. But as MacIntyre has claimed, Kant’s attempt to locate the ethical beyond social needs and human desires is an illusory effort. He stresses instead that absolutist claims are false if and when the actual historic study of moral rules and aims are taken into account. Values and virtues change over time as people and their situations also change. For Mackie, virtues and values are invented. Along with Mackie, MacIntyre recognizes the fundamental concern of self-interest to all human endeavor and ethical behavior. From the secular perspective, egoistic drives are not contrary to moral impulse but the beginning point. Ethics begins with the self and the self’s encounter with the other; they do not begin as absolute transcendental externals toward which we yearn and aspire. Ethics are instead the evolving resources and tools we already have to work with and can employ toward any achievement of the good life.

From Nietzsche we learn that we cannot simply assume the sameness between all people – that, instead, we are different and many of these differences are important considerations for the overall advance of humanity. If and when we expand the insights and rants of Nietzsche, we are in a better position to see ourselves as both part of the ‘herd’ but also as potential aristocrats with the possibility of noble expression. The key virtue-value of nobility has always been,

⁵⁷ *Vide* York (1995).

and remains, generosity of spirit and being. If we nurture that latent magnanimity that flourishes through the accumulation of surplus – a cultivation that is possible under conditions of freedom and the wider context of honor, we move closer to becoming ‘overpeople’, superior human beings. It is as such that we are able to harmonize with the ‘harmony of the spheres’, the rhythms of nature from which we garner our greatest strengths.

The importance of such thinkers as Grayling, Mackie and MacIntyre, as well as countless others, is their secular humanism that reprieves the individual from the fantasies of Abrahamic and dharmic thought. It has been my contention in this study that secularism acts as the emancipating bulwark to free us from religious intimidation and bourgeois superstition. It is in that very advancing state of human liberty and maturity that paganism itself can then flourish – a spiritual insight that reclaims enchantment as a lost human birthright, and in that recovered condition, with secular humanism as friend and ally, the rediscovery of an ethical community comprising earth and humanity as well as divine aspiration becomes a real possibility. We learn from our past mistakes, but we are not to be imprisoned by them.

We have noted throughout this work that corpo-spirituality is at the core of the pagan perspective. It is through this understanding of the divine as earth and nature that paganism comprehends humanity’s origins, *raison d’être* and its own intrinsic divinity. When humans are god or gods, a pagan argues, the commensurate behavior is for us to act and do ethically. No pagan will need be deterred or shamed by the so-called immoral deeds performed by the gods that are recorded in myth, for a pagan understands the metaphorical and how the mythological is *not* a literal presentation but a hermeneutical series of sacred allegories and symbols through which to approach the inscrutable, the mysterious and the holy. From within the foundational ground of pagan sensitivity and insight, value, like the human herself, is an emergent. Values and virtues are not approached as *a priori* but as natural concomitants to the growing process of being human and becoming evermore divinely superhuman. We are, in fact, *ad hoc* vehicles of matter’s intrinsic impulse to achieve consciousness and reflexivity, and this entails accepting an existential mandate of self-responsibility in the perpetual process of reevaluating values. None of this precludes that, as individuals and communities, we must compete, conflict and cooperate with one another in the face of limited resources, but it is precisely under such conditions that the secularist and pagan can develop understandings and achievements of the good life in terms of the heptatheonic virtue-values.

In all, our basic choices of possible ethical formulations are between the Hedonistic, the Stoic, the Kantian, the Utilitarian and the Aretaic or Aristotelian. For a pagan, to the degree that Kant’s freedom is never a part of the empirical world but transcends the world of causality, his categorical imperatives have little appeal. Ethical navigation instead will more likely than not be inspired by the remaining moral explorations and presentations and, to the degree that paganism is inherently pluralistic, will most likely consist of a combination of their offered insights and suggestions. The basic argument that has unfolded in the present investigation is that a virtue-based ethics, perhaps as a modification and updating of Aristotle, provides

the clearest model and focus commensurate with attaining a viable form of the good life. In general, a pagan accepts Aristotle's nomination of happiness or *eudaimonia* as our overriding target and, to this end, inclines to understanding the virtues as aesthetic values. If we agree with Nietzsche that the proper way of living is to pursue our aesthetic best – but include compassion as part of that superlative beauty, we have a range of ethic value to which I contend most pagans will subscribe.

Eudaimonia

What I have sought to stress in delineating pagan normative values is the supreme importance of liberty. This virtue-value alone may be considered synonymous with maturity when understood as the acceptance of self-responsibility for our decisions and actions. Not only acceptance but the *actuality* of being able to make our own decisions in order to be self-responsible for them is integral to mature freedom or the freedom of maturity or both. As discussed in Chap. 5, pagan spirituality and its assistance in the growth processes have a chief venue of expression in and through the mystery religions, and the need for these remains paramount vis-à-vis the psychological imbalances prevalent in the world today. To this end, part of any pagan's reclaiming of freedom includes the right to private initiation and rites of passage without governmental supervision or intrusion. The current impossibility to conduct religious mysteries in line with the pagan past is a freedom issue that touches on virtually all the parameters of liberty as paganism's most sacred value. The restoration of the right to private mysteries belongs invariably on a pagan political-ethical agenda.

Consequently, adulthood and freedom – either as overlapping conditions or as one and the same – are paramount for pagan aspiration. And as human beings, a pagan might also emphasize both health and comfort as worthy goals and preferred states of being. The real balance of liberty in a pagan perspective, however, is the stress on value, worth, honor. A pagan can understand these in terms of worship – not a worship characterized by what has seemingly become sterile ecclesiastical fossils but a worship understood as organic and transforming ritual. For pagans, ritual worship is both an act of devotional expression and a way of life as a work of art. It is something that has been put together correctly in both aesthetic and functional senses. Worship, therefore, as an honorable undertaking, an undertaking of honor, is that which honors the gods through a life and pursuit of pleasure – a life that is additionally characterized as productive in the sense of positive output and as ethical in the sense of extending beyond the purely egoistic concerns of self, namely and exclusively, of me and mine. Worship or honor for a pagan could be a supreme instance of pleasure, and pleasure is what informs let alone constitutes all that worship is: sharing, serving, producing, enjoying and ritually dancing. A worshipful life is an honorable life and one that joyously celebrates its way through the cosmos if not also, microcosmically, *as* the cosmos.

As a form of naturalism, paganism is comprehended in both spontaneous vernacular expression and in reflective, philosophical thought. There is here no rupture between the two. The one leads to the other and vice versa. The ethical dimension that emerges from this full spectrum of possibility is always an open, negotiable and perpetually shifting enterprise. There are no fixed dogmatic commandments. Morality for a pagan is contextual and intrinsically beyond completeness. It aspires toward the indefinable boundaries of the beautiful. At the end of the day, rather than through reading a book or catechism recorded by some alleged ecclesiastical authority, the most feasible and enduring way to know the good and the good life is through intuition. Understanding *arête* is the gift that comes to belong intuitively to the person who is in tune with nature and the gods of nature. This is the person who recognizes that *eudaimonia* is the sole purpose and goal of the natural cosmos.

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Chapter 15

Contemporary Sectarian Pagan Ethics

The pagan ethics I have been outlining in this book are those that comprise an understanding of a virtue ethics based on seven values that are essential to human flourishing, namely, liberty, comfort, health, honor, pleasure, worship and generosity. In large part they are what I have been able to glean as common denominators through my own studies and reflections as well as examinations of both indigenous and current Western paganisms. Once again, the heptatheonic virtue-values comprise what we might designate as ideal-types. In the specific sectarian expressions of paganism, there will be different compilations of ethical principles and guidelines, though, I will argue, these are in general reducible or convertible into one or more of the dispositions or goals I have named. Nevertheless, it behooves us to look at the ethnic and non-ethnic traditions themselves to gain some idea of how they phrase their individual understandings of virtue ethics and the good or proper life. To this end, I wish to look briefly at Shinto, Santeria, the Northern tradition, Druidry, Romuva, Slavic orientations, Kemetic spirituality, Classical formulations and Wicca to know where there are overlaps with the generic pagan position and where there are differences.

Shinto Ethics

Shinto is among the more colorful of pagan religions with its *matsuri* festivals and processions – sometimes riotous and drunken, fertility rites such as in Nara and Kyoto, and its extreme sensitivity to beautiful locations and various power nodes of nature. The use of natural stones to depict such deities as the Dosojin (e.g., throughout Japan and also to be found in San Francisco's Japanese Tea Garden in Golden Gate Park) reveals the earthiness of the worship. Shinto has been inspired in particular by Confucianism, but here the primary emphasis is placed upon purity – both spiritual and moral. Shinto rituals aim to eliminate pollution – negativities that may be part of the natural world but which undermine the well-being of the

individual and a person's relationship with the gods or kami. Pollution in this sense may be understood as a form of spiritual illness. It is a metaphorical disease that has a corollary with physical disease. Shinto purity is accepted as a condition of harmony with the world and with others including the deities. As a pagan faith, however, there are no moral absolutes, no ethical code of commandments,¹ but, in true pagan fashion, there is a flexibility of interpretation that varies from situation to situation and is measured against the purpose or intention behind an act as well as the circumstances, time and location in which an act occurs.²

As with Confucianism, there has been a predominant emphasis within Shinto on community. Virtually over the individual, it was the community and its prosperous continuation that was sacrosanct.³ While this may be less the case in more contemporary times with their greater concern with individuality and consumerism, it is nevertheless here that we can detect a chief difference between traditional indigenous paganisms and contemporary Western paganisms with their stress on the importance of the individual. However, that being said, in the West, the community of nature has emerged as the locus of supreme significance – one which takes precedence over selfish behavior that becomes detrimental to the well-being of the environment. Consequently, while the Shinto community is situated within the natural and seeks to maintain harmonious relationships with it on all fronts, it is more directly inclusive of the social dimensions than we find in Western pagan consideration. In traditional Japan, “religion has always put its main value on the continuity and development of a community.”⁴

¹“Shintoism has no moral code, no sacred books, no sermons.” Accordingly, Motoōri claimed that “morals were invented by the Chinese, because the Chinese were an immoral people who needed some such code. In Japan, . . . there was no need for any system of morals, because every Japanese acted aright if he merely considered his heart” (Horne 1917b:163f). Less chauvinistically, Cali and Dougill (2013:13) explain that “Shinto is considered a ‘natural’ as opposed to a revealed religion. It has no founder and no prophet. It has morality tales and myths that have been preserved in writings and influence its practices, but there is no doctrine such as the ‘Ten Commandments’ that dictate the correct way to live as mandated by God. It is a belief system that developed over thousands of years at different locations within Japan, and it is centered on local as opposed to universal beliefs. Nature is its primary source of inspiration . . .”

²<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/shinto/shintoethics/ethics.shtml> (accessed 31 July 2014).

³Nelson (u.d.)

⁴Jinja-Honcho (u.d.) Shinto ethics list pollutions or sins as either Amatsu-Tsumi or Kunitsu-Tsumi. The former refer to ritual violations such as destroying a shrine, stealing a divine object, etc. The latter include not only human crimes such as murder, infant murder, incest, injury to others, poisoning and cursing but also natural disasters. These last are considered to result when the balance between the community and the world of nature has been disrupted. Purification rituals then become necessary to remove individual and collective pollution and restore harmonious relations. The value and continuation of community is the foremost context in which Shinto ethical navigation occurs. (ibid.) For the Yengishiki “Purification Ritual” of 927 ce, see Horne (1917b:174–176). Miyake Hitoshi (2001:203) refers to Hiraoka Yoshifumi's 55 different types of Shinto rituals. Of these, 11 concern rites of passage, 7 are general Shinto rites and 5 deal with the removal of misfortune. “[Most] of the Shinto observances are concerned with agricultural rituals.”

As with paganism in general, Shinto adheres to no set of absolute commandments or moral rules.⁵ It does not rely on an ethics comprising ‘should not’ prescriptions but recognizes the imperfections that are part of the world and the gods and endeavors to live without disturbing either the kami or their worship or disrupting world harmony, the natural world, the social order and the group to which one belongs.⁶

Shinto purity is to be understood in terms of sincerity and/or honor.⁷ Its guiding precepts are understood as not violating the will of the gods, honoring one’s ancestral obligations, abiding by the decrees of the state, being grateful to the gods, avoiding anger and sloth, keeping diligently mindful of Shinto precepts and not sullyng them with extraneous or alien concepts, remaining aware of one’s own shortcomings and limitations and recognizing the fraternal unity of humanity.⁸ We see in these, especially as they are Confucian derivatives, little emphasis on liberty as such. Instead, Shinto ethics are encompassed primarily by the virtue-values of health and honor – ritual/spiritual health (as well as physical freedom from disease) and honoring family, friends, community as well as the human community in general. Its group emphasis may be criticized not only for generating the possibility of non-conscientious conformity but also for an unhealthy stress on ethnicity that leads to chauvinism and anti-miscegenation. We find similar fascist possibilities among some Asatruar, Hellenic, Slavic and Baltic pagan ethnic expressions as well.

In many respects, Shinto (the ‘way of the gods [*shin*]’)⁹ parallels Taoism that is centered on the *tao* or ‘way’. Both are naturalistic religions in which a supreme value is placed on nature.¹⁰ With Shinto, its ethical position is essentially Confucian – allowing a humanistic and naturalistic mix in overall aspiration. However, the uniqueness of Shinto is its emphasis on gentle harmony and honorable sincerity. The good life is a pure life; an evil life is an impure one. While contemporary Western paganism is less apt to conceive things in terms of purity and impurity, Shinto perhaps helps to broaden the ethical vision and explicate the dynamics of honor. With the West’s growing concern with environmental degradation and industrial

Miyake classifies purification rituals as (1) preparations for ancestor festivals, (2) exorcisms, and (3) part of seasonal festivals (p. 170).

⁵<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/shinto/shintoethics/ethics.shtml> (accessed 31 July 2014).

⁶Ibid. The clearest formulation of Shinto ethics is Emperor Meiji’s Imperial Rescript on Education that lays stress on national loyalty, harmonious relations with both family (respect for one’s parents, harmonious relations with siblings and spouse) and society (intellectual development, contribution, fraternity, modesty and trustworthy friendships): Jinchu-Honcho *loc. cit.* It is here that we can detect the influence of Confucianism.

⁷A Shinto saying holds that “Sincerity is a single virtue that binds Divinity and man in one”: Williams (2005:128). The saying is also found at Wilson (2009:54) which adds: “The first and surest means to enter into communion with the Divine is sincerity. If you pray to a deity with sincerity, you will surely feel the divine presence.”

⁸Sivananda (2005).

⁹The original, non-Chinese name for Shinto is Kami-no-michi.

¹⁰Shinto has been termed a “religion of all outdoors” (Horne 1917b:164).

pollution, there is doubtlessly an increasing mindfulness that is in conformity with what Shinto labels as ‘uncleanliness’. Shinto, however, links the ecological question of purity more directly to both community and self.

If the emphasis on purity is a focus on health and honor, it would appear to have less to do with pleasure if not also comfort. Nevertheless, to be in a state of ritual and emotional cleanliness is conceivably to be in a comfortable condition as well. There is likewise also an element of liberty in the Shinto preoccupation with purity, namely, to be free from impurity. Wrongful behavior is explicitly mentioned as destroying the agricultural fields or crops of another. Invariably, such a transgression not only strikes against the gods but also endangers the community. The pure person is one who is free of such behavior and/or jealousies. With Shinto, decency, integrity, honor or propriety is central to ethical behavior and what we might consider to be the proper life. If pleasure is not to be obviously included in the Japanese formulation of morality, there is nevertheless nothing that necessarily suggests that pleasure is impure. And to the degree that Shinto practice becomes increasingly concerned with the attainment of various benefits, this might also be seen to be intrinsically about pleasure. In the Japanese consideration, however, the real constraint on pleasure is that it is not to be exercised to the disadvantage of the community and state. Pleasures in conformity with purity are not proscribed.

Santería

Like Shinto, La Regla de Ocha or La Regla Lukumí (Lucumi) engenders an ethics that are embedded in cultural values – whether traditional Yoruban or traditional Cuban. Once again it is community – community and family – that is the predominant focus throughout the Afro-Latin diaspora traditions as well as throughout indigenous African religion, and once again this is an especially colorful practice. Tradition predominates over innovation, public life over the private, shared space over personal space, and spiritual perspective over materialistic consumerism. Tribal and familial heritage is sacrosanct.¹¹

¹¹<http://www.londonlucumichoir.com/history.html> (accessed 31 July 2014). While Western ethical emphasis in these respects is substantially different, the current growth of paganism in the West may be in large part the seminal attempt to re-develop communal identities. Accordingly, Bart Pattyn (*apud* Burggraeve et al. 2003:234–7) points out Durkheim’s *le mal de l’infini* and claims that “the uncertainty that comes with increased self-determination . . . as a long process of socialization” is something that works for the better educated but allows two options for those for whom it does not: either they can “attach themselves unquestioningly to old certainties,” or they can “opt for strong moral authority and the elimination of those who think otherwise.” Dominionists and other fundamentalists fall in line with the second option. Some of the more right-winged pagan groups might be considered to pursue both possibilities. But short of fascist conservatism, the traditional certainties with their embedded ethical authority have strong appeal and may account for the growing attraction of such spiritualities as Santería/Ocha, Condomblé and Voodoo in the West.

