

Animism,¹ Empathy and Human Development

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Surely it is time for us all to make every effort to evolve as a species and become more fully human. To be fully human is to be humane. To be sub-human is to be inhumane. In order to evolve in this way and become more fully human we must define and refine our ethical and spiritual responsibilities and sensibilities. And we must redefine what it means to be human. The origin of the word human is rooted in such terms as humus, humility and humane. Then we may evolve socially and biologically, as our behavior, appetites, needs, values and relationships change.

Feeling for Others: Panempathy

The word *religion*, like the word *yoga*, means to become spiritually reconnected. But by what means do we establish this connection? And to what exactly do we become connected? Our inherent divinity is not actualized or released until we become truly religious, developing the yoga of body-mind integration and harmonic resonance with the inherent divinity in all sentient beings. The powers and potentialities of becoming a fully human, panempathetic being, are realized once we begin to reconnect with the sacred, numinous dimension of reality.

That people do feel pain when the earth is damaged is affirmed by a Wintu Indian woman of California who said, "We don't chop down trees. We only use dead wood. But the white people plow up the ground, pull down the trees, kill everything. The tree says, 'Don't. I am sore. Don't hurt me.' ... They blast rocks and scatter them on the ground. The rock says, 'Don't. You are hurting me.'"²

Such empathy leads to a feeling of kinship with all life. Lakota Chief Luther Standing Bear wrote: "Kinship with all creatures of the earth, sky and water, was a real and active principle. For the animal and bird world there existed a brotherly feeling that kept the Lakota safe among them and so close did some of the Lakotas come to their feathered and furred friends that in true brotherhood they spoke a common tongue."³ Chief Luther also asserted that lack of respect for growing, living things soon led to lack of respect for humans also.

Australian aboriginal elder Bill Neidjie in the book *Kakadu Man* (Angus and Robertson NSW Australia 1986) puts it this way:

I feel it with my body, with by blood. Feeling all these trees, all this country. When the wind blow you can feel it. Same for country... You feel it. You can look, but feeling...that make you. Feeling make you, out there in open space. He coming through your body. Look



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while he blow and feel with your body... Because tree just about your brother and father...and tree is watching you... If you feel sore...headache, sore body, that mean somebody killing tree or grass. You feel because your body in that tree or earth. Nobody can tell you. You got to feel it yourself.

What and how we feel about trees, grass and all the living and pre-living elements and components of our life community affects our perception and behavior and is greatly influenced by our beliefs and spirituality. Bill Neidjie is a believing animist who lives and breathes in a way of feeling and sensing, and therefore of knowing and understanding, that is alien to most western "civilized" minds. He sees through feral eyes. To see in this way, the late Sioux medicine man Fools Crow told me, is to see in a sacred way.

Philosopher Martin Buber is one European with such vision. In his book *I - Thou* he writes that, "It can also happen if will and grace are joined, that as I contemplate the tree I am drawn into a relation and the tree ceases to be an It... What I encounter is neither the soul of a tree nor a dryad, but the tree itself." Or as the Buddhists say, "The thing in itself."

The "otherness" of an animal Buber describes eloquently in *Between Man and Man* when he strokes a horse at his grandparents' estate... "I must say that what I experienced in touch with the animal was the Other, which, however, did not remain strange like the otherness of the ox and the ram, but rather let me draw near and touch it... and yet it let me approach, confided itself to me, placed itself elementally in the relation of Thou and Thou with me." In my book *The Soul of the Wolf*, I described this as communion with a significant responsive Other, the wolf being 'the otherness of I.' This is the essence of communion.

Our spiritual autism has now become so severe, and our egotism and anthropocentrism so alienating from the rest of the Earth's life community that we wantonly destroy whole forests, watersheds, and wildlife habitats and unique plant and animal species without any feeling or sense except to make paper for computers and raise cattle for hamburgers. Such trivial ends to millions of years of biological evolution that is being irreplaceably obliterated, along with the peoples who for generations maintained a more sustainable, if not also a gentler way of life, must be stopped. There is no future in it. Those who allow

themselves to be intimate with the woods let the trees become their teachers and healers.

The "Powers" of Animals and Nature

Certainly without the ability to empathize, our ancestors would have learned very little about the ways and "powers" of animals. The success of gatherer and hunter, and later agricultural communities would have depended as much on objective, instrumental knowledge as on empathic resonance with and understanding of animals, plants and ecosystems.