With the Afro-Latin traditions, purity in the Shinto sense is not specifically stressed apart from during the initiation process when an *íwayó* dresses only in white for a year and maintains other *ebbós* or restrictions (e.g., not being outside one's home at night, avoiding crowded places, not holding or shaking hands with other people, etc.).¹² The hardships that are placed on a god-child by the god-parent as the former prepares to become an *olorisa* (priest or priestess) are designed to protect the candidate so that the energy placed within the new initiate may be allowed to mature properly and without interruption.¹³ Nevertheless, purity in Lucumí/Santería is understood more broadly as peaceful tranquility – expressed as being calm and cool-headed. Ritual ceremonies in Santería often aim to calm and cool a person's composure.¹⁴

Within Lucumí, there are strict rules for the *íwayó* in training and in visiting her own or other *iles* or spiritual houses. These regulations and procedures are known as the etiquette that one follows in this faith. Much of the propriety has to do with salutations to an *orisa*, a priest (*santero*, *santera*, *babalawo*) or an elder.¹⁵ Nevertheless, “The best way to give devotion to the Orisha is to live a good life.”¹⁶ In this particular practice, there is great humility that is demanded of the initiate as he/she proceeds through the various stages of *aborisa* (a worshipper of the *orisas*) commitment.¹⁷

¹²On the Santería list (santeria@yahoogroups.com), Omi Ogunda claimed that “Sacrifice is an important part of the process, as is purification . . .” (2 March 2001).

¹³Gutierrez (2007–2012) – Episode 69 (17 March); and Pattyn *apud* Burggraeve et al. (2003:234–237).

¹⁴*Ibid.* (Gutierrez *passim*). Nevertheless, passion and ritual frenzy are also important as preludes to possession by an *orisa*. In the related Voodoo/Vaudou, James Leyburn describes possession as “something more than the elation of the Holy Roller, and less than the mystical exaltation of the enraptured saints, yet partaking of elements of both” (cited in Rodman 1961:71). As Rodman points out, however, possession still occurs in conformity to established rules and procedures (*ibid.*) It is through possession, the central religious act of Lucumí and Vaudou, that the *orisa* or *loa* communicates with the community. The possessed individual remembers nothing from the trance state but receives honor for having become a mouthpiece of deity.

¹⁵To an elder or *orisa*, salutation means full prostration after which one is ‘lifted’ by the elder, godparent or priest. Propriety covers benedictions (*bendiciones*) and *santo* exchange as well. As a highly ritualistic practice, Santería involves the expression of respect to one's god-parents, bringing required items to them (e.g., a white plate, two coconuts, two candles, a *derecho* or monetary gift, etc.), cooking foods for the celebration of one's own *cumpleaños* (anniversary of a *santero/santera's* initiation) and so forth. For instance, on the Santería list (santeria@yahoogroups.com) the advice was given to bring to a *misa* (ancestor party) cigars, rum, white flowers, candles, cooked fish and/or nine pieces of fruit as appropriate offerings (3–4 February 2001).

¹⁶Ekun (Ewetuga Ataré), Santería list (23 June 2001). Ekun adds, “The way to give devotion to the Orisha in the proper manner is to find a god parent and until you are initiated or have Santo Lavado, to give your devotion to your Godparent's Orisha and listen to him or her.” See further, [http://go.to/santeria\(ekun@email.com\)](http://go.to/santeria(ekun@email.com)).

¹⁷Commitment begins with *oddu* or divination and is followed by receiving *collares*, *illekes* or ‘necklaces’, i.e., formally becoming a godchild to an *olorisa*, receiving *guerreros* – Elegba and

The requisite humbleness requires one to honor his/her teachers, mothers and fathers, and to ‘live faithfully for the ancients’. One endeavors to be kind, merciful, just and peaceful.¹⁸ Key values are honesty, integrity, humility, helping others and the expression of gratitude to the *orisas* and ancestors.¹⁹ Most important, in Ocha or Lucumí, there is no possibility of self-initiation, and there can be no rejection of the authority that is based on an established and time-honored legacy. In a fundamental sense, Santería practice differs from Neo-paganism and much of Wicca. It is African derived and, as such, is above all a community-based endeavor.²⁰ None of the important rituals may be performed solo. At least two additional *olorisas* are required in any of the rites for an initiate.

In Yoruba, the language of the African people from whom Ocha/Lucumí derives, there is no word for ‘religion’ as we understand it in the West. Instead, the word *sin* or *isin* referring to ‘service’ is employed to convey *aborisa* practice.²¹ In all, this is not a religion of faith but one of experience and knowledge. It involves

other ‘warrior’ *orisas*, i.e., making one a formal devotee of the *orisas*, and leads to *kariocha* or being ‘crowned’ and becoming an *iyawó*, that is, a novice *olorisa* ‘priest’. Ekun suggests that one should “learn to walk before you run. First find a godparent, and learn what are the proper offerings for each Orisha, and learn how we ask permission and ask what is desired rather than try to impose what we want on Them” (ibid). Further, the lengthy initiation process is frequently described as pure ‘work’ rather than glamour or magic: running errands for a god-parent, plucking chickens, preparing meals, washing dishes, cleaning blood from the floor, etc. Obalorun Ala Aganju (Santería list, 20.5.03) explains that the *iyawo* period lasting for a year (during which the novice is to wear only white) includes the 3-month *ebo* ceremony and the final presentation to the Aña (‘fundamental drums’). The Ebo is the most important after the Kari Ocha and allows the *iyawo* presentation to the Cuarto de Santo or mysteries of the Igboro (“the sacred ritual space marked by the white sheet over the door.”) The drumming ceremony signifies the celestial announcement to Olofi that one is now an *olorisa*.

¹⁸For Oquendo on the Santería list (8.12.01), “My way of finding spirituality through santería is helping others.”

¹⁹*Vide* Gutierrez (2007–2012) who also alluded that there are some *odu* that completely forbid lying, with the exception for saving one’s life.

²⁰Ibid. In essence one’s godfamily functions as a support structure. Community is especially important within the religion, and the community of priests and priestesses is always considered necessary. Apart for individual prayers and devotions, there is little that an *olorisha* can do by herself/himself alone.

²¹From the Ifa verses, we learn the following concerning Ocha behavior:

As the Odu Eji Ogbe teaches: Let us not engage the world hurriedly. Let us not grasp at the rope of wealth impatiently. That which should be treated with mature judgement, Let us not deal with in state of uncontrolled passion. When we arrive at a cool place, let us rest fully. Let us give continuous attention to the future. Let us give deep consideration to the consequences of things. And this because of our eventual passing. (Cited by Obalorun Ala Aganju on the Santería list, 16 January 2003).

In other words, we find in Santería an ethical emphasis on patience and emotional control let alone rational and reflective consideration.

most centrally maintaining respect for lineage, succession and authority in terms of loyalty, consistency and decorum. As a traditional practice, there are traditional rules.²²

There is no notion of divine retribution in Santería – no punishments from the *orisas*; no need for guilt. Personal responsibility is the paramount emphasis. The overall purpose is to develop one's *ache* 'power' and one's *ori* 'head'. If an *aborisa* misbehaves or does not conform to established rules, *ita* or divination, the consequence is considered to be stagnation. The wayward person is abandoned by *orisa* and elder alike. At best, the result is likened to an illness.²³ In other words, Ocha/Santería does not countenance the idea of absolute evil. There is no notion of 'original sin'; no need for salvation. Instead, as with paganism in general, what becomes necessary in negative situations is healing. While there are disruptive forces (*ajogun*) that foster decrease and darkness, these are not intrinsically 'evil' but simply part of the cosmic balance of things as 'tests' to encourage us to re-direct our energies toward increase and betterment.²⁴ There is throughout Lucumí a profound emphasis on character (*iwa*).²⁵ In the heptatheonic formulation, this may be interpreted as health – a person with good character is a person who is spiritually healthy, not someone who is corrupted, morally diseased or impaired. The primary function of the priests and priestesses of the *orisas* is to be healers.²⁶ *Santeros* and *santeras* seek to establish balance and promote connection with the divine.

Obalorun Ala Aganju has stressed in Santería the importance of honesty, decency, diligence, love of and responsibility to one's family and loved ones.²⁷ Since the various stages of initiation require both time and the purchase of required items and foods, etc., there is a financial factor that is present and that can become a source of greed and extortion. It would be inaccurate to say that these negatives do not occur within Lucumí, as they do in virtually any religious practice, but these

²²For instance, in attending a ceremony, women will always wear a skirt. Even if they have slacks, they will wrap a skirt around them in order to appear properly attired. Innovation is nothing that is encouraged in Lucumí, since there are traditional ways by which to respect the elders. It is to these that the younger are required to learn to listen and to whom they must listen to be able to learn.

²³Ekun/Ewatuga Ataré, Santeria list (15.11.03).

²⁴Obalorun Ala Aganju, Santeria list (4.12.03). Accordingly, "Odu Ogbeate teaches us: Even if the beginning of wrongdoing is pleasant, the end of wickedness will not be good. We cannot use evil to secure goods and expect them to be anchored firmly." Further, "The wisdom of Odu Ofun Meji counsels: Ifa says we should not break a commitment to a friend, lest we die an unexpected death. If we discuss something with a person and that person wants to break a promise to us, the Ancestors will judge them. The king of the world will reward everyone precisely according to the work of his or her hands."

²⁵Ibid. "Bad conduct is what is attributed to youth. Bad character is what is attributed to elders" (Obalorun Ala Aganjua, Santeria list, 25 October 2003).

²⁶Likewise, while speaking of Haitian Vaudou, Rodman (1961:73) mentions that the *houngan's* "equally vital function is as medical advisor to a community generally without doctors." This involves herbal knowledge, psychological curing and the ability to encourage development of a healing/recuperating peace of mind in the patient.

²⁷Santeria list (15 August 2002).

are in general the exceptions rather than the rule – ones that are denounced by the wider community. Initiation is vitally central as *the* means within Ocha to bring one close to the *orisas*. But unlike elsewhere, in this form of paganism, ritual initiatory practice becomes more the assumption of responsibility than it does of freedom. The *olorisa* assumes lifelong obligations from which there is no ‘turning back’. Overall, Santería is pragmatic and practical. It does, however, contend that the *orisas* are real powers, potentially as dangerous as they might be helpful, and this requires the burden of vigilance in following the proper procedures and maintaining the necessity of a supportive community.²⁸

All in all, full participation and personal accountability are the chief means of expressing *aborisa*. The concomitant ceremonies are “a series of graphic demonstrations of the forces of nature,” symbolized by the *orisas* and “the participator’s capacity to integrate himself with them.”²⁹ As Rodman expresses for Vaudou, “sex is regarded as a wholly normal and un sinful activity.”³⁰ In Lucumí and Candomblé, homosexuality is tolerated and integrated within the community. *Orisas* may have gay relationships as well, and, as Eddy Gutierrez made clear, one’s sexual preferences are of no concern to the *orishas*.³¹

Consequently, Santería and related Afro-Latin spiritualities are to be seen as tolerant expressions of pagan sentiment. While many adherents to these traditions will refuse the label ‘pagan’ being applied to them, in their this-world orientation, plurality of godhead, rituals of enchantment and orientation to nature and the forces of nature, these African derived practices conform to what I have delineated elsewhere as pagan identity in contrast to secular, Abrahamic and dharmic.³² To be sure, like Shinto, Ocha/Lucumí, Ifa and Vaudou are particular sectarian expressions of paganism rather than the generic position I have been largely outlining in the present work. To some, they will have great appeal and attraction; to others, this may be less the situation, but in either case, the inherent pagan spirit and ethos are not diminished. The emphasis here appears to be more firmly on health, worship,

²⁸To counteract *osogbo* or ‘misfortunes’, resorting to *ebbó* or sacrifice becomes the means to restore balance. The first step is invariably divination to determine the patterns (*odu*), and then the appropriate behavioral changes, deeds or offerings are selected accordingly. Vis-à-vis the rest of the world, the most controversial *ebbó* is *eyebale* or ‘blood sacrifice’. Nevertheless, when attending a Vaudou house of worship in Oakland, California, I was informed that the sacrificial chickens were given subsequently to a local orphanage. The important point is that nothing was to be wasted through the ritual process.

²⁹Rodman (1961:69).

³⁰Ibid. p.74. He mentions further that the gods themselves are held to engage in active marital and extra-marital sex lives. Overtly sexual acts may appear on occasion in fertility rites, but by-and-large there is “too much discipline, solemnity, and time-honored translation of act into symbol, to permit of anything approaching orgies.”

³¹Gutierrez (2007–2012).

³²York (2003).

honor and productivity as well as generosity in the form of service. In particular, elders and women retain a revered place within these orientations.³³

Although many are drawn more superficially to *aborisa* out of desires for comfort in terms of power, money, love, sex or problem solving, the often unrecognized but centrally enshrined virtues are work and responsibility. The purpose of worship is to prepare and train for self-accountability in relation to both world and community. This is not a faith for ‘fairy tale’ or short cut solutions. It calls instead for perseverance, sacrifice, wisdom, character, internal strength, “the love of doing good for all people; most importantly those who are in need . . . and the eagerness to strive to increase good in the world and not let any good be lost.”³⁴ Nevertheless, worship in the Santerian sense aims for contact with the gods, and in this we can recognize that the impetus is to be deciphered as pleasure in terms of communion with the godhead and being informed and directed by the divine. While the Yoruba were enslaved peoples who first brought Ocha to the New World, it is perhaps surprising that freedom itself does not appear to be particularly signaled. The remaining virtue-values are clearly to be found in one form or another, but if and when we can also recognize that wisdom, insight, knowledge and understanding are themselves conditions that lead to increased emancipation, liberty is no less an important feature of the good life and happiness in Lucumí perceptions.

The Northern Traditions

While reconstructions rather than continuously living traditions, and, at the same time, radically different practices, the Northern traditions of Asatruar, Odinism, Vanruar, *seidr*, Theodism and Irminism, collectively also known as Heathenism, share some similarities with both Shinto and Ocha/Lucumí through their emphasis on community. Heathenism stresses folk association that conforms in many respects to a reinstitution of tribalism. The folk often assume precedence over the individual.³⁵

³³For Peter Clarke’s work on the social empowerment of women in Candomblé, see Clarke (1993).

³⁴Obalorun Ala Aganjua, Santeria list (18 November 2003).

³⁵<http://www.ealdriht.org/structure.html#more> (accessed 7.4.6; no longer available), website for Miercinga Ríce (for the Angles of Mercia), cited Durkheim’s contention that over-emphasis on individualism leads to depression and the possibility of suicide. Eric Hláfórd Wóðening and Swain Æþeling Wóðening also compared the effort to reinstitute tribalism with Confucius’ call for *jen* as the basis for social order. With a different emphasis, according to the Hoosier Heathen Alliance of Indiana (<http://www.ravenbanner.com/hha/> accessed 10.4.6; no longer accessible), “Heathen religion is *always* associated with a people or a nation.” The site continued further to maintain that religious claims to be applicable to all humanity all the time is “patently bunk! Spirituality is an intimate part of our people, culture, time and place – to separate them out is to unweave the very fabric of our destiny.” The site maintained, accordingly, that Judaism is a Heathen religion; the “spiritual smorgasbord of Santería and Voodoo are not.”

The Heathen value of *fridh* (pronounced ‘frith’) encompasses the maintenance of peace and friendship within the social group.³⁶ This is suggested by the obligations that are deemed necessary between kin, community and friends – these duties being the requisite reciprocal exchange of gifts, the rules of hospitality and the dynamic of mutual support that were central in ancient Germanic and Nordic society and remain so today among contemporary pagans of the Northern path. In this sense, the taking of an oath is vitally important for it rests on the values of honesty, being forthright and speaking plainly. All these are determinative factors that concern personal honor and its relations with the social group. We find this same emphasis on direct speech and the keeping of one’s word in Santería. As exemplary of a particular kind of pagan ethical position, honor is something sacred and incompatible with deceit.³⁷

There is as a result a strong articulation of ethics in Heathenry that is clearer than what we tend to find in many of the other forms of contemporary Western paganism. As an Odinist parent phrases it, “I feel now that I have found a faith which I can proudly share with my children, and which will give them a faith in something greater, an inner strength, a sense of identity, a broad minded view of life, a sense of right and wrong and above all a sense of joy and wonder and a sense of the adventure of being part of this amazing world of Midgard.”³⁸ As we have seen with Santería, there is in Heathenry an understanding of godhead as both male and female, equality between men and women and a strong cherishing of children.

For Heathens, there are various formulations of the moral path, but there is a detectable unified position nonetheless. In a sense, we have here virtually an instance of Aristotle’s understanding of virtue ethics. There is a concentration on the moral principles themselves as a means of conveying the sacred and suggesting the good life.³⁹

³⁶BBC Religions (2003): under “Ethics, beliefs and other paths.”

³⁷Within Heathenry, the pivotal factor is expressed by the notion of *wyrd*, the cause-and-effect principle that underlies the cosmos. *Wyrd* signifies the decrees and measures that constitute a person’s life (Mackenzie 1912:214). “[It] refers to how past actions continually affect and condition the future. It also stresses the interconnected nature of all actions, and how they influence each other” (T.R.S. Muralidharan: <https://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=1006010902755> – accessed 7 April 2014). The mutual connection of everything through space and time is a fundamental pagan concept that delineates the organic unity of the cosmos. Although frequently translated as ‘fate’, *wyrd* suggests more the influence of one’s own actions and responses rather than a strictly immutable destiny. Consequently, in ethical terms, it indicates the personal responsibility involved with how a person carves out his or her life in the face of the givens that one has been dealt. Each personal decision and subsequent action become determinative of one’s future range of choices. While our possibilities are understood as limited by the Norms or Fates, our freedom is intimately related to the responsibilities we assume under the restricted conditions that are ours and ours alone.

³⁸Hodges (2005:2). Midgard is ‘middle earth’, our earth.

³⁹One compilation included bravery, industriousness, friendship, generosity, honesty, hospitality, self reliance, self worth, steadfastness, strength, troth or loyalty and wisdom (<http://wodening.ealdriht.org/swain/asatru.html> – accessed 6 April 2006; no longer available). Anglo-Saxon Heathens refer to the ‘virtues’ as *thews* (Old English ‘customs, rules of conduct’). “Together they

While the *thews* or virtues are admirable and presumably encouraging of upright behavior in the ‘highest’ sense, there is nevertheless a tendency in Asatruar and other ethnic paganisms to use these same toward chauvinistic, racist and reactionary ends.⁴⁰ What we can occasionally see in *volkisch* identity is the anti-cosmopolitanism that springs from an exclusive concern “for our own Folk, an endangered minority. We support the awakening of racial consciousness for all peoples as a bulwark against assimilation.”⁴¹ With too narrow a focus on kindred, the specific hearth, garth or *samnung*, honor in the form of a more free and universal bigheartedness – one based on the intrinsic dignity of all peoples – is lost.⁴² Instead, honor becomes a virtual caricature. If the honorable is to be worthy, it must expand beyond the ‘me and mine’ for the fortitude of true generosity. While endangered identity is a real concern, once it becomes defensive, arrogant and/or myopic, it

form what is known as honor or worth and it is the aim of most Heathens to be honorable by practicing these thews with friend and stranger alike” (ibid.) The site <http://www.thetroth.org/memsvc/stewards/flyers/benw/flyer3.pdf> (accessed 7.4.6; no longer available) compared *thews* and the Scandinavian ‘nine noble virtues’. A further grouping of moral principles is supplied by <http://thetroth.org/> (The Troth Official Homepage – accessed 7.4.6): boldness, self-rule, steadfastness, generosity, truth, hospitality, equality, family responsibility, honor, industry, strength, troth, self-reliance and wisdom.

⁴⁰ Anne Ferlat (unpublished dissertation; personal communication 27.2.6), following Harvey, notes that there are both the “‘folkish’ and the ‘universalist’ orientations” within the Northern tradition. “The former assert that past heritage is a matter of bloodline and the homeland—that people bear their tradition inside themselves, while the latter claim that heathenism is for everyone, without needing to be physically embodied.” For instance, one website (<http://www.rhfweb.com/germrell1.html> – accessed 10 March 2006 but no longer accessible) listed the 1934 Breslau Catechism of Ernest Bergmann which states that the “ethics of the German Religion is an heroic ethics. It rests on three ancient German virtues: bravery, chivalry, and fidelity, all of which spring from honour.” The catechism is labeled “the 25 theses of the German religion.” See instead <http://thecensureofdemocracy.150m.com/text18.htm> (accessed 1 August 2014). As impressive as this may sound, we hear along with this that “The German of today requires a healthy and natural religion which makes him brave, pious, and strong in the struggle for Folk and Fatherland. Such a religion is the German Religion.” This ‘catechism’ is preceded by such statements as: “all belief in inherited sin, as well as the Jewish Christian teachings of a fallen world and man, . . . menaces the morality of the Folk” (ibid.) Even worse, the site declares that Jewish or Israeli, Asian and Black African cultures are a disgrace to all German people. For a contrary position, see the instructions listed for troth clergy at <http://www.thetroth.org/clergy/ethics.html> (accessed 10.3.6 but no longer available; see instead The Troth’s 2008 “Position Statement”: <http://www.thetroth.org/index.php?page=Position&title=About%20Us%20%20The%20Troth&css=style2&pagestyle=mid> (accessed 1 August 2014).

⁴¹ From *The Odinist* 123 (1989:4) – cited in York (1995b:126).

⁴² Describing the Odinic Rite, Ferlat (*loc. cit.*) says that “The movement is organised into *hearths*, or small communities open to non-professed members, and *garths* open to professed members only; *hofs* who are groups of Hearths and/or Garths meet on their own premises with the purpose of making the *Odinic Rite* celebrations available to a wider audience.”

is unhealthy and no longer conducive to the spacious virtue that is the beauty and ethical role of the generic pagan spirit upon the stage of the global arena.⁴³

While fascist tendencies cloud some of the Heathen expression in Germany, Belgium, Britain and America, it is not a black-and-white scenario, and many within the Northern Traditions hold more open positions that suggest a proper balance of heptatheonic virtue-values.⁴⁴ The various moral temperaments emphasized are expressive of honor itself – the ability to show respect to others, to the deities and to oneself. They are healthy pursuits as well as comfortable ones – spiritually and emotionally if not also physically. And being hospitable is additionally to be honorable, for here we find the very essence of generosity and magnanimity.⁴⁵

Once again, and surprisingly for a tradition that descends from a peoples renowned for having resisted Roman imperial rule in large part, there is little concrete reference to freedom per se. Nevertheless, the Raven Kindred Association had mentioned: “While we recognize Gothar as teachers and persons of close relationship with the Gods, no person’s relationship with the Gods is dependent on another human’s intervention or help.”⁴⁶ In other words, the Heathen is *independent* in terms of spiritual communion.⁴⁷ The language here is Nietzschean but is

⁴³A milder form of ‘racism’ is expressed by the ‘Declaration of Purpose’ of the Asatru Folk Assembly of America (<http://www.runestone.org/flash/home.html> – accessed 7.4.6, but as of 1 August 2014 to be found at http://www.runestone.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=69&Itemid=475): “All native religions spring from the unique collective soul of a particular people. Religions are not arbitrary or accidental; body, mind and spirit are all shaped by the evolutionary history of the group and are thus interrelated. Asatru is not just what we believe, it is what we are. Therefore, the survival and welfare of the European peoples as a cultural and biological group is a religious imperative for the AFA.”

⁴⁴For these, the elucidation of the ‘nine noble virtues’ drawn from the *Poetic Edda’s Havamal*, namely, courage, truth, honor, fidelity, discipline, hospitality, industriousness, self-reliance and perseverance, are pragmatic guides toward the good and proper life. As Freya Nash (2005:4) explains, courage indicates the bravery to speak out against injustice and wrongdoing. Truth entails not only sincere speaking but also being truthful with oneself. Fidelity suggests faithful loyalty to partner, kith, kin, the gods and goddesses. Self-discipline, industriousness, self-sufficiency and resolve are virtuous dispositions we have already found emphasized within Santería as work and determination.

⁴⁵Nash (ibid.), however, contends that today the sharing of home, shelter and food with strangers is “too dangerous.” Instead, if and when we help others to find the information and assistance they require, shop for an elderly neighbor or visit those who are hospitalized, we are “still being hospitable.” <http://www.aetaustralia.org/nnv.htm> (the Australian-based Assembly of the Elder Troth; 7.4.6; no longer available) originally provided another explanation of the ‘nine noble virtues of Asatru’ as well as the ‘nine noble charges’ or ‘six-fold goals’ of right, wisdom, might, harvest, frith and love. See instead <http://www.aetaustralia.org/> (accessed 1 August 2014).

⁴⁶<http://www.webcom.com/lstead/RKA.html> (accessed 7.4.6; no longer available), now to be found at <http://kaerhrafnr.wordpress.com/2011/03/21/kaerhrafnr-kindreds-beliefs/>: KaerHrafnur 2011 (accessed 1 August 2014).

⁴⁷Further than this, the American-based Asatru Free Assembly lists “The fostering in our people of a deep love of freedom and a hatred of all forms of tyranny” as an important principle:

nevertheless expressive of the freedom of non-conformity and non-intimidation that is central in Heathenry. Once again, the notion of liberty is tied with wisdom.⁴⁸

But freedom also entails self-expression,⁴⁹ and the affirmation of this last for all peoples was the first point to be stressed in the Resolutions of the World Congress of Ethnic Religions and Traditions that was co-sponsored by *Werkgroep Traditie* (the Asatrú movement for the Low Countries) following its gathering in Antwerp in June of 2005.⁵⁰ Consequently, the Northern Traditions incorporate the virtue-value of liberty into their understanding of the good life even if this is not explicitly included among the ‘nine noble virtues’. But once again, we have a pagan spiritual response that recognizes communion with the godhead (understood in Heathenry in terms of ‘hard polytheism’)⁵¹ as a greatest of pleasures. This enjoyment is, for Heathens, invariably extended to community and communal religious gatherings – *blots* and *symbol*s.⁵² All the same, and akin to *Lucumí*, there is a stress on the less

Asatru implies strong, vigorous, free people who do not grovel before other humans, the state, or the Gods themselves. Our Gods are not slave masters, but rather want us to grow in freedom and responsibility that we may better imitate them. The Gods do not want us to be submissive, meek, and mild. Rather, they want us to evolve towards ever-greater freedom, exercised in wisdom and awareness. Similarly, we will never bow before human tyrants. Totalitarianism, the ant hill, and the mass-mind are the antitheses of the European ideal (Asatru Folk Assembly 2012 “Declaration of Purpose”).

The other points of the AFA declaration of purpose include the promotion of Asatru, preservation of the Northern peoples, inclusive restoration of the sacred ways of Asafolk, re-establishment of self-reliant community, promotion of diversity throughout the world, responsible use of science and technology in balance with the natural world, adventurous exploration of the universe, and affirmation of eternal struggle with courage, welcome and joy. Concluding a life of vigor, “when it is time to die, let us do that with dignity, honor, and grace.”

⁴⁸In keeping with the spirit of being adventuresome, the AFA connects the love of freedom further with a passion for border line borders: “Stagnation brings regimentation and tameness. Liberty needs a frontier; there is no place for the hero in a world grown regulation-riddled and over-organized” (ibid.)

⁴⁹Likewise, one of the ten principles of Burning Man is *radical self-expression* which is understood as arising “from the unique gifts of the individual. No one other than the individual or a collaborating group can determine its content. It is offered as a gift to others. In this spirit, the giver should respect the rights and liberties of the recipient.” See Burning Man (1989–2013).

⁵⁰<http://www.traditie.be/> (accessed 7 April 2006). One of the resolutions from the WCER document touches directly on the alleged fascist associations of Astruar and Odinist identities: “Since love for ethnic heritage is often confused with racism and xenophobia, we ask that the Government encourage understanding of the fundamental difference between political organizations and movements, on the one hand, and the religious communities whose open-mindedness, values and principles are based on local cultures and traditions, on the other.” <http://www.traditie.be/Wie%20zijn%20wij/9b.html> (accessed 2 August 2014).

⁵¹BBC Religions (2003).

⁵²*Symbol*s are ritual drinking ceremonies, and participants are expected and encouraged though not enforced to join in with the merrymaking. Consequently, “drinking alcohol, even to excess in some ritual circumstances, can be a holy act, as can various forms of conjugal and non-conjugal sex” (originally <http://www.thetroth.org/clergy/ethics.html>, but now to be found at Chakkraa 2010). Nevertheless, Troth clergy were previously admonished that licentious behaviors are “things which

obviously pleasurable activities of hard work, diligence and perseverance. If there is an all-embracing value for the Heathen, it is honor – an honorable condition that includes pleasure but also dignity, grace and devotional output as expressed in one’s dedication to community and the gods.

Druidry

As Susan Reed finds, Druid groups are similar to Heathens in following principally virtue-based ethics that encourage the development of moral character. Occasionally, duty-based ethics appear in Druidism as well.⁵³ Some Druid groups do not emphasize morality; others articulate widely diverging understandings. One of the more complete formulations is to be found in Emma Restall Orr’s “Ethics and Values in Druidism.”⁵⁴

Originally in another essay, “Druidry and Ethical Choice,”⁵⁵ Restall Orr disclosed that Druidry or Celtic spirituality must be assessed by the values and priorities of its adherents rather than its tangible legacy, mythology, pantheon, language or history. She affirmed that the virtues of this tradition develop from “reverence for and connection with the powers of nature” – comprehended in the honoring of life.⁵⁶ Druid ethics, therefore, are “sourced in relationship, and in

we must handle carefully in order not to give the wrong impression to outsiders” when occurring in public and semi-public rituals.

⁵³Reed (2004).

⁵⁴Former Joint Chief of the British Druid Order, Restall Orr (also known as Bobcat) focuses on responsibility, world and community engagement, trust in existential meaning and purpose, authenticity, holistically appreciating the polarities of life, and being of value to others and the world in terms of goodness and healing. These foci may be summed up as making the effort to live honorably. Restall Orr claims that “Druid ethics are built upon the release of ignorance and the respectful creation of deep and sacred relationships” (ibid.) She draws on the ideas of Brendan Myers and Athelia Nihtscada, namely, Druidic devotion to truth and the sacredness of life, community service, honesty, hospitality and the maintenance of spiritual and physical health, to consider that Druidic ethics, rather than being an imposed code of morality, are a practice that is based on contact with the natural world and art of every kind:

http://www.druidry.org/modules.php?op=modload&name=PagEd&file=index&topic_id=1&page_id=50 (accessed 7.4.6).

Reed (2004) furnishes brief presentations on the varying ethical positions of the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids; the British Druid Order; the Ancient Order of Druids in America; Reformed Druids of North America; Ar nDraiocht Fein; and the Henge of Keltria. She also provides a list of references and resources.

⁵⁵See now Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids. u.d. “Ethics and Values in Druidry II”: http://www.druidry.org/modules.php?op=modload&name=PagEd&file=index&topic_id=1&page_id=50 (accessed 7 April 2006).

⁵⁶Ibid. On <http://www.druidnetwork.org/ethical/articles/druidry-choice.html> (originally accessed on 7 April 2006, but no longer available), Restall Orr described this as an “exquisitely complicated simplicity.”

particular from our relationship with the divine: nature.”⁵⁷ Honor is comprehended as honesty, wonder and respect, and, as ignorance is sacrificed and the Druid vision of life becomes increasingly informed by the patterns of nature, mindless and destructive egoism has steadily less place in the concomitant expansion of Druidic awareness.⁵⁸

With Druid/Celtic spirituality, however, community is not understood as necessarily biological as it often is in Heathenry. For paganism as a whole, especially in many of its ethnic expressions, there is a similar propensity as with much religion in general for the development of sectarian divisions in the regressive sense. But vis-à-vis the kind of groupism that divides humanity, Druid religiosity tends much more toward collective associations that are enabling rather than divisive. Among Celtic forms of reconstruction, for some reason, there have not appeared the needs for folk purity that have been envisioned among Germanic and Slavs as well as some Baltic peoples. Perhaps there has been more of a trans-cultural assimilation among Celts that has allowed Druidism and related expressions to champion a more sophisticated and inclusive cosmopolitanism – one that, in this case, still firmly grounds itself in a love for and respect of nature.

Not all contemporary Druids view Druidry as religious. For some, it is a philosophical tradition or a magical practice or both. But in virtually all instances, “Druid ethics and reverence for nature, and the worlds of spirit, are seen by many as a cultural treasure that is being rediscovered after centuries of persecution and marginalization.”⁵⁹ Isaac Bonewits (1949–2010) affirmed that “it is necessary to have respect and love for Nature as divine in Her own right, and to accept ourselves as part of Nature and not Her ‘rulers’ We consider ecological awareness and activism to be sacred duties.”⁶⁰ He placed this nature worship within a Druid context that includes understandings of divinity as polytheistic, immanent and transcendent, male and female; of the cosmos as something to connect to through observations of solstices, equinoxes, the phases of the moon, etc.; and of the good life as one that is filled non-addictively and non-compulsively with “joy, love, pleasure, beauty and

⁵⁷<http://www.druidnetwork.org/ethical/articles/druidry-choice.html>.

⁵⁸In Restall Orr’s understanding of Druidism, every act of daily life is part of the spirituality of democratic choice and, if done with proper awareness and consideration of the consequences, becomes a vote against industrial agriculture, pharmaceutical hegemony, animal testing and violations of human rights. Druidic mindfulness is based on the whole notion of community – relationship with others, with self and with nature. This translates into responsibility – being responsible “as part of the ecological web of life and nature.” <http://www.druidnetwork.org/ethical/articles/druidry-choice.html>. Likewise, another of the ten Burning Man principles is that of *communal effort*.

“Our community values creative cooperation and collaboration. We strive to produce, promote and protect social networks, public spaces, works of art, and methods of communication that support such interaction” (Burning Man 1989–2013).

⁵⁹<http://www.avaloncollege.org/PROSPECTUS.html> (7.4.6) – the former website for the Avalon Center for Druidic Studies but no longer available.

⁶⁰<http://paganpastorale Outreach.ca/ethics/pagan.htm> (7 April 2006) but now to be found at <http://www.skepticfiles.org/mys1/adf-neop.htm> (accessed 3 August 2014).

humor.”⁶¹ All in all, he spoke of a ‘positive ethics’ that promotes religious tolerance, religious freedom, a ‘cautious technophilia’, community responsibility, authenticity in practice as a way of life and occasionally the simple social function.