Indeed, much ecosystem and animal knowledge was incorporated into the laws, rituals, taboos and religion of earlier peoples. Many of their ills—collective and individual, were (and still are) often correctly diagnosed and treated because an ecological or environmental element was identified and corrected: like killing too many deer, felling too many trees; having too many cattle and offspring. We and our domesticated animals developed new diseases, and the surviving wildlife also, when we dammed rivers and made swamps, developed unnatural monocultures (biologically and conceptually) and when we depleted the soils of their life and nutrient value to what we grew and ate.

Animism facilitates an empathic rather than an objective mechanistic and reductionistic approach to human health and prosperity. And it leads to empathic knowledge, the vital complement, catalyst and corrective for our scientific, objective knowledge base.

We have, regrettably, developed significantly in the latter realm socially, economically and technologically. Satellite systems and computer nets, along with our prowess at manipulating the atoms of matter and the genes of life to serve the illimitable wants of industrialism and consumerism, become an assault on the biosphere and on humanity when there is no ethical temperance and reverential respect for life. Enlightened animism constrains us, along with empathic knowledge, from commoditizing life and from becoming a global parasite.

What do the materialists and instrumental rationalists who applaud our splitting of atoms and splicing of genes think animists might feel, *empathetically* about nuclear fission and transgenic animals and plants?

We derive "power" from our totems, like the Pueblo Indian saying, "My help is in the mountain that I take away with me." This spiritual power or psychic energy can be drawn upon in times of need. Animals and plants, thunderbolts and mountains, serve various symbolic functions today

on coats of arms, national, regional and military flags, logos, stamps, emblems, etc. Their totemic use therefore continues in modern society while their powers and animistic significance have been variously forgotten, forbidden, or debased. It is no coincidence, for example, that the lion, once a pure totemic symbol of power, was coopted as a symbol of power by the British monarchy, among other rulers, and by various manufacturers and product advertisers from motorbikes to tea and syrup!

I recently asked a Tanzanian tribal elder and wildlife ecologist Prof. Deo-Gratias Gamassa what is the deepest significance of animals, like the lion and elephant, to Africans. His immediate response was, "Power."

This generic "power" has many dimensions, from using various animal parts for healing and divination to rites of initiation, ceremonial purposes, and calling up the spirit of the totem animal in order to gain psychic energy from its particular attributes. A feather, tooth or bone can therefore embody to the animist, much more than the "realist" or materialist can ever sense or appreciate. That an eagle's feather, ivory amulet, or wolf-bone flute would be worth far more than money can buy and more than a perfect diamond or gold nugget to the animist, attests to the very different realities and value systems that people live by.

Hyemeyohost Storm in his book *Seven Arrows* says that, "Any idea, person, or object can be a Medicine Wheel, a mirror, for man. the finest flower can be such a mirror, a wolf, a story, a touch, a religion, or a mountain top." In his book, *The Sacred and The Profane, The Nature of Religion*, Mircea Eliade explained the shift in perception from profane to sacred that occurs when we have feral vision as follows: "The sacred tree, the sacred stone are not adored as stone or tree; they are worshipped precisely because they are *hierophanies*, because they show something that is no longer stone or tree but *sacred*, the *ganz andere* or 'wholly other.'"

Nature Heals; Natural Healing

Just as the earth and living things can be harmed and suffer in their ways, so they can be healed and heal us. We should therefore also consider that if the healing powers of Nature can help heal us, then when we have harmed them, made them sick, they will probably harm us and make us sick.