Though they can be confusing, contradictory and poetic, for the study of Celtic ethics, reflection on the ancient literary Triads may provide the most rewarding avenue toward insight.⁶² According to John Wright, embedded in the Triads that deal with ethics, the notion of ‘virtue’ is synonymous with ‘excellence’.⁶³ It is here where we are permitted to glean the importance of heptatheonic understanding as they play out in Celtic ethical thought. The three most valuable things are declared to be health, liberty and virtue. While health, freedom and prudence are all considered to be better than wealth, it is health, success and honor that are the rewards one garners by keeping to the law.⁶⁴

The manifestation of excellence occurs in the honoring of one’s parents, the respecting of the elderly and the education of the young.⁶⁵ Akin to the Confucian recognition of the importance of *jen*, the Triads present two sets of causes behind true humanity: truth, honor and duty; or civility, generosity and compassion. We find that generosity is linked to beauty and desire. For the good life, there must be generosity, truth and peace, or, alternatively, generosity, truth and valor. The gods are said to love the just, kind and generous person who exercises these dispositions with strength, in bravery and without regret. Generosity, industry and prudence are held to be the three special virtues of wisdom.

Finally, turning to worship and pleasure, the Triads tell us that the foundations of spirituality are the hearth as altar, work as worship and service as holy. Worship along with an upright character and perseverance are the three factors that help to prevent misfortune. Pleasure itself is recognized as part of worshipping the gods. But, for the good life, pleasure along with wealth and festivity must be neither in deficiency nor in excess.⁶⁶

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²According to Squire (1912:11), these are “verses celebrating famous traditional persons or things.” He also speaks of “the Celtic love of triads” (331). As verse recordings of Celtic wisdom and law in the form of tripartite assemblages, they derive principally from Gaelic and Cymric sources. For the triadic dynamic underlying Celtic mythology and cultic perception, see York (1995a:252–73). For a comprehensive presentation of the Triads, see Wright (1995).

⁶³Wright (1995).

⁶⁴Ibid. We also learn that good health is understood as resulting from moderate eating, balanced labor and intrinsic friendliness. Further, those who are blessed in lawsuits are those who are generous, wise and healthy. In addition, and more prosaically, comfort is something that pertains to the home and concerns having a bed-partner, a hearth-fire and a filled purse. Similarly, the three uncomfortable things are a house without a partner, a room without food and a body without health. As we have mentioned earlier, health and comfort are closely intertwined values.

⁶⁵Wright (1995). A fourth excellence is given here as defending infancy and innocence. Additionally, worldly honor is to be found when one ploughs the family farmstead, when one is successful in the assertion of a claim and in the raising of children. Happiness is the condition in which one gains prosperity, honor and ease of conscience.

⁶⁶For all these references, see *ibid.*

Lewis Spence contends that Druidism “originated in the worship of the oak tree as a source of provender in early times.”⁶⁷ While his theory is questionable by today’s standards, it is nonetheless still plausible. In the least, it is indicative of the affinity of Celtic spirituality and Druidry with nature and nature worship – an association that continues with modern, revived Druidism and furnishes the basis for its ritual focus and the concomitant grounding of ethical formulation. Relationship with nature as well as the relationships of family and spiritual brethren form for today’s Druid a series of overlapping communities. Honor, health and freedom emerge in this context as central virtue-values. All in all, Druidic ethics are not only expressive of positive pagan morality but also appear to demonstrate themselves as such in actual practice.

Romuva

In many respects, the same situation exists for the Lithuanian pagan reconstructionist movement of Romuva as we find for Druidry. Although Romuva is an instance of ethnic religiosity, its overall emphasis is not chauvinist but firmly interfaith and inclusive. To be sure, in my travels to Lithuania as well as through the Romuva e-list I have encountered negative jingoistic comments and attitudes on occasion (e.g., exalting Aryanism), but in general these are the exception rather than the norm.⁶⁸

The overriding issue for all European ethnic traditions is one of authenticity in the face of suppression and discontinuity. But as Martin Shetty argues, Lithuanian paganism does not have behind it a stable social order, a preserved concrete theology (which it never had), a legacy of priesthood or ethnography, but instead Lithuanian culture itself accommodated the spirituality and preserved its original worldview. Shetty feels that “Baltic ethics and perception of the world transcends time and space.”⁶⁹ Jonas Trinkunas, who became officially *krivis* or ‘Chief Priest’ of Lithuania,⁷⁰ recounted how Romuva came to be when he and his colleagues “learned

⁶⁷Spence (1940/1971:67).

⁶⁸In response to some rabid anti-Semitic comments, Romuva list owner, Marija Kuncaitis said on 11 February 2001: “Racial issues have always been a touchy subject for centuries. Let us leave this topic alone and go on to other issues.” Romuva@egroups.com.

⁶⁹Romuva list: Romuva@egroups.com (11 January 2001).

⁷⁰Accessed through <http://www.romuva.lt/?kalba=engl&page=istorija&nr=3> (10.4.6). During his ordainment, Trinkunas (1939–2014) made the following statement: “Dear friends, I speak under the direction of the last Lithuanian Krivis – Kestutis. I received this call forty years ago in the sacred grove of Verkiiai. Daukantas, Vyduenas, Basanavicius and other Lithuanian intellectuals called for the nation’s rebirth in Romuva. The way to today’s celebration was long and twisted like the krivule, but meaningful. The voice of the ancestors clearly stated the need to revive our traditional Baltic religion. How? The answer came from the common people of our country – villagers, farmers – the keepers and protectors of our folk culture. The moral code of our ancient faith, the stories of gods and goddesses, relics, rituals, chants, and the wisdom itself was [*sic.*] handed

our paganism from the rural people, not from books, not from popular movements” that they did not know about until later. Through living in the villages, collecting the folklore, communing with the local people, and by acquiring from them the ancient songs, “the peculiar type of sensation, behaviour and ethics . . . we acquired their ‘true spirit’, which inspired our paganism.”⁷¹

Lithuanian culture and Romuva are nature-centered – with the Lithuanian branch of Romuva being closely associated to the Green party.⁷² Accordingly, Romuva pagans honor the earth and celebrate the seasons.⁷³ “Romuva is a nature religion; it is animistic and pantheistic.”⁷⁴ As Al Paciuinas says, “Whenever we cut or harvest herbs we honor the plant or tree with a prayer.”⁷⁵ Throughout Lithuanian Baltic pagan practice, there is an intimate connection with the natural world, and the concomitant ethics are based on this tie. With this grounding in nature, Baltic paganism is in full accord with contemporary Western paganism and various indigenous paganisms.⁷⁶

Simonas Kiela explains that a core Baltic value is good temper and that Lithuanians appreciate and honor age, experience and wisdom.⁷⁷ These are cited as the things that make a person more stable. The Lithuanian equivalent of the Vedic *ṛta*, Latin *honos*, English *art*, however, is *darna*. Accordingly, “Evil is the failure of

down to us by respectable village elders. We live in the 21st century, the century of modernization, having maintained the cultural heritage of our ancestors. We still live with our Baltic gods and goddesses, we believe in their power and the omnipotence of our Earth-Zemyna. I wish everyone harmony, love and confidence in life and loyalty to the ancestors, gods, and goddesses. God help, Laima bless!”

⁷¹Ibid. (11 January 2001). Trinkunas admitted, “Of course, the rural people would never speak of ‘paganism’ – as their culture or religion.”

⁷²http://altreligion.about.com/library/faqs/bl_romuvan.htm (accessed 10.4.6 but no longer accessible): the Romuva-Lithuanian Folk Revival site.

⁷³Theresa J. Deardon (Romuva list; 29 August 2001).

⁷⁴Vilius Rudra Dundzila (Romuva list; 3 June 2002).

⁷⁵Romuva list (21 January 2002). In a personal communication (14 April 2006), Jonas Trinkunas said much the same: “it is difficult and practically impossible to avoid killing other living creatures, trees, plants and animals. . . . When a tree had to be cut down, or an animal slaughtered our ancestors took care to beg forgiveness for their actions. Such practices contributed to the reduction of destructive actions and never allowed unlimited use of natural resources.”

⁷⁶According to Lietuvos Romuva, the ecological movement of today is “close to the values of ancient Lithuania, when people respected nature and lived in harmony with natural laws in a sustainable way. . . . Learning from nature was one of the main ancient principles” (<http://www.romuva.lt/?kalba=engl&page=naujienos&nr=5> – accessed 10.4.6). “Ancient Baltic culture was completely ecological leaving no waste, and nothing material for archeologists to find.”

⁷⁷Romuva list (26 July 2001). Trinkunas (private communication; 14 April 2006) claimed that “Respect for one’s mother, father, and elder individuals is especially important in human relations. In the letters of Grand Duke Gediminas, we read that respect for elders is the most important virtue.”

darna, its absence, and the inability to reestablish it.”⁷⁸ In the heptatheonic schema, *darna* comprises comfort.⁷⁹ The Seniunas Vilius Dundzila extends this further by considering that the person with *darna* is one who has personal “wholeness and balance.”⁸⁰ Consequently, there is also with *darna* the suggestion of health.

In the Romuva tradition of Lithuanian paganism, then, the key virtue-values would appear to be honor, health and spiritual comfort.⁸¹ However, generosity also comes into significance through the emphasis on what is known as *talka* – roughly translated as ‘mutual aid’.⁸² Dundzila confirms that the proximate equivalent of the generosity of charity in Romuva would be *talka*.⁸³ There is some disagreement on the implications of this term. *Talka* carries more the impression of reciprocal exchange, but as Kazlauskas puts it: “Our Elder [Dundzila] reminds us that

⁷⁸Trinkunas (1995): “Such opposing pairs as light-day, fire-water, man-woman, etc., were not equated with ‘good-bad’. Their cooperation is a condition of life and of moral growth. Such pairs of opposites are not solidified because they constantly change and interact. From the human perspective, there is no absolute good or bad. Goodness is born from the interaction of different and even opposing forces.” Consequently, people actively participate in creating and sustaining *darna*.

“Evil – *blogis* – does not exist of itself, rather, evil is the downfall of harmony, the absence of harmony and the inability to restore it. . . . Morality is the most important ideal of nature and man and is attained and maintained through persistent effort.” (Trinkunas, private communication, 14 April 2006).

⁷⁹Gintautas Kazlauskas lets us know that the usual translation for *darna* is ‘harmony’, though he feels that ‘harmonization’ might be more accurate (Romuva list, 5 June 2002).

⁸⁰Romuva list (3 June 2002). See also Trinkunas (1999).

⁸¹According to Trinkunas (private communication; 14 April 2006), “The most important moral requirement is respect for and protection of life. From this comes the requirement not to kill. Because nature that encircles life was considered alive, that respect was extended to all essential manifestations of nature. This is why Lithuanians honored the earth, water, the sun, the moon, fire, bread, trees, birds, animals, etc. Behavior that destroys or injures these norms was sinful. For this reason, it is considered a sin to pollute water from a spring, fire in a hearth, to hit or otherwise damage the earth, or to spoil bread. Killing a bee or a stork was just as sinful as the murder of a human being.” In the same communication, Trinkunas mentioned that the moral life is determined by the way a person views the world rather than through a list of rules for good behavior or punishments for sins. Lithuanian morality derives from the assumption that the “world itself is good-willed towards people.”

⁸²Gintautas Kazlauskas refers to this as an institution “which is a system, a set of protocols, a way of life and also the people themselves” (Romuva list, 5 June 2002). He says additionally that *talka* is “a system of interlaced aid and mutual obligations to return aid in kind.”

⁸³Romuva list (3 June 2002). He feels that “In Romuva, *talka* is there because people are in need. People helping people. Very simple and straight forward. I think it is quite natural. I dare say the Ethical/Religious Humanists would agree with the Romuva approach, but not the Christian one [of *agape* or *caritas* because of the love of God].” For Jonas Trinkunas (private communication; 14 April 2006), *talka* is ‘cooperative help’ and refers to communal work without compensation. He also mentioned *biciulyste* ‘friendship’ as a word that derives from bee-keeping and denotes relationships that are based on morality. Moreover, *vaisinigumas* is the “kindness and respect given to guests.”

true volunteer work expects no return.”⁸⁴ He claims instead that the Lithuanian worldview on charity stems from the native concepts of *dorybe* ‘propriety’, *darna* and *svietingumas* ‘hospitality’. But whereas *darna* has to do with proper ritual, purity or cleanliness, perpetual responsibility and the afterlife, *dora* is simply helping another because it is the right thing to do. This last coexists with hospitality and is exemplified in the ancient Lithuanian *pasaka* or fables about one of the gods appearing as a stranger.

Dievas (or Perkunas) assumes [the] form of a beggar, dirty and dressed in rags. He comes to the house of a prosperous farmer who gives him crusts of bread, lets him sleep in the barn with the animals. [Next] he goes to a poor, old farm couple who have only a loaf of hard bread and dried cheese, but they share what they have and put him up next to the warm stove. Dievas rewards the generous person and punishes the stingy one.⁸⁵

In Lithuanian legend, lightning, the attribute of the god Perkunas, will not strike the house that welcomes the stranger at its door. All in all, *dora* and *svietingumas* are virtues that concern this life, this world, and both express the spirit of generosity that makes Baltic ethics a true and non-egoistic morality.

In what I have been able to learn of Lithuanian morality, neither freedom nor pleasure as such are explicitly emphasized. Nevertheless, I am certain that if the pagan Lith were asked whether these values are important, he or she would say ‘yes’. In the *dainas* or folksongs these do not appear, but all the same, with the stress on honoring nature, the gods and ancestral traditions as well as the ancestors themselves, with the further accent on *darna*, *talka*, *dora* and *svietingumas* – harmony, health, honor, reciprocal aid, generosity and hospitality – Baltic or Lithuanian ethics are a noble understanding of the good life. It is *darna*, however, as harmony, which perhaps most encapsulates the spirit of the heptatheon as a whole – especially if and when it is infused with *talka*. It is here where I would disagree with Kazlauskas in his shifting *talka* to the afterlife. A *talka* impregnated *darna* would be very much this-worldly whatever else it may also be. As such, it exemplifies the reciprocal dynamics of the heptatheon per se: pleasure, freedom and health are the gifts of the gods; honor, worship, doing right, service, productivity and kindness are our ways of giving thanks and expressing gratitude to our benefactors.⁸⁶

⁸⁴Romuva list (5 June 2002).

⁸⁵Ibid.

⁸⁶On the Romuva list (12 March 2003), Vilius Dundzila launched a discussion of Romuva Principles along with his own comments. The Baltic Community works for the harmonious unison with the gods, ancestors, nature and people while nurturing the Baltic traditional moral way of life. In this, nature is understood as “the most obvious manifestation of divinity.” While harmony with other people, the divine and the natural world is sought, it is nonetheless recognized that harmony itself is a difficult goal and is not always possible. Nature and its cycles and community and its methods are venerated. The ‘scriptures’ of Lithuanian Ethnic Religion are the verbal, aural and visual folklore that have been preserved continuously in Lithuanian peasant culture. They encourage the use of common sense and reason in their application. “Holiness is [honored as] the most perfect quality of the life of the world” – creating the challenge to live life with that “holiness

Slavic Spirituality

The reconstructed pagan traditions of the Slavic countries (Russia, Ukraine, Byelorussia, etc.) often conform to the eugenics and xenophobic positions we can find among the Northern and Baltic orientations.⁸⁷ Adherents are frequently people who are concerned with reclaiming an ancient and threatened ethnic identity. Once again, this is a pagan possibility that does exist and, while not particularly savory for many within the wider pagan community, needs to be kept clearly in sight and on the table rather than simply dismissed or hidden.⁸⁸

In the very flexibility and multi-applicability of paganism, we have a spirituality that can be used in countless different ways – some positive; some negative; some in a cosmopolitan sense; some in a regressive, myopic or provincial sense. With its extreme valuing of locality and the immediacy of place, xenophobic chauvinism is

[constantly] alive in our consciousness.” “The main character traits of a romuvis are respect for the divine creative power in nature and in humans. The pivots of the Baltic faith are harmony and honesty. The pursued virtues of a romuvis are justice, diligence, and the ability to get along with other people and the World.” In this pursuit, the honorable building of relationships, community and trust is seen as the more likely outcome.

⁸⁷Moreover, for Shnirelman (1999–2000:18), the Russian effort to develop a ‘genuine’ indigenous religion “is not a restoration of any pre-Christian religion as such but a construction of an ideological basis for a new socio-political entity that could meet the demands of modernization.” While this point may be accurate in itself, it overlooks the ‘organicity’ that is celebrated by paganism as well as the non-precluded ability to regenerate an ethos that has been historically suppressed. Despite the theosophical, Zoroastrian, romantic and frequently embarrassingly infantile fantasies that are detectable in the current Russian and other Slavic attempts to re-find their ethnic religious past, the skeptical anti-reconstruction attitude itself does not work ‘emically’ but often criticizes and dismisses from its own outside perspective.

⁸⁸In her chapter on “Slavic Movements in Russia” (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation), Anne Ferlat mentions various “ideologies of hatred.” Alekseĭ Dobrovolskij, a dissident who created his own group promoting Nazi ideas, “is well respected among right-wing Neo-Pagans in Russia today. . . . His ideology can be defined as a ‘Russian national socialism.’” Further, for the ‘second wave’ of formalized pagan groups or communities in Russia, “Dominating the visible part of the movement were a majority of neo-fascists, and particularly the group *Pamiat’*, of which Emelianov [author of *Desionisation*] was one of the leaders.” Ferlat finds that neo-fascists are also attracted to the martial arts emphasis of *Soyouz Slavianskix Obšin*, the ‘Union of Slavic Communities’.

In addition, “Some right-wing influences may be well reflected by the publishing group *Russkaja Pravda*, ‘Russian Truth’, which defines itself as a central anti-Christian Slavic publishing house that promotes Vedic health concepts. It defines itself as nationalistic, ‘leading an uncompromising fight against the occupying regime’, and it is directed by Aleksandr Aratov, [who is] known in Russia for his extremist positions.” According to its website, “*Russkaja Pravda* is a publishing house run by Russians, about Russians and for the Russians” (Ferlat translation).