A Taos Pueblo Indian poem expresses how Nature heals him in the following words:

My help is in the mountain
Where I take myself to heal
The earthly wounds
That people give to me.
I find a rock with sun on it
And a stream where the water runs gentle
And the trees which one by one give me company.
So must I stay for a long time
Until I have grown from the rock
And the stream is running through me
And I cannot tell myself from one tall tree.
Then I know that nothing touches me
Nor makes me run away.
My help is in the mountain
That I take away with me.
Earth cure me. Earth receive my woe.
Rock strengthen me. Rock receive my weakness.
Rain wash my sadness away. Rain receive my doubt.
Sun make sweet my song. Sun receive the anger
from my heart.⁴

Animism plays an important role in healing, as when our soul (or higher Self) and personalities are not integrated, and when our relationships with others, lacking spiritual resonance, cause harm and suffering. The prevention and reversal of many diseased conditions, as conventional medicine demonstrates in its limited, reductionistic and mechanistic/materialistic approach to healing, depend upon understanding the spiritual and psychic components of disease and well-being. As the late Dr. Edward Bach observes, "Disease is in itself beneficent, and has for its object the bringing back of the personality to the Divine will of the Soul."⁵ He sees the real primary diseases of man as such defects as pride, fear, cruelty, hate, self-love, ignorance, instability and greed.

Spiritual Development

Animals, plants and Nature have played an immeasurable role in our psychic and spiritual development. Like the infant who instinctively strives to achieve the physical transformation from crawling to walking, so there seems to be an instinctual urge to achieve spiritual self-transformation. The "powers" of animals, plants and Nature therefore not only heal, inform and inspire. They can also play a role in our spiritual transformation and acquisition of feral vision by (as the above self-healing statement by the Taos Pueblo

Indian attests) literally getting us outside of our ego-centered, anthropocentric consciousness. Such transcendence and way of being is facilitated by animism, and also totemism and panentheism. These should not be confused with anthropomorphizing. Anthropomorphic thinking, narcissism and anthropocentrism are coins of the same currency of awareness and perception. Animism and panentheism⁶ enable us to begin to develop a whole new currency of awareness and understanding of animals, plants and Nature which, from the analogy of the infant learning to walk, is a more mature and enlightened stage of human consciousness.

In letting go our attachments to things, ideas, fears and desires, and believing that trees and other natural creations are sentient, we become open to them. When we are open, we are able to empathize, to communicate at a pre-linguistic level with other sentient beings. They "talk" to us when we have communion with them. Our lives are then not only enriched. Our entire perspective changes and the human ego is cast aside like the shell or case of a more immature life-form and stage in our metamorphosis. New powers and possibilities are gifted to us, some as inconceivable as flight and great distance must seem to caterpillars yet to become Monarch butterflies.

So it is with the development of the human spirit and potential. Our collective development, bounded by the rampant egotism of our industrial consumer society, is being arrested, trapping us in a perniciously persevering stage of adolescence (or addled-essence). Our liberation therefore entails liberating the rest of creation—trees, rivers, and all creatures great and small—from the tyranny of human immaturity, that is manifest as arrogance, ignorance and greed.

Balancing Mind and Earth

Vice-President Al Gore has one picture in his book *Earth in the Balance*. It shows Plato debating with Aristotle. What balancing the Earth entails (and which Al Gore did not fully address) begins with us not dismissing Plato, and his neo-Platonic school of transcendental animism, and only embracing Aristotle's grounded rational and instrumental materialism, as Gore unwittingly urges, but an integration of animism and materialism; of spirit and matter; body and soul; feeling (and empathic knowledge) and objectivity (and scientific knowledge). Erich Fromm in his book *The*

Art of Loving states that "The Aristotelian standpoint led to dogma and science, to the Catholic Church and to the discovery of atomic energy."

The pathology of modern industrial consumer society is a combination of objectivism, materialism and narcissism that is self and Earth negating and destroying. The antidotes this age is beginning to rediscover, as in ages past is that we will only be well, as Black Elk said, "when we learn to live in harmony with the Power of the World as it lives and moves and does its work." Two of our powers, the ability to have empathy and to believe in animism, are our for the taking: but not the genes and lives of other species, or the integrity and future of Creation.

The human species, in its present state (and developmental stage) has regressed in its evolution from predator to parasite, and from parasite to a self-consuming Plague. Until it begins to develop feral vision, empathize and embrace animism and panentheism in spirit and action expressed in reverential respect for all life, the human species will not evolve. It will not pass the test of becoming a fully human, rather than some chimeric, schizoid, half-god, half-demon, half-mother, half-murderer, half-lover, half-rapist monster.