“An inseparable part of this myth [of Aryan or Nordic origins] was the idea of Universal Evil that had placed innumerable obstacles before the Aryans on the path to the Bright Future. Such literature associated this Evil with the Jews, who came to symbolize a negative global, if not cosmic, force, as in Nazi ideology” (Shnirelman 2003 – section 1 & note 7). Shnirelman feels that with the breakup of the Soviet Union, its former citizens felt ‘orphaned’ and turned as a result to new ethnocentric ideologies.

always a possibility. Likewise, for any bigoted, prejudiced or opinionated agenda, paganism may become a vehicle for the furtherance of antithetical goals. This may also be the case with other religious persuasions, but for paganism itself it is this diverse possibility that is integral to it that is actually paganism's great strength. There are no fixed codes, no final authority and no sanctioning body. Paganism remains a perpetually open negotiation that seeks to aspire toward 'the best', the *aristos* – one that is mindful of, respectful of and championing of the right to self-determination for each and everyone to determine what that *aristos* is. But the 'saving grace' that is embedded within the very corpo-spiritual soil of paganism is the implicitness of heptatheonic virtue-values that, if properly cultivated and allowed fruition and flowering, are conducive to the human best for humanity as a whole.⁸⁹

If some of our Slavic expressions fall short on this score at present, paganism as a whole always holds the hope and promise for eventual improvement. Consequently, it behooves us to look for the positive ethical sides of Slavic paganism. We want to know what are its moral articulations. What are the ethical building-blocks that can be used from this direction for the good life and/or a better world?

The following known as the Russian Religion developed by V.M. Kandyba, for instance, stresses the divine potential of the human individual, kindness, compassion, cheerfulness, positive feeling, non-suffering, social service, labor and community over individualism. He considers idleness, self-interest, thirst for power, alcoholism, adultery and anti-luxury modesty to be sins.⁹⁰ In general, Russian and Ukrainian spirituality places emphasis on the ancestral cultural heritage, community formation and preservation of the natural environment,⁹¹ but to find a truer Russian

⁸⁹The upset over the more fascist developments of contemporary paganism is reflected in the 9th of July 2014 DECLARATION FROM THE EUROPEAN CONGRESS OF ETHNIC RELIGIONS which included the statement: "We object to the use of the term 'pagan' by extremist political groups of any kind, as it reflects negatively on our reputation." <http://ecer-org.eu/a-declaration-from-the-european-congress-of-ethnic-religions-english-version/> (accessed 3 August 2014).

⁹⁰Shnirelman (1999–2000).

⁹¹Apart from the neo-fascist manifestations among ethnic Slavic paganism, there is also a tendency toward 'fantasy escapism'. People who follow in, and/or identify with, Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* saga [a strong influence among Russian pagans] "long to escape from the everyday world and enjoy a more meaningful existence." For Ferlat, "Pagan times are seen as the Golden Age, an era of perfection and of freedom." Victor Shnirelman recognizes that the "Russian 'back to the soil' (*pochvenniceskii* in Russian) nationalism aroused a passionate interest in a 'heroic' reading of ancient history and prehistory" (Ferlat *loc. cit*). Ferlat signals Nicolas Speranski who calls for a lifestyle close to nature and the rejection of technology and urban living. Grigorij Jakutovskij, who founded the group *Kupalo* in the early 1990s, "asserts that in the past people were closer to shamanism than to polytheism" (Shnirelman 2003 – section 1 & note 3). Here too we find an exaltation of an idealized past.

Consequently, throughout much of the current nationalistic expressions of Russian paganism, it is admittedly difficult to find the kind of ethos that relates to that of generic paganism in general. For instance, author Vladimir Ivanov

or Slavic pagan spirit, one must dig deeper beneath the transcendental overlay and amalgamation.⁹²

The reverence for, and interaction with, nature is central to paganism in most of its guises. Adrian Ivakhiv, for instance, maintains “that contemporary Slavic Neo-Pagans have been able to maintain an idea of nature that is *inclusive* of ethnos, and an idea of ethnos that is inclusive of nature.”⁹³ He contends that Slavic paganism is neither ‘nature religion’ nor ‘ethnic religion’ but rather a form of ‘ethnic/nature religion’ with the two terms never having been distinguished, the one from the other.⁹⁴ Ivakhiv calls this non-anthropocentric, non-instrumental and non-biocentric view of the land an ‘ethnocentric natural law’ ethic. Ethnicity is simply understood as a part of nature – a natural phenomenon in which the natural kinship is formulated on native land, language and faith.

For some groups, the notion of sacred tradition is developed into a central pillar of their faith. ‘Custom’ (*Zvychayevist*) is understood by the Kyiv-based pagan community Triitsia (Trinity) as a form of natural law. The ‘divine worldview of the universal order’ is considered by many as genetically encoded. Nevertheless, when the visible world, the invisible world or underworld and the world of higher law or right are brought together through the unity of customs and constitutional law with the laws of nature and morality, an organic coexistence with everything in

views Russian paganism as a national variety of a pan-Aryan religion, Vedism, and claims that morally this is incomparably more attractive than Christianity. The former produces not slaves but warriors, teaches people not to cry but to rejoice, encourages knowledge rather than blind faith, stresses one’s own strength rather than Christian fear of God, liberates the human being’s natural sexuality, rejects “hypocritical Christian morality,” and develops a “healthy egoism” instead of self-sacrifice and an aspiration to personal enrichment rather than “rotten humanism” (ibid. section 2 & n 81).

The language here is surely Nietzschean in its worst sense. As Shnirelman sees it, the denial of humane values allows Russian paganism to proclaim Russian national egoism as a healthy principle. Nevertheless, as we have seen elsewhere, such racial ideas of Aryan purity and supremacy are much more gnostic and theosophical than they are generically pagan (York 2003:165f).

⁹²Nevertheless, as Shnirelman points out, there is also in Russia a neo-pagan socialist movement that appears to be as anti-Semitic as are the neo-fascists. While there is the broader recognition of nature as sacred and currently violated by multi-corporate capitalism, Dobroslav (aka Aleksei Dobrovol’skii), leader of the *Russkoe osvoboditel’noe dvizhenie* (Russian Liberation Movement) whose goal is ‘pagan socialism’, condemns Judeo-Christian alienation from nature. “For Dobroslav the solution is a return to a pagan, close to nature, understanding of the world” (Shnirelman 2003 – section 4). While pagans more universally might agree with this last, their agreement is not predicated on subscribing to racial/cultural forms of elitism either right or left, but rather on re-grounding escapist tendencies and avoiding dogmatic assertions of blame upon another.

⁹³Ivakhiv (2005).

⁹⁴Ivakhiv identifies “Slavic Neo-Pagan or Native Faith conceptions of nature – specifically, nature as land, nature as ethnos, and nature as custom or sacred tradition.” He continues: “‘Native Faith’ – *Rodnaia vera* in Russian, *Ridna vira* in Ukrainian – is the common denominator of those who consider themselves to be continuing, reviving, or reconstructing the ancient faith ways of pre-Christian Eastern Slavs.” (ibid.)

nature is believed to be guaranteed. Ivakhiv claims that East Slavic Native Believers commonly associate this belief with the Indo-European or ‘Aryan’ cosmology that has been drawn from the ostensibly forged pre-Christian text known as the *Book of Veles*.⁹⁵

The difference between the interconnection of place, personhood and collective identity for Slavic spirituality and the ecological holism of the West (that is, a Russian-centered Eurasian civilization vis-à-vis the ‘Atlanticist West’) hinges on the former’s more developed territorialized notion of ethnicity.⁹⁶ The crux of the divergence is the issue of whether culture is a linguistic phenomenon or a biological one.⁹⁷ For a paganism that sacralizes the land and locality of immediate place to conform to the ethical imagination in its noblest sweep, culture must be understood as a development that valorizes both the humanistic individual *and* the ancestral community as non-fixed but ever changing, assimilating, converging, diverging and fluid expressions of humanity as a whole, a divine twin, rather than a humanity that is parceled and divided into separate and irreconcilable parts. To the degree that Slavic paganism can liberate itself from provincialism and find a security in its own ethnic identity that is not dependent on denigrating others or erecting cultural barriers, it is capable of encouraging ethical reflection that is in conformity with the best of the pagan legacy rather than the worst.⁹⁸

⁹⁵Ivakhiv (2005). The ‘Tradition, Custom, or Natural Law’ of Native Believers is felt to be threatened by a combination of “Christianity, modernity, globalism, Zionism, the ideologies of ‘rootless cosmopolitans’” [and/or] international finance.

⁹⁶Lev Gumilev’s biocosmic theory of ethnogenesis holds that ethnic identity is a growth and biochemical development of the immediate biosphere’s specific energy. As Ivakhiv finds, Gumilev’s understanding of the ethnos or racial group as a biosocial organism has been a popular concept among Slavic nationalists. This phenomenon is little more than the German ideas of Aryosophy now transferred to a Slavic milieu. With the continual shift in paganism toward emphasizing the importance of locality, the same possibility is inherent in the West if it were not for the growth of miscegenation and the prevailing cosmopolitan ethos. For Ivakhiv (ibid.), “While ecological thinking in the West has a strong tradition of holism, including such influential doctrines as Aldo Leopold’s ‘Land Ethic,’ it rarely identifies the human part of the human-nature picture with a specific form of human collectivity, such as, for example, the tribe, ethnos, or nation.” Ivakhiv concludes his paper with the following: “The association of cultural identity with territory and national or territorial sovereignty remains a potent link, the troubling nature of which has been evident in recent developments in places as far apart as France and the US-Mexican borderlands. These associations may be disputed by the anthropological sciences [that] Bruno Latour and Michel Foucault both deconstruct as modernist. But if we have never truly been ‘modern’ – that is, if ‘nature,’ ‘ethnicity,’ ‘nation,’ and ‘humanity’ are categories always in the process of being created, contested, dissimulated, and constructively reinvented, their relations with each other and with themselves unstable and never guaranteed, then it behooves us to understand how we ourselves may be taking them for granted and thereby risking a failure to understand the messy entanglements of place, personhood, and collective identity that makes up the world.”

⁹⁷There is an irony here, because the lower Volga steppe, generally taken to be the Indo-European homelands, reveals a mixed racial presence that dates to the earliest archaeological findings.

⁹⁸Ferlat (*loc. cit.*) finds that the nationalist and anti-nationalist “tendencies are exemplified mainly by the *Soyuz of Slavic Obštin*, “Union of the Slavic Communities”, located in Kaluga, and the *Krug Jazyceskoj Tradicii*, “Circle of Pagan Tradition,” located in Moscow; both have federative

Kemetic Spirituality

Those from the *Kemer*, the ‘black land’, namely, ancient Egypt centered their ethics on truth or *ma’at* (“what is right, just, and orderly.”)⁹⁹ Whether this corresponds to the Vedic/Sanskrit *ṛta* is unclear. The latter is usually translated as ‘order’, although its Avestan cognate *asha* is indeed interpreted as a synonym for ‘truth’. Egyptian *ma’at* is as likely an equivalent of Lithuanian *darna*. In other words, we have in this complex of designations a delineation of what their respective users held or hold as the ethical essence of the sacred.¹⁰⁰ With the Kemetics, however, we are no longer dealing with an ethnic spirituality but rather with a reclaimed tradition that has appeal to generally a group of Westerners who find the Egyptian idiom conducive to their own pagan understandings.¹⁰¹

The most complete expression of Kemetic Reconstructionist ethics are the Negative Confessions – also known as the Declarations of Innocence.¹⁰² These are found in ancient Egyptian texts (the Book of the Dead) and are reputedly the affirmations that the deceased makes before the tribunal gods of forty-two immoral

goals and assemble communities from the whole of Russia.” Even Iuri Miroljubov (1892–1970) “defends the idea of pre-Christian Slavic religion as being . . . a vehicle for high moral values, in continuation of the Vedic religion.”

⁹⁹<http://paganmystics.proboards.com/thread/1120>: “Ethics” (accessed 8 April 2014).

¹⁰⁰Speaking of *darna*, Trinkunas designated it as “the moral core of the world.” It is the most important ideal of humanity and nature – one that is attained – and maintained – through both persistent human effort and “the favor of the gods.” He cited the Golden Rule as exemplifying the spirit of *darna*. All the same, The Boston Conservatory’s Phoebe Wray understands *ma’at* as follows:

Understanding Ma’at is the key to the Ancient Egyptian concept of One-ness. She is the organizer of the logic of life. She represents balance, harmony, justice, and appropriateness, but more than that. Through Ma’at we find the interface between the sacred and the mundane. Through Ma’at we understand that the gods are always with us, our realms forever entwined and responsive. Life is the manifestation of this. (Personal communication, 17 April 2006).

On 27 April 2006, Freeman Gunter explained *ma’at* as the cementing principle of the Egyptian pantheon. It is the opposite of chaos. In typically pagan fashion, he needs a statue for worship and uses a photo of his mother, Marcia, as his icon for Ma’at since she was “a very ordered person.”

¹⁰¹Although Kemetic Reconstructionism is largely a white Euro-American phenomenon, Maulana Karenga (author of *Selections from the Husia: Sacred Wisdom of Ancient Egypt*, 1984) is an activist-scholar for the “ancient Egyptian Maatian (Kawaida) tradition . . . in the African American liberation movement & in African American social-ethical & cultural philosophy” (http://www.africawithin.com/karenga/karenga_books.htm – accessed 10 March 2006 but no longer available. See instead http://books.google.nl/books/about/Kawaida_Theory.html?id=xxLsPAAACAAJ&redir_esc=y – accessed 3 August 2014). “As part of Karenga’s project to create one central source for African spirituality texts, [his] book is a wonderful addition to any Kemetic or African or spiritual/religious library”: *vide* now <http://onolympus.proboards.com/thread/1478> (accessed 3 August 2014).

¹⁰²<http://maatlaws.blogspot.nl/2010/06/42-laws-of-maat.html> (accessed 8 April 2014).

acts that he or she has not committed. These include being angry, doing wrong, lying, corrupting the innocent and mistreating animals.¹⁰³

I will wrong none, I will do no evil.

I will give bread to the hungry, water to the thirsty, clothes to the naked, and a boat to the boatless.

Thus may I say I am pure.

I am pure.

I am pure.

I am pure.¹⁰⁴

The spiritually ethical for the Kemetic Reconstructionist is to be, and maintain oneself, in an unpolluted state of purity.

Adultery and sexual perversion are also unacceptable behaviors. This last is “often translated in older texts as committing homosexuality, although Kemetic Reconstructionists in general consider this a mistranslation and are open to homosexual members.”¹⁰⁵ Consequently, while holding to high moral standards, Kemetics conform to the generic pagan paradigm of latitude, tolerance and inclusiveness.

In addition, there is a stress on community – “with life lived in community.”¹⁰⁶ Kemetic community includes both the seen and unseen worlds – including the ancestors, other beings, humans, the all of creation, and the Netjer/Neter (the gods and goddesses). It is on this basis that the possibility of the good life and a just world depend.¹⁰⁷ The ultimate victory of good over evil rests with *ma’at*.¹⁰⁸ In short, *Ma’at*

¹⁰³In short, the moral person is also expected not to be envious, lazy, unjust, irresponsible, thieving (from the poor, the gods, the earth or the dead that the earth keeps), a causer of strife, a polluter, a debaucher, an oath-breaker or one who poisons the fields, waters or air of another. The Kemetic endeavors not to cause pain, sorrow or weeping; not to kill or give orders to a killer; not to starve children or the poor; not carelessly to deplete the food of the earth; and not to spoil the earth, waters or their sources, creations and outcomes. One should neither put out a fire that should burn or have sexual relations with a child or any person of any age against that person’s will.

¹⁰⁴The Declaration of Innocence was forwarded to me by Phoebe Wray on 25 December 2005. For an online presentation of the Negative Confessions of Declaration of Innocence (for the Weighing of the Heart), see <http://ixwa.hubpages.com/hub/EgyptKemetic-Alkebuland-The-Egyptian-Book-of-the-Dead-The-32-Negative-Confessions-Part-1> (accessed 8 April 2014). A different translation is to be found at <http://www.touregypt.net/bod3.htm> (accessed 14 April 2006). In Wray’s version, the Declaration is phrased positively – e.g., “I will not glorify evil or evil intent or mischief making,” “I will not cause any to fear me,” “I will not impoverish nor add to the burdens of another’s life,” etc.

¹⁰⁵<http://www.religionfacts.com/neopaganism/paths/kemetic.htm> (accessed 6 April 2014).

¹⁰⁶<http://www.per-ankh.org/principles.html> (accessed 10 March 2006).

¹⁰⁷Ibid.

¹⁰⁸According to <http://www.hwt-hrw.com/page8.php> (accessed 16 April 2006 but undergoing updating as of 15 June 2013), Kerry Wisner’s website for Akhet Hwt-Hrw (the School of Ancient Egyptian Religion), *ma’at* is the spiritual essence through which we are all connected. It becomes the basis for living in balance with the Netjer and one’s ‘true’ self. (See further <https://www.smashwords.com/profile/view/KerryWisner>).

is like the Lithuanian *talka* in that it is what can be offered to the gods and ancestors and, in turn, what can be received into one's life. To have *ma'at*, therefore, is "to live in harmony with the Universe."¹⁰⁹

Classical Tradition

With Greek and Roman spirituality we have various traditions that are ethnic in some cases and reconstructionist affinities in others. These can also range from what is the best in pagan expression to what is worst in the holier-than-thou sense that we have already seen in some of the chauvinisms of Asatru and Slavic paganisms. For instance, I had at one time been a subscriber to the Olympus list-serve group but was removed by the Australian list-owner when I dared to question her statements concerning the need for racial purity. In contrast, both the Ethnic Hellenic Religion and the Federazione Pagana, from Greece and Italy respectively, sent delegates to the World Congress of Ethnic Religions and Traditions that met in Antwerp in 2005 in the spirit of cosmopolitan interfaith.¹¹⁰

The ethics of the Greco-Roman legacy are, of course, at the heart of pagan moral understanding. Most of the ethical terms and concepts we have been examining derive from the classical heritage. The Via Romana, or Roman Way, as the direct application of Roman ethics, virtues and philosophies in everyday life, is a stated goal of the online Roman community NOVA ROMA. Virtues are understood as "those qualities which define the ideal state of being and behavior," and while it is recognized that the ideal is never fully attainable, the virtues "remain as the goal toward which we strive, and serve as the benchmark against which we may measure ourselves."¹¹¹

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- Ma'at is a force which orders both nature and society and attempts to bring all things back into right relationship to one another.
 - Ma'at can manifest as a Netjer.
 - Achieving Ma'at is both the goal of ethics and the process by which it is reached.

Per Ankh (2001–2002): <http://www.per-ankh.org/principles.html> (accessed 16 April 2006).

¹⁰⁹Ibid. (Per Ankh).

¹¹⁰World Congress for the Preservation of Religious Diversity (2005). Moreover, as Kouros Syriktes on the Hellenic Philosophy Symposium list serve declared (10 August 2003; syriktes@yahoo.com), "The Classical Spirit belongs to the whole world now. It isn't about what blood flows in your veins; it is about aesthetic; about humanity; about appreciation for learning and civilization. It is about FEELING, in the broadest sense." At another point (22 August 2003), he states, "Hellenic culture is a major component of the substratum of all European culture. . . . It's a mistake to reject the Hellenic path simply because you're not of Greek descent."

¹¹¹http://www.novaroma.org/via_romana/ (accessed 11 March 2006). NOVA ROMA divides the virtues into personal qualia that are the heart of the Via Romana and public ones which are socially shared. From among those designated, we can recognize the heptatheonic virtue-values as follows: freedom (Libertas), comfort (Securitas, Abundantia, Concordia), health (Salubritus, Salus), honor (Aequitas, Dignitas, Honestas 'respectibility', Humanitas 'humanity', Nobilitas),

In the Via Romana understanding, it appears that the public and personal virtues connect with each other primarily through Pietas and Clementia, namely, through worship (paying honor to the gods) and generosity. Both appear as public and personal virtues. Laetitia itself/herself is understood as the “celebration of thanksgiving, often the resolution of crisis.”¹¹² This connects with Bonus Eventus (‘good fortune’) as the remembrance of important positive events, and Fortuna (‘fortune’ as also an acknowledgement of positive happenings). NOVA ROMA accepts that some of these virtues were personified by the Romans as deities.

What becomes clear for the Via Romana is the importance of the state or community in the exercise of *pietas* (‘devotion’ but also ‘patriotism’), *aequitas* (‘equity’), Concordia and Virtus in general. The same emphasis on community is found within Greek spirituality as well. In fact, Walter Burkert traces ancient Greek sacrificial ritual and its consequent needs for atonement to its roots in hunting in which the hunter and quarry are perceived in a kinship relation.¹¹³ Consequently, the community as a whole is required to atone for its collective guilt that results from the victim’s sacrifice as part of the restoration of nature and renewed harmony. In other words, the foundation of ethics rests with the community’s means of survival and the necessity of its maintaining or restoring its integral balance with nature.

In a 2001 essay, Andrew Campbell expressed this same principle of reciprocity as the key to the ethics of Hellenic Reconstructionist Polytheism.¹¹⁴ Campbell understands that other persons can be friends, enemies or strangers. Since enemies are those who seek to harm one or one’s friends, it is reciprocally correct to seek to harm them. With strangers, the position is much less clear, and here the decisive virtue is *xenia* – “often translated ‘hospitality’ or ‘the laws of reciprocity as applied to hosts and guests’.”¹¹⁵ Since the community and its relationship with the gods are dependent on honoring the sacredness of reciprocal obligations, one’s personal honor is integral with communal respect and balanced flourishing.

pleasure (Comitas, Felicitas, Hilaritas, Laetitia ‘joy, gladness’), worship (Pietas, Industria, Ops ‘wealth, abundance’) and generosity (Liberalitus, Clementia) as well as the cardinal virtues of strength (Firmitas, Severitas ‘self-control’), temperance (Frugalitas, Pudicitia ‘modesty, chastity’), prudence (Prudentia, Providentia) and justice (Iustitia). Among those listed, the following are designated as personal virtues: Comitas, Clementia, Dignitas, Firmitas, Honestas, Humanitas, Industria, Pietas, Prudentia, Salubritas and Severitas. Surprisingly, although Virtus is included as a public virtue, there is no mention of Honos. Some of the other virtues that are mentioned are Auctoritas (‘spiritual authority’ as the sense of one’s social standing that is developed through experience, Pietas and Industria), Gravititas (‘gravity’ as responsibility, earnestness and the sense of the seriousness of the matter at hand), Veritas (‘truthfulness’ in dealing with others) and, among the public virtues, Fides (‘confidence’ in governmental and commercial transactions), Patientia (‘endurance, patience’), Pax (‘peace’), Spes (‘hope’) and Uberitas (agricultural and human ‘fertility’).

¹¹²http://www.novaroma.org/via_romana/

¹¹³Burkert (1983:82ff). “Nourishment, order and civilized life are born of their antithesis: the encounter with death” upon which the sustenance of the community depends (ibid. p 212).

¹¹⁴Campbell (2001).

¹¹⁵Ibid.

The most important virtue in respect to community is personal moderation (*sôphrosunê*). Self-restraint in turn must be exercised under the influence of rational thought, although – as Campbell points out – moderation itself must be moderated upon for certain occasions such as with the drinking rituals in honor of Dionysus.¹¹⁶ Campbell acknowledges that modern Hellenic polytheism does not wish to recreate ancient society but that for modern times ethical inspiration may be found in the teachings of spiritual ancestors.¹¹⁷ “We accept that our lives as mortals are often harsh and that only strong bonds based on reciprocity and self-restraint can mitigate some of the inevitable struggles of human existence.”¹¹⁸

Reciprocity, of course, in Hellenic and Roman consciousness, extends to the gods as well. The aware person makes offerings to the divine in response for the blessings that the gods bestow: gift for gift. In the Hellenic Philosophy Symposium, the endeavor is to recognize virtue and happiness in communion with the gods and one another.¹¹⁹ Consequently, “the purpose of human life, indeed, the true nature of human life and being, is involvement – involvement in the world, in nature, in relations, and involvement in his or her own spiritual growth and realization.”¹²⁰ We are once again with the pervasive notion of community – a community perhaps of what Harvey refers to as consisting of persons, both human and ‘other-than-human’.¹²¹ For Harvey, persons, some of whom are human, “are those with whom other persons interact with varying degrees of reciprocity. . . . Persons are volitional, relational, cultural and social beings.”¹²² It is this reciprocal relationship that is perceived to exist between humanity, the gods and nature that comprises the ethical core of Greco-Roman spirituality.

¹¹⁶All in all, from inscriptions of the Delphic temple, we learn that generosity, justice, worship, learning, virtue, accomplishment, acknowledgement of mistakes, controlling one’s anger, appreciating family and friends, avoiding enemies and the acceptance of old age are among the ethical behaviors that inspire a community-based ethics (Rice and Stambaugh 1979:96f).

¹¹⁷As Tryphon Olympios states this, “We want to take the world view, concepts, ideas, religion and values of the ancient Greeks, the founders of western civilisation, and adapt them to today”: Brunwasser (2003).

¹¹⁸Campbell (2001).

¹¹⁹“ Hellenic_Philosophy_Symposium Moderator” Hellenic_Philosophy_Symposium-owner@yahoo.com– welcome letter (9 August 2003).

¹²⁰According to Syriktes, everything from humanity, the gods and the forces of nature exist “in a directly linked chain of cause and effect” – creating for him the ‘participation’ model of the universe in distinction from the monotheistic ‘obedience’ model (Hellenic Philosophy Symposium, 18 August 2003). Syriktes also states, “For reasons that run the gamut from basic subconscious ethnocentrism all the way up to full-blown pride, many people can’t accept that other people can believe differently from them and still be loving, caring, ethical, and productive people. They think that if their particular chosen religion or culture and its laws and ethics ‘work’ for them, then it must be the one that can and should ‘work’ for everyone.” He claims that it is the fear of change that causes people to become locked into dogmatic patterns of thought.

¹²¹Harvey (2005). The term ‘other-than-human person’ comes from Hallowell (1960). As Harvey suggests, “placing humans within a community of persons rather than at its peak challenges claims to human uniqueness . . .” (p. xix).

¹²²Ibid. p. xvii.

In keeping with paganisms elsewhere, the reciprocal community is one that is grounded in nature. “A connection with the Earth is an essential part of Paganism, both Neo- and Paleo-, and thus many Neo-Pagans look to their ethnic roots as a source of spirituality.”¹²³ In a discussion on piety as “recognition of the Gods, and Man’s relationship to them,” one person on the Hellenic Philosophy Symposium list claimed that there was no orthodoxy of Greek paganism.¹²⁴ This freedom of belief within the community of nature is a central feature to classical ethics. NOVA ROMA expresses the same: “Roman philosophy provides what the Religio Romana does not (nor does it try to); a coherent moral code for personal behavior. . . .

the choice of personal philosophy allows the individual to express his or her personal moral and cosmological inclinations within the larger framework of Roman society and religion. This separation of personal philosophy and religion is one of the most healthy aspects of the Religio Romana, and one of the reasons it is . . . uniquely suited for modern times.¹²⁵

The classical pagan community, whether Hellenic, Roman or both, and in conformity with the growing trend of contemporary paganism more generally, is one that honors the environment and the renewing energies of nature as gifts of the gods – gifts that the individual who is a member of a particular ethnic, traditional, religious or spiritual – or even aesthetic – community reciprocates through worship and ethical behavior. Within this community-sanctioned exchange, however, the individual is free to determine his or her own specific moral code and worldview.

Wicca

Wicca is a strange pagan anomaly. As a derivative of the freemasonic and theurgic magical traditions, it is more gnostic than indigenously or nature-based pagan.¹²⁶ It is certainly non-ethnic although retaining various Celtic affinities. In its cosmopolitan and new age propensities toward eclectic adoption, Wicca is frequently condemned by the more national and cultural identities.¹²⁷ This last, however, is both accurate and inaccurate. While it is patently correct that Wicca espouses

¹²³Syriktes (Hellenic Philosophy Symposium; 22 August 2003).

¹²⁴You Know Who . . . /K (1 September 2003).

¹²⁵http://www.novaroma.org/via_romana/

¹²⁶See <https://groups.google.com/forum/#!search/Charles%20Godfrey%20REPOST%3A%20Origins%20of%20%22The%20Charge%20of%20the%20Goddess%22/soc.culture.baltics/CD74T15xz9E/DCEtxnvIWhAJ> – accessed 3 August 2014) which contains Jezibell and Bejorkin Frievalkyr’s essay “The History of Wicca, or, Who Came Up With All This???” that provides a brief historical synopsis of Wicca. See further, Clifton (2006).

¹²⁷For instance, on the Santeria list (10 March 2002), Lee, a former Wicca initiate and now Ocha priest, claimed that Santería is real while Wicca is simply fantasy role-play. Such claims appear more often than not to be the norm from Santería and other ethnic traditions.

what could be designated as a virtually monotheistic form of bi-theism, its very adaptability and flexibility have allowed it to transform into a spirituality that appreciates and centrally valorizes both the divine as immanent and the sacral importance of nature. In the very least, Wicca has been the seminal vehicle that has promoted and assisted the re-birth of pagan consciousness, awareness and acceptance. All contemporary Western pagan traditions owe an enormous debt to Wicca vis-à-vis their re-recognition in the world of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. For those who wish to remain critical of Wicca, it is best to keep in mind both that Wicca is simply one more sectarian expression of paganism and that Wicca is a pagan religion that is still developing.

What we do find in Wicca is a central affirmation of the virtue-value of liberty – the preeminent emphasis that I have contended is the foundation of generic pagan ethics. Its ethical oath, ‘The Wiccan Rede’, first formulated by the founder of the contemporary faith, Gerald Brousseau Gardner (1884–1964) – presumably under the influence of Charles G. Leland (1824–1903) and Aleister Crowley (1875–1947) and later modified by Doreen Valiente (1922–1999), has come to embody the ethical stance of modern-day religious witches.¹²⁸ While ‘The Rede’ enjoins one to love life, trust, joy, resolve and wisdom, it is its conclusion that embodies its full ethical essence:

Eight words the Wiccan Rede fulfill -
An it harm none, do what ye will.

As Emma Restall sees, “The first half is determined to be equally important to the rejoinder.”¹²⁹ She argues that self-expression is the equal to ‘no injury to another creature because of our self-expression’.

While some have argued that it is impossible *not* to harm someone or something in whatever we do, it is the fundamental intent here that is crucial.¹³⁰ True enough, harm tends to connote physical injury. I would personally want to expand the notion in terms of honor, namely, not to harm *or reduce* another person against her will. Equally, as a human ethic, I have in mind here *human persons* rather than necessarily Harvey’s ‘other-than-human’ persons. To cut a tree to provide shelter or fuel, for instance, may be an act that harms and reduces the tree against any understanding of its own personhood and potential will. While rituals of gratitude and such might help us atone for the act, the initial chopping of the tree is *not* covered by the Rede. But as Harvey allows, “an animist [acknowledges] that humans’ most intimate

¹²⁸The Wiccan Rede can be found in the *Pagan Dawn* 157 (Samhain 2005:23). See further <http://www.wicca.com/celtic/wicca/rede.htm> (originally accessed 17 April 2006).

¹²⁹<http://www.druidnetwork.org/ethical/articles/druidry-choice.html> (accessed 7 April 2006 but no longer available).

¹³⁰As Starhawk, NightMare et al. (1997:254) assesses the lessons to be learned from the Rede, “Harmlessness comes first. Doing whatever we can to minimize any needless harm to our loved ones precedes the exercise of personal will.”

relationships are had with other humans,”¹³¹ and it is primarily with the intra-human dimension that the Rede is confined in its practical and applicable sense.

This is not to preclude the importance of nature and honoring the godhead for Wiccans and modern-day witches.¹³² The Rede of Wicca or Wicca itself implies as much in its suggested lunar timings, its mindfulness of the directions of the wind, its commemorations of the seasons, its recognition of the Lady and the Horned One, etc. It is certainly in the unfolding of actual Wiccan practice that nature and its ‘Gods’ have assumed a magnitude that bespeak their determinative role in ethical behavior. It is in fact through the growing importance of nature worship – a worship that most significantly involves ecological concern – that Wicca has come to manifest its pagan credentials even if those credentials were not necessarily a part of its original legacy.

But if we were to understand the Rede as intended primarily as a guide for human-to-human interaction, it is to be seen as much as an affirmation of human freedom as it is the proviso that instructs on how that freedom is to be employed. If paganism is about liberty as I have argued, the epitome of Wicca’s tenets of faith endorse that principle in its most important formulation. If no one else is injured (or intrinsically reduced) by our actions, we are free to do as we wish. But even in the human person-to-human person mandate, the destruction of a forest, the pollution of a river, the ending of a nature preserve *are* indeed affronts and reductions of other people’s well-being and aesthetic-spiritual balance. A person might not be physically harmed in the immediate event, but our collective heritage might still be impaired if not destroyed outright, and we are then all reduced as a result.

ffetcher [*sic.*] considers that the Rede’s ‘three-fold law of return’ may not have been a part of any Wiccan tradition from which Gardner claimed to have developed his faith’s ethical framework.¹³³ To be sure, the very notion that good is returned for good, and evil is returned for evil, has an Eastern ring let alone similarity to Hindu concepts of *karma*.

Mind the threefold law ye should,
Three times bad and three times good;

In essence, this is a recasting of the Golden Rule or, at least a karmic version of the Golden Rule. What one sends out will return three times or three times as strong. ffetcher finds that in Leland’s Aradia, “it’s reasonable to give back evil for evil,”¹³⁴ and as we saw with Andrew Campbell’s Hellenic Reconstructionism, not to harm

¹³¹Harvey (2005:xviii).

¹³²Referring to all pagan ethics including the Wiccan, Pagan Pastoral Outreach claims that “The ethics espoused . . . may be different, but there is a general common basis in honouring Nature and all Life” (<http://paganpastoraloutreach.ca/ethics/pagan.htm> – 7.4.6).

but not currently available. See instead <http://spritzyphrenia.wordpress.com/category/pagan/wicca-pagan/> – accessed 3.8.14).

¹³³“The Wiccan Rede and the Threefold Law,” *Pagan Dawn* 157 (Samhain 2005:23).