It is as unfair to blame Aristotle for the legions of rationalists, the materialists and the anti-animists as it is to blame our parents and their generation for the chaos and suffering on Earth today, and for our ills and unfulfilled longings. It is an immature humanity that looks to others—God, King, President, or Government, to solve its ills; or worse, to instruments of war, to improve their condition, zone of comfort, and power. And it is an immature humanity that sees those who are animistic empathes as being "over-emotional," "irrational," "sentimentally immature" and "unrealistic." Pity those who see empathy as an extrasensory, psychic ability and not a latent sense in all of us. Pity more those who see empathy and empathizing as something illusory, unreal, mystical, pagan, subversive, and incomprehensibly alien to their limited sense of self and unity with all life.

Albert Einstein described his vision of the unity of life in a letter to the *New York Post* (November 28, 1972) in which he wrote:

A human being is part of the whole, called by us the 'Universe', a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his

thoughts and feelings as something separate from the rest—a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty. Nobody is able to achieve this completely, but the striving for such achievement is in itself a part of the liberation and a foundation for inner security.

Ecologist Gregory Bateson, in *Steps to An Ecology of Mind*, gives a more ecological, rather than a mystical view of what animists see as divine intelligence in Nature. He contends that:

The individual mind is immanent but not only in the body. It is immanent also in pathways and messages outside the body; and there is a larger Mind of which the individual mind is only a sub-system. This large Mind is comparable to God and is perhaps what some people mean by 'God,' but it is still immanent in the total interconnected social system and planetary ecology.

Professor Jay McDaniel⁷ expresses this view along the lines of process theology as follows:

The universe...has a dominant soul, or a subjective center, which at any given moment feels things, much in the manner that a mind feels things in its body. This universal soul—a whole that is greater than, and yet includes, its parts—is God, understood as the ongoing Psyche of the universe. The totality of creatures in the universe constitutes God's own body...A Christian spirituality that sees nature in God will attempt to feel nonhuman organisms as God feels them, that is, with openness to what they are in and for themselves, and with love. It will recognize that nonhuman organisms are parts of the divine body, and it will recognize that humans, too, are parts of that body.

Right Relationship: The Spiritual Ethic

Though many people claim to be devoutly religious, their lack of reverential respect for fellow creatures and Creation—the natural world—reflects a lack of respect and devotion for the Creator. Therefore we should inquire as to the nature of their religion, and what ends it serves.

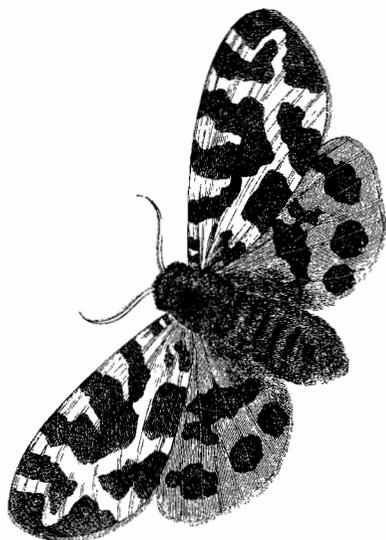
If we were in our right minds, we would be in right-relationship: In right relationship and right mindfulness with each other and Nature, we would enjoy world peace and the benefits of a healthy environment; and with animals we would enjoy their gifts and powers, finding no justification to cause them harm and suffering and death and extinction as we do today.

The world's major religions have always encouraged right-relationship, which is based primarily upon the hallowing covenant of reverential respect, be it for the land, for our own kind or for plants and other animals. This is right mindfulness.

Pre-industrial civilizations had various rites of initiation, rituals and belief systems (including animism, totemism) and language structures that enabled its members to develop their feral vision, experience the sacred and to express the sacred in poetry, the arts, crafts and healing. Reverential respect grew from experience and did not arise primarily from a set of moral codes, ethical principles and laws. These were derivative, not primary.

But they became primary when anthropocentric, monotheistic religious traditions emerged and were perverted to serve political and pecuniary ends. These traditions were opposed to any sacramental or pantheistic reverence for Nature, plants and animals since their god was transcendent and not also co-inherent. That tangible presence in all things that our senses were fully capable of feeling and knowing and loving was denied and excommunicated. Communion with Nature was anathema because Nature was something other, separate from man and god. Our senses, and the potential for divine realization in our children were cut off from the sacred dimension of Earthly Creation. To have reverence for animals and trees was judged heretical paganism. To believe that all manifestations of creation, wolves, woods, rocks and rivers, have a sacred dimension because they are all part of divine creation and conception was dismissed as primitive superstition. Anthropologists and others of our contemporary technocratic society call such a belief

system "animistic." Yet as a culture, we still hold to some of the vestiges of animism when we make arbitrary (and often capricious) distinction between the living (wolves and woods) and the non-living (rocks and rivers).