¹³⁴*Ibid.* See also ffetcher (2001, 2005) “So What’s all the Fuss About?”

or constrain one's enemies is a disservice to one's friends if those enemies are also the enemies of one's friends. Consequently, the 'threefold law' is a debatable issue but is nevertheless an attempt to provide, "for many Wiccans and for some pagans who are not Wiccans, a major framework for guidance in matters of ethics."¹³⁵

Nevertheless, not all contemporary Western pagans subscribe to the Wiccan Rede. Restall Orr, for one, found the principle of *honoring life* as one that holds her vision more clearly and fully.¹³⁶ For her and many others that she has worked with in Druidry, it is not an adequate expression of the ethical tenets that are compatible with the Druid faith. In 1974, the Council of American Witches drafted a thirteen-point Statement of Principles.¹³⁷ These speak of the natural rhythm of life forces, environmental responsibility, a depth of power naturally potential to all, and the male–female polarity of the universe's creative power. Specifically, principle thirteen states: "We believe that we should seek within Nature that which is contributory to our health and well-being," and, perhaps as an acknowledgement of the Rede, "A witch seeks to control the forces within him/herself that make life possible in order to live wisely without harm to others and in harmony with Nature" (principle eight). The important thing for paganism more widely that Restall Orr and the Council express is the emphasis on harmonization with the natural as a foundation for ethical behavior.

If the Rede is found for some to have shortcomings, it is still a start for many along the pagan path. If it endorses freedom and responsibility, it finds its true place within a heptatheonic context that ensures respect for nature and others based on the foundational dynamics of health, worship and the wider vision commensurate with generic paganism. The Council of American Witches expresses this more explicitly when it declares that witches "value sex as pleasure, as the symbol and embodiment of life, and as one of the sources of energies used in magical practice and religious worship."¹³⁸ The notion of the free pursuit of pleasure is already present in the Rede – an [if] it harm none, that is, as long as it is not undertaken at the expense of another. In all, beside enjoyment, the Wiccan Rede encourages one 'to do comfort and health', if not also to worship and be generous. In other words, once again, we find the same seminal virtue-values to be implicit in this particular pagan expression of ethical behavior and the good life that we find in the other sectarian and non-sectarian or generic manifestations of paganism.

¹³⁵ffetcher, *Pagan Dawn* 157 (Samhain 2005:22) and *ibid*.

¹³⁶<http://www.druidnetwork.org/ethical/articles/druidry-choice.html>

¹³⁷Originally <http://paganpastoraloutreach.ca/ethics/pagan.htm>; see now Knowles (u.d.)

¹³⁸*Ibid*. (Principle 4). The Council also refers to its rejection of authoritarian hierarchy, the denial of freedom to others, the suppression of differing religious practices and beliefs, the notion of absolute evil and the Christian concept of 'Satan'. On the positive side, it acknowledges honoring teachers, those with greater knowledge and wisdom, and those who exercise courageous leadership. There is also recognition of the inner and outer worlds and their interaction, one's personal role in the development of consciousness and giving meaning to the universe, and the importance of not seeking power through the suffering of others. Witchcraft is declared to be the Wiccan Way.

Honoring the other – as person both human and other-than-human – is the safeguard against wanton licentiousness. One may pursue pleasure, though not at another's expense; one may pursue comfort, though not at another's expense; one may pursue liberty, health, productivity or even generosity but not if these pursuits directly – and hopefully even indirectly – involve the demeaning or lessening of someone else against that person's will. It is honor alone that cannot be performed to anyone's detriment – at least as long as that person has not forfeited his right as a person and merited negative retribution through his or her own dishonorable behavior. Keeping in mind that all is fair in love, war and the freedom of role choice, there is no honor if and when disgrace, degradation or humiliation becomes part of the equation.

Consequently, the Wiccan Rede summarizes the essential gist of pagan morality. In all of one's dealings with another person, there is the responsibility to ask if one is being fair to the other in one's own actions and aspirations. What this comes down to is honor – honor as worship: a worship that includes freedom and the freedom of pleasure but equally respect of the freedom belonging to the other as well. We do not harm or reduce another against that person's will. When we love, we are ourselves fair game. We place ourselves into a no-man's realm emotionally to be hurt and even to hurt. When we war, we seek to defeat our enemies. When we play the role of someone who can be verbally insulted, we allow others to take advantage of the advantage we give them. An it harm none, do what ye will. If one is not really injured except conceptually through the baggage we continue to carry because we have not allowed ourselves the maturity and growth to be free of it, *tant de pis* – as the French would say. The responsibility that lies implicit in the Rede lies on both parties of any action: the responsibility not to harm, and the responsibility not to allow one's self, community, peoples and world to be harmed. The important thing here is that there are no commandments or 'shall nots' in pagan ethics and the Rede. There is much ambivalence and unclear situations in life that need to be negotiated on an *ad hoc* basis as the situations arise. The Rede and pagan ethics more generally simply suggest a guideline by which the necessary reflection and negotiation might take place.

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Chapter 16

Conclusion

With its centralizing proclivity to consider the divine as physical and regardless of whatever else it may or not be, the dynamic involving idolatry which is implicit and/or explicit to pagan spirituality sets the overall pagan orientation apart from other forms of spirituality or religion which have emerged over time. The heptatheonic virtue-values of freedom, comfort, health, worship/honor, pleasure, productivity (as ritual worship) and generosity that I have profiled in the present work are universal rather than necessarily or only pagan.¹ But there is nothing intrinsic to them that precludes them from being compatible with pagan corporeality. In fact, I contend that paganism in its ‘grounded’ sense fully supports and celebrates these seven values in particular. Nevertheless, by way of concluding this investigation into ethics both as a global matter and a pagan concern, I perceive a few loose ends and concluding remarks that I wish briefly to make concerning *arête*, the *summon bonum*, heptatheonic and cosmic horizons, the garden metaphor, the calendar as a verbal means by which to honor one’s gods, the tangibility of interconnectedness, tribalism, violence, over-consumption, Wicca, the importance of children, conversation and the integral freedom of idolatrous worship. These reflections are undertaken in light of Graham Harvey’s ‘new animism’, Bron Taylor’s ‘dark green religion’ and the semiotic plenitude significance of the sacred object and place. Inasmuch as ethical behavior is uniquely human, there are – especially for a pagan – unavoidable responsibilities and consequences.²

¹David Bromwich (2014) states that “morality, by definition, means a standard of right and wrong that applies to all persons without exception.”

²If the notions of freedom, honor and pleasure are particularly noticeable in the chapter’s text, my partner, Richard Switzler, sees this as akin to the Hindu practice of *jalpa* or ritual chanting, the Shinto *norito*, Japanese Buddhist *shomyo* or even the repetitive recitation witnessed in Islamic *madrassas*. He understands this as a hypnotic circling around and repetition that echoes our cyclical earthy experience – a verbal wandering to encourage the underlying gist to appear spontaneously and as a means to broaden understanding of a pagan ethical outlook.

As Graham Harvey recognizes, the ‘new animism’ that he explores has a near-synonym in personalism, the philosophical doctrine that accepts the person as ultimate.³ As a ‘school of thought’, personalists concentrate on the personhood of God in opposition to the positions of both pantheism and materialism. Approaching God as person, a divine person, is argued as a more relevant way than considering ‘him’ an abstract and absolute transcendental principle. Harvey’s emphasis on animism that encompasses both human and other-than-human persons is an attempt to locate the grounding for an ethics of relationship, responsiveness and responsibility. In extending the notion of personhood, he speaks of the possibility of ‘rock-persons’, ‘tree-persons’, ‘eagle-persons’, etc. From a pagan perspective, Harvey’s ‘new animism’ may be thought of as a form of ‘polytheistic personalism’. If we push the notion further in the effort to emancipate ourselves from confining subject-object dualistic frameworks and to include ‘man-made objects’ in addition to natural entities, we may extend this paradigm to include the idol as person as well. Idolatry then is to be seen as centered on the respectful relationship – the same as might exist between two human beings, between a human being and a spring, river or mountain, or a human being and a deity or locus or vehicle of deity. While animism or personalism stresses the idealistic, the non-substantial person or personhood, idolatry is even more encompassing in its inclusion of the very material or hylozoistic dimension of the sacred or divine.

Consequently, my own resistance to animism as personalism is the idealistic bias and basis of the latter. To be sure, Harvey approaches the ‘new animism’ not as an ontology or metaphysics but as an ethical mandate. He also stresses that animistic perception is something that is acquired and cultivated; it is not an automatic and infantile given. In other words, “animist knowledge requires education and effort.”⁴ But whether the notion of personhood (of rocks, trees, rivers, birds, deities) is a projected fabrication or not, the thrust in much current thinking is to emphasize the *interconnectedness* of being and, as such, its relational capacity and concurrent responsibilities that occur in person-to-person transactions. Apart from the ideal or idealistic, an idolatry-centered spirituality stresses the more obvious and immediate bond-forming relationship, namely, the community or kinship of matter. If personhood also develops, it develops additionally as and from the material which unites all manifestation. Things, objects and subjects have in general a physical base or source. It is not that there is a panpsychic sentience that belongs to the material but that there is a natural impulse inherent in matter to become conscious or to produce consciousness. If humanity and/or personhood unite through the emergence of awareness, they are already unified in the tangibility of our collective origin.

³Harvey (2005: 22).

⁴Ibid. p. 173. “Elders are more animist than children because they have learnt not only to know the difference between a person and a thing, but, more important, appropriate ways of acting towards and in response to persons – human and other-than-human.” “[Animism] is nurtured not natural” (p. 169). For the ‘new animism’, see also Hallowell (1960) and Harvey (2013).

Worship before – or *of* – an idol is part of the search for “better forms of personhood in relationships.”⁵ In idolatry itself, there is no intrinsically significant distinction to be made between ‘nature-made’ idols (or ‘persons’) and ‘man-made’ ones. One can encounter venerational meaning in the oak of Dodona *and* in the Statue of Liberty, in the *svayambhuva* or naturally shaped *lingam* of Kashi Vishwanath *and* in the sculptured depiction of Athena Parthenos, and in the magnificence of the Grand Canyon or Mount Fuji *and* in the splendor of the Manhattan skyline or the pyramids of Giza. The ‘man-made’ and the ‘nature-made’ are not necessarily in conflict or opposition but equally provide locations of personhood, deity and/or contemplative reflection. The dynamic one encounters with either, as well as the dynamic between them, is relational and, as such, the very foundation for an ethics of respect and honor. Neither the natural nor the cultural need be achieved at the expense of the other. Instead the relationship between the natural givens of nature and the fashioned creations of civilization can be akin to the effort and working with the available resources that constitutes the garden. Perhaps the best metaphor for the recognition of and relationship with the other, the ‘person’ of the other, the community of selves and others, the collectivity of being and aesthetic output, is that of the gardening process. We may on occasion be required to clear a forest for reasons of settlement or agriculture, to dam a river canyon for needs of electricity or irrigation, or to mine an area in order to obtain necessary minerals or fuel, but for such activities to remain within a pagan spectrum of the ethically permissible – keeping to the etiquette entailed by the respectful and respected relationships inherent in a community of persons not all of whom are human, man-made changes to the environment must occur in full, acute and sensitive mindfulness of the full community and not just of a privileged few, for short-term and *ad hoc* goals, or for a profit that does not consider long-range consequences.

If ‘man-made’ and ‘nature-made’ are two alternatives, there is also the possibility of ‘god-made’. Pagans, however, are unlikely to give much credence to biblical notions of the world itself having been made by Yahweh. Nevertheless, in mythology, pagan gods themselves can intervene and produce objects by apport or *deus ex machina* means. In India, at the Hindu shrine of Tirumala on Tirupati Hill, there is a highly revered Vishnu statue of Venkateshwara (‘Lord of Venkata Hill’) which, despite its man-made appearance, accordingly appeared spontaneously as *swayambhu* or ‘self-existent’.⁶ However unlikely, there is nothing inherent in nature to prevent the occurrence of a fully-formed anthropoid idol. According to legend, the figure of Venkateshwara or Balaji is ‘god-given’; it just was found, not made.⁷ But in this tale, there is no essential difference between ‘god-made’ and ‘nature-made’, and, for the pagan, nature and god are the same. Consequently, in pagan negotiatory

⁵Harvey (2005: 16).

⁶Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (2006–2009). http://www.tirumala.org/maintemple_main.htm (accessed 4 August 2014).

⁷According to the Tirumala legend, Vishnu turned himself into stone that henceforth was worshipped as Venkateshwara.

relationship, the personages or parties involved are always humanity and nature. If the gods exist, they are primarily either aspects of nature or aesthetic humanizations or both. Ethics may indeed include honoring the gods, but full moral importance for the pagan cannot be divorced from concern with humanity's relationship with nature and vice versa.

If Burggraave and friends can claim that “one can only talk of idolatry when one absolutely attaches oneself to a reality that does not deserve this because it simply is not divine,”⁸ the pagan rejection of such a statement is based on three points, namely, pagans do not think in terms of ‘absolutes’, they modify extreme attachment by their valorizing of freedom, and they consider that *all* is divine. This all or everything is physical reality, personhood, cultural production, in short, the cosmos itself. It is nevertheless true that a positive pagan ethic is always vulnerable due to “the suffering of the earth,”⁹ but it does not link its spirituality exclusively to this suffering. Instead, moral behavior for a pagan is primarily joyous and affirmative, and, when these are not possible, it is then that it becomes stoic and resolute. The joyful part, however, derives its celebratory position in relationship – relationships that merit responsibilities but within the range of reciprocal behavior that concerns freedom, comfort and pleasure.

For a pagan, pleasure is something that is – or at least can be – profoundly physical and sensual. It represents a mental crossing point of intensity but frequently one translated into and expressed through tangible/corporeal contact. Along with liberty and honor, enjoyment is essential for the pagan in what constitutes the good life – whether as something as rarefied as the Burning Man Festival or the Queen's/King's Birthday in The Netherlands, or whether as our more prosaic day-to-day ordinary navigations. In the ensouled understanding of idolatry and paganism, Harvey's “animist ethics are embodied, sensual and erotic,” and this in addition “requires them to be particular and pluralistic.”¹⁰ Morality for the pagan deals with a multiplicity of specific situations and relations. In endeavoring to become better as human persons, pleasure with honor for the pagan does not translate into abstinence and the absence of bodily delights. To the contrary, it is enjoyment of education and worship in all their forms along with the carnal and sensual as well.

Part of the issue here comes down to the non-empirical issue of intuition and the *as if* (metaphorical or otherwise) appreciation by many pagans of animistic being. The difficulty for me is that both Graham Harvey and Bron Taylor wish to eliminate the theistic or supernatural/preternatural from their, respective, understandings of relational and biocentric religiosity. I differ from both in entertaining and recognizing the co-natural as a preoccupying focus for much traditional religion that still has relevance for a viably enchanted world commensurate to the needs and aspirations of much of today's humanity. Consequently, between the phases of Taylor's ‘biological

⁸Burggraave et al. (2003: 121).

⁹Yves de Maeseneer, *ibid.* p. 258.

¹⁰Harvey (2005: 172).

organisms' and Harvey's 'agental persons', I consider that of 'animate beings'. This recognition extends the boundaries of devotional and conversational concern beyond the biological alone but remains more selective than is inherent in the idealism of Harvey's universal personhoods. It is the very animation of the human, the wight, the deity, the tree, the river, the fabricated idol, a collective, etc. that is salient in religious and much, if not most, pagan perception and consequent spiritual enactment. This centrally informing animistic vibrancy is still articulated within Edward Tyler's original conception of (the now 'old') animism as well.

The further issue here concerns conscious life – including, of course, any consciousness of pleasure. Our consciousness is just what it is when it is. In a pagan way of thinking, it is an offering to the cosmos. If this is so, the pagan asks what it is that he or she wishes to offer – puritanical, purely rational consciousness, or one that has tasted and enjoyed pleasure without accompanying or resultant guilt and shame? I will assert that pleasure is the pagan's gift to the cosmos, and consciousness is the very pleasure that she/he gives. In other words, it is the consciousness of our pleasure that supersedes even the self-abandonment of ecstatic pleasure – however pleasurable this last may still be. There is no Abrahamic monopoly on the idea of fusing the supernatural with the ethical standards of right and wrong, but if the pagan does this as well, it is done differently – against different standards and understandings of the preternatural. In an overall sense, a pagan seeks to keep to this side of the border between decorum pleasures and outrageous pleasures – even if and when these last are still to be tolerated.

The particularity of pagan concern allows that whenever we have tribalism, we have paganism of some sort even if paganism also celebrates the cosmopolitan to the fullest. Pagans will champion each and every tribe – because tribes are natural/organic developments. To be sure, there are both human and other-than-human tribes, but the on-going quest of human social life is always to mediate and build bridges between ever-emerging tribal identities.¹¹ In this endeavor and challenge, the burden of ethics rests on the human alone. As *human* persons, this is our particular 'cross' to bear. What ultimately separates the human person from the other-than-human person is the moral responsibility contingent upon the former.

¹¹Through personal communication of 6 March 2014, Bron Taylor conveys his hope that "pagans would not champion *all* tribes: not the imperial ones, the terrorist ones, the misogynist ones, the homophobic ones, etc." (my emphasis). But to the degree that these 'negative tribes' *do* exist, it becomes all the more imperative that not only must we recognize them but also and especially to learn how to converse and dialogue with them if there is to be any progressive change toward a functionally 'terrapolitan' world and whatever political form it might assume: from an enlightened anarchy or a shared civil earth religion to an affirmative cosmopolis or a global democracy insured by technological systems of intercommunication. Taylor's concerns are to "(1) winnow out the exclusionary tribal bullshit, (2) fuse an appreciation for organic biocultural diversity with (3) a recognition that despite great differences we share a genome, and thus affective and ethical possibilities, and thus the possibility of a sense that everything is sacred and worthy of reverence." He sees a 'live and let live ethics' as a common denominator of the human emotional repertoire, but in contrast, it has been the purpose of the present book to address personal morals in the uncertain complex navigation between state-supported social liberalism and individual/local libertarianism.

Tree-persons, animal-persons, bird-persons and rock-persons may have wisdom and some kind of reciprocal relational possibility, but they are neither moral nor immoral. Other-than-human persons are amoral. Ethics are a measure of aspiration that applies to the human alone.¹² If and when they are extended to our deities, it is only when the gods are understood as *super*-humans, perhaps as immortals, but still as essentially human. The propensity to perform ethically – and the accompanying responsibility to do so as a result – is uniquely human in her capacity for self-reflective sentience.

But I wish to stress again that this is not a Calvinist or Puritanical duty. Pagan ethics are inclusive of the erotic and sensual. The increasing betrayal of America's Christianity may be seen in the emerging but purely hedonic approach to live to the fullest whilst we live. I will argue that America cannot be blamed for its consumption. What is required instead is a world in which everyone is raised up to the same level of opportunity – not reduced or annihilated to some 'lower' level of ubiquitous sameness. If Americans could be made aware that their over-consumption is not part of its Christian heritage but rather its pagan legacy, we might be able to start weaning America out of its hex-like debilitation toward understanding that appetite is natural but healthier when tempered and not excessively and unnecessarily indulged. Enjoying life is fully pagan. If this could be recognized, the spirit of generosity that is an integral part of the American character might be able to flourish. In other words, appreciating and conceding that happiness and the pursuit of happiness are fundamentally pagan, the ethical agenda that *is* paganism could manifest through that very acknowledgment. This is the consequence of gratitude. It applies as much to Europeans and others as it might to the American. If and when we as basically normal human beings can conceive of something, the mere fact that it has been thought greatly increases the possibility of its coming into being.

For the present as well as the future, we need to contribute new concepts to the world. In the achievement of a more pagan-centered, human-centered and/or person-centered world, we will have to learn to deal with and marginalize war-lord bullies, fear-mongering politicians and non-conscientious industrialists. The first have their militias and mercenaries; the second, their armies, tax collectors and subservient

¹²In a personal communication on 24 April 2006, Graham Harvey expresses the thought that if rocks and clouds were to be anti-social that such behavior would be immoral. For him, that is the very implication of 'relational ontology and epistemology'. The decisive factor for Graham's 'new animism' is communal. He claims that "[t]radition and innovation, like community and individuality, turn out not to be opposites." My own argument is that while we might have relationships with other persons not all of whom are human, it is the human side or sides of any equation that can be assessed in terms of morality and not that which is reciprocally returned by nature or other-than-human persons. If we extend humanhood to include angels and deities, it is only because these last are 'human-like' that they might too be assessed as moral or immoral. Graham's defense is that "seemingly 'bad' rocks might be acting as tricksters." But even here I will contend that tricksters 'transcend' morality. If they did not, they would be something else – like culprits, nasty people, malevolent beings, etc. What the trickster does is not evil, just upsetting. It is what tests us but does not fatally compromise us. See further York (1995: 559–62).

media; the last, their devious and demeaning advertising techniques let alone capital wealth that often cannot be matched by any opposition's resources. To these we need also to consider the anti-human terrorists with their myopic vision. There is no easy solution for de-powering any of these. They, along with the violence of nature – exacerbated perhaps through the global warming and immune-weakened life forms that we ourselves have brought into being, are the negatives through which we must now work in any efforts to obtain an equitably good life for our planet.

At present, we are all serfs to today's multinational corporate world. If a film like *V for Vendetta* suggests that a people's revolution is the only answer for change, there might nonetheless still be the possibility that conversation could succeed in achieving a more durable outcome. Could it be feasible to suggest that conversation might be understood as the supreme pleasure? Conversation requires persons with whom to converse.¹³ The pagan wishes to engage in root-based conversations – with nature, with nature-persons, with human beings and with deity. The metaphor here is about as organic as it gets – considering all the excrement we have produced. A root-based communication from the fertile detritus of our waste and mistakes could yet become the flower of a pagan ethics – ultimately a secular ethics as an offering to the gods. 'Human' and 'pagan' are virtually interchangeable terms.

In the shifting developments the sociologist and others can witness, Wicca has been a leading gateway – if not *the* gateway – to the vision of a pagan world. In many respects, it also serves as a bulwark against the intimidations of the Abrahamic/secular consortium. Paganism is now both a mother chastising a wayward child *and* a self-offering to the world of itself as an object for conversational dissection. Nevertheless, pagans are increasingly demanding a participating role in the governing of this world. They demand to be heard, to be considered and to be able to argue for the final rights of every one and every community in an active conversationally-based world.

We have already asked in our terrorism chapter how many 911s, whether natural or man-made, do we need before we start waking up and attending to the imperative needs of our world and a non-tribal human community? As much as paganism honors the tribal – and will always honor the ancestral or collective clan, it equally transcends the tribal. In other words, paganism grows out of the tribal, honors it and ritually enacts it, but paganism also aspires to a trans-ethnic condition or state of being. The West needs now to put away its Anglo-Saxon 'winner-take-all' tribal mentality. This last may ultimately be the most interesting, but it has become incommensurate to – and too far outside – the parameters of other tribal mentalities. In establishing the 'shoulds' upon which the whole ethical question comes down to, we need to have and locate these through a conversationally democratic realm as well as upon our own personal, intuitive flowing of our individual ways through life and reciprocal relations with others. Each and every one of us has a certain claim

¹³ As Harvey (Johnston and Bauman 2014: 206) expresses, "Movement, gift-giving and *conversation* are three indicators of the animate nature of relational beings, or persons" (my emphasis).

on space – not necessarily a space of ownership but a space of operation, that is, a domain for operational or utilitarian possibilities, both fixed and non-fixed.

In the world that is emerging, there are still the detectable and entrenched ‘monoisms’ of science, Abrahamic and other traditional religions vis-à-vis the pluralism of paganism. While all systems are valid or at least potentially valid, a pagan asks for the smaller, more immediate local gods of time and place as his/her talismanic touchstones in the now of the present. Despite the ethnic dangers involved in placing too strong an emphasis on homeland and locality, a pagan inclination is to begin with these all the same. He/she must continually reflect on whether it is possible to be a hedonist without the dogmatic greed and self-pampering over-consumption that is currently characteristic of the American.¹⁴ By focusing on the immediate community, he/she endeavors to engage with others beyond simply one’s self. There are still difficulties even at this level. Politics and religious sectarianism each have the tendency to encourage us to demonize the other – as well as for us to be demonized by the other. But by talking with others, engaging in conversation, we have not only a means toward wealth, power and security, etc. but a mode of religious awakening that becomes a sacred end in itself – one that supersedes the various goals of self-oriented politics and religious ends.

For the pagan, there can be no single moral code that is applicable to everyone. Through its very polytheistic preference and pluralistic constitution, the emphasis on choice and both individual and community selection is paramount, and different people and different groups will concentrate on virtues and values differently. For the global community as a whole, the pagan contribution will be chiefly its championing of the goals of freedom, honor and pleasure. It is upon these emphases that paganism is to be primarily distinguished. It will share the more universal aims of health, comfort, productivity and generosity with others across the board, but the pagan seeks in the main to avoid the (im)moral complicity and conformity of what Nietzsche recognized as the sniveling masses. While we do not find overly much articulation on either freedom or pleasure among pagan indigeneity, it has been my argument throughout this book that these two virtue-values are implicit in pagan this-worldlyism, pantheism and idolatry.

By contrast, what we *do* hear much in ethnic and other pagan ethical formulations is the mention of respect and responsibility. Respect, reciprocity and equitable exchange are various dimensions of honor – dealings with the other in terms of the other’s intrinsic value and expressing this recognition in fairness and overall contribution and, hopefully, in the cultivation of a generous spirit. The surpassing

¹⁴I have focused here chiefly on the American rather than any global consumer class because, belonging to the current definitive superpower and the lead promoter of the Western economic belief in market-fueled consumption, the American exemplifies to the global world as a whole the benchmark of paranoia and the devil-may-care consequences of unbridled, imbalanced and apparently mindless resource depletion. See further Robert Reich’s 4.4.2014 blog <http://readersupportednews.org/opinion2/277-75/22937-the-vicious-cycle-of-concentrated-wealth-and-political-power> that underscores for me why and how the American is the source of the over-consumption problem.

of niggard behavior, stinginess, covetousness and miserliness is to achieve the more comfortable state of generosity. This last constitutes in itself an essential of freedom: the non-generous person is not free; the magnanimous one is. Responsibility is similar. In some respects it may be understood as productivity, worship or service, but, at the end of the day, it is the concomitant manifestation of liberty. The slave has no responsibilities – only duties, orders or imposed obligations. The enslaved masses, the herd, simply follow the course. By not insisting on the freedom of self-determination, they are unaccountable – unable to be held to account. To be a responsible person, one virtually by definition must be a free person.

Among one of the chief responsibilities for the person of a pagan persuasion is the protection of innocence. Our young are to be encouraged in their freedom of naïve incorruptibility until they too, in turn, must prepare to assume the responsibilities of adulthood. Encountering small groups of children along the banks of the Ganges in Varanasi has often been an unpleasant experience. They can be nasty and irritating – especially when excited by the presentation of foreign difference, and taunts and sometimes stones would follow. One day, however, I noticed a young man carry a small bundle in a white cloth to the Jalsain burning ghat where he proceeded to unravel its contents onto the ground near the funeral pyres. It was his son about 8 or 9 years old. In Hinduism, children, sadhus and people who have died of snakebite are not cremated but given directly to the river. As I watched the father negotiate with a boatman, I could not help but gaze at the ‘sleeping’ child on the ground. No trace of the urchin so many of his age could be, but his lifelike form fully displayed that pure innocence of childhood in all its specialness, and I wished that the child would simply rise back to his feet and rejoin his friends in play. For all humanity, children are our greatest of resources. They are our inspiration and hope; they are our *raison d'être* to ensure we contribute to a better world. For many of us, our children, their upbringing and hopefully education constitute our sole gift to the world. We may produce nothing further of value – whether substantial or transient, but in the pagan spirit of generosity, tolerance and acceptance, this in itself is enough. The way of nature is to produce offspring. Paganism endorses children and their integral sanctity, and a pagan endeavors to protect the child's innocence and encourage its joyous discovery of life.

A, if not *the*, thrust of the human being is to reproduce. Angels in the Western tradition do not generate offspring, but their Eastern equivalents, the Gandharvas and Apsaras, just might. The gods too sire progeny, but it is the human being for whom fertility is a central concern whereas for the gods it is more symbolic of their fecundity, their transmission and what they represent among the forces of nature than it is an aspect of species necessity and survival. With all three, it is personhood that is the most salient of their being. But if anthropoid persons (human beings, angelic beings and divine beings) are to be distinguished from rock-persons, thunder-persons or fire-persons, etc., it is through the former's volitional movement that burdens them in turn with ethical responsibility that the chief difference is

to be located.¹⁵ The elements and/or objects of nature do not possess these same responsibilities in any assessable form. If there were indeed a Luciferian rebellion, the resultant contention that there is such a thing as a ‘fallen angel’ suggests that angelic beings too can do good things and bad things. If they too can do wrong, like the human, they must be capable also of suffering. In other words, they are vulnerable, and, as such, this very precariousness produces an ethical responsibility as part of their nature. For the human being, aesthetic duties are to produce both physical offspring and the means to nourish them that is compatible with an ethical/aesthetic standard.

In the West, all human achievement has come to be achieved under the duress of the Tower of Babel metaphor that has been superimposed over our every activity. The pagan, however, refuses to be intimidated by the suggestion of perpetual and invariable defeat. To recognize humanity as a god, one of the gods, a being capable of apotheosis, or at least a being that can become an angel in one manner or another, is the residual pagan affirmation that heaven is indeed attainable – not through an entity such as the Judeo-Christian/Abrahamic God who, if he did exist, would be laughing his head off over how much humanity has allowed itself to have been duped and frightened, but through our own efforts and ongoing propensities to ‘put things together properly’.

Ritual is something that is done. We *do* ritual – and as such we engage in the honor and worship that for a pagan links us with the divine in both its natural expression and supernatural/preternatural manifestation. As I mentioned earlier, a theonym can be equally approached as a verb. I Apollo, you Apollo, they Apollo, etc. In like manner, ‘ritual’, ‘calendar’, the ‘heptatheon’ themselves may be thought of us verbal actions. We ritual, we calendar, we heptatheon. In paganism, the good life is the life that is done as ritual. It is the timing that becomes essential, and in the quest to time things correctly, every religion has produced its own sacred calendar to mark the seasons and celebrate the seminal events of its history. The week itself suggests a basic heptatheonic approach to life. It overlaps with the calendrical demarcations of the annual cycle, but it is the calendar itself that is to be seen as perhaps the most divine feed-back looping form. To calendar is, for the

¹⁵In a further personal communication (25 April 2006), Harvey says the following: “If the sun or rock or hurricane could warn you (as you are willing to concede helpful or elective ‘deities’ might do) but don’t (to parallel the problem for [which] monotheistic theodicy traditions struggle with) does this make them less personal (or even personable) than animists might think? I don’t even think it makes them less moral – because I don’t think this is the kind of inter-species communication animism is about normally. It might be what animists with initiatory intense relationships (marriages?) with other than humans might expect. But most of the time the rock gets on with being a rock – partly just being hard and sharp and not good to kick.” This has made me wonder, however, whether, in the spirit of Graham’s relational ontology and epistemology, ethical relations with animate/inanimate nature, that is, with non-human or non-human-like persons, is to be conducted *as if* the latter have ethical propensities. We humans could treat rocks, rivers, trees, etc. *as if* they are persons like we are and *hope* they will respond in kind but not hold it against them if and when they choose to behave otherwise. The responsibility is still with us and not with them. We are obligated to respect their freedom not to conform to our ethical and cultural standards.

pagan, to honor the gods in a certain way and at certain propitious times. Obviously, when two peoples ritualize or calendar differently, there is the possibility of friction and conflict. One must yield his or her own way to that of whomever currently is the host. One yields to that of the one in whose house one is. The laws of hospitality predominate. Otherwise, accommodation and flexibility are the only means to be viable in the performance of ritual, the calendar, the virtue-values – endeavoring to be mindful of the aesthetic sense, the aesthetic/ethical or aesthetic-ethical option, that *aims for* the good life despite the many mistakes we make along the way.

If and when we are able to time things correctly, we have been then fortunate. In other words, good fortune or luck is what the pagan seeks through attuning naturally/spontaneously to environment, situational conditions and holy aspiration. The good life, *arête* or the *summum bonum* is submitting in essence and organic attunement to the seven virtue-values I have been delineating. This is not a pagan passivity but rather a vigilant and persistent engagement, for the pagan maintains in his/her challenging affirmation that if the laws of the cosmos do not allow us to change to a good life for us-in-our-universe, we must then change the basic rules of the cosmos themselves. And if our world is increasingly torn asunder through the internal divisions of Abrahamic self-clash, the strife between Christians and Muslims, a pagan rejects both in her/his heptatheonic approach to life. Pagans aspire to the best and to produce the best – to live in the best way possible, a way that is as freed from intimidation, fear, greed, myopia and counter-productive behavior as much as is possible.

The contrast between pursuit of self-interest and altruistic generosity that is found across the pagan dimension may present a paradox. How is it that paganism can embrace the differing positions that it does? How is it that a pagan can be at home with and stress the immediacy of locality and yet also be comfortable with the universal and ever-expanding horizons of discovery, imagination and change? The answer lies in a pagan's understanding that our cosmos is itself a paradox, a complex of opposing forces and desires, an inexplicability, inconsistency or enigma that paganism as an affirmation of what is its spiritual reflection and expression. Paganism is not intimidated by absurdity and does not need ultimate explanations, salvations or escapes. It accepts what is and yet, if and when something is not to its full liking, will change the rules as need be – including even the very laws of the universe as they become counter-productive of a compassionate and equitable 'good life' for all. In their own abandon to the ferment of the cosmos, pagans are willing to dare beyond even the limits of imagination.

Within this pursuit through the ever-present realms of uncertainty, the idol serves as a refreshing anchor that allows the pagan worshiper a grounding oasis, a moment of reprise, a locus of contemplation and an *ad hoc* connection with the paradoxical beingness of our expanding multiverse. The idol becomes a cherished, welcomed friend – one upon which a pagan is not dependent, not fixed and not belittled but instead inspired to reach the fullest stature of her or his own humanity and beyond. The idol or icon is eventually centered with community and becomes a means by which the worshiper can reach within to reach outside and afar. But no pagan *needs* the idol; it is instead a sacred accessory – to be honored when available but perhaps

only remembered when one moves into more independent realms. The idol is simply a sacred tool in an already sacred everything. If there appears to be a contradiction in there being a sacred *primus inter pares* that merits special honor within an all-embracing reality that itself instills the spirit of worship, the pagan merely laughs out of her or his acceptance of the freedom that is born of paradox. We both die and live – and perhaps always at the same time.

But within this matrix of freedom, irony, illogicality and even impossibility, the pagan – the true pagan, the individual who is maturely in attunement with the cosmos – seeks to express and live as honorably as her/his vision allows. To be fully honorable in such is to seek ever to expand one's vision, to question what it is and search for its own limits and inconsistencies in order to transgress them. In a cosmos in which more is never enough, the pagan wants nothing and everything.

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