Animism: The God-Within

To our ancestors, and to some modern thinkers, biologists, ecologists and theoretical physicists, rocks and rivers are as living in their ways and as giving to life as part of the life process, as are wolves and woods and whales and woodpeckers. But when we treat the seemingly inanimate (i.e., un-enspirited, dis-godded) components of the life-community as non-living, non-sacred, we disrupt the living Earth system and harm ourselves in the process.

Reverential respect for Nature means avoiding causing wanton harm or injury. This principle of nonviolence was of instrumental value since it helped constrain actions that would be ecologically damaging. A Taos Indian, for example, advised, "Do not move the rock or anything placed in its place by God. Not a leaf from a tree nor a bird from its nest nor a spider's silver thread. These things will fall soon enough in their time.

The earth has roots, and the roots belong to the soil. If you cut a hole in the soil you have damaged the earth. You must therefore be certain it is necessary."⁸

Humanism, in its most pernicious and arrogant mode of instrumental materialism, leads to a non-sustainable economy and way of life. Animism, the antithesis of humanism, is no panacea, but a signpost pointing our way toward a different way of life and of seeing and conceiving our place and role on Earth.

Religious reasons aside, a major reason for dismissing animism is because it is seen as being primitive superstition, which is unscientific. Since the "objective" tools of science cannot determine if rocks and rivers are alive or enspirited, and whether trees and lakes can suffer, or animals really have feelings, then it is reasoned that animism (also termed pansychism) is irrational. It is an anthropomorphic or anthropopsychic projection whereby we erroneously endow other non-human, "non-living" and "living" entities with feelings, spirit, divinity.

However, I believe that animism is a less distorted and dysfunctional state of mind than humanism and scientism. It is our natural, normal, healthy state of mind that leads to a more life affirming, sustaining and self-actualizing way of being that is the antithesis of both anthropocentrism and anthropomorphizing. It is the first step toward a more anthropo-cosmic world view.

This worldview begins to take form when we are able to accomplish a kind of conceptual and perceptual integration and synesthesia particularly in how we sense and feel in relation to other beings as subjects/objects. (As a Taoist would say, when we objectify the subjective, and become one with the object, then the way of harmony will be found).

Integrating the Subjective and the Objective

We can sense, objectively, in a detached, impartial way, but not completely until all memories and associations are set aside. Pure objectivity in the realm of the senses is thus extremely difficult to achieve, although it is one of the blessings and memories of childhood. To see, taste, touch, smell or hear anything as though for the first time is to open a new door every day.

We can also sense subjectively, in a wholly selfless yet feelingful way. Through our senses we become aware of and receptive to the feelings and conditions or state of being of others. The more selfless we are, the more "otherness" we can experience as we sense and feel and

know. In other words, the ego, our central point of conscious reference, is no longer exclusively in the self, or in the other (or object of one's attention). Rather, consciousness is relational and arises when there is resonance between subject and object, I and Thou. The quality of that resonance is determined by our senses and empathy and by the balance between our dual yet complementary modes of sensing and relating, namely the objective and the subjective. When these two modes are in harmony, like the strings on a finely tuned musical instrument, a new dimension of human potential is realized.

Philosopher Martin Buber proclaims, "Subjectivism is psychologization while objectivism is reification of God: One a false fixation, the other a false liberation; both departures from the way of actuality, both attempts to find a substitute for it." For Buber, "The demanding silence of forms (of nature), the loving speech of human beings, the eloquent muteness of creatures—all of these are gateways into the presence of the word."

Experience is the foundation of belief. Such is the power of the animist's feral way of sensing, feeling and knowing the sacred in woods and wolves. Belief alone cannot be a viable basis for a meaningful and fulfilling life without experiential affirmation. It is easier to believe what we sense and feel than to shape and distort our perceptions, feelings and cognition to fit what we believe to be true. Is it not a perversion of Christianity and of any religion to force certain beliefs on people that are contrary to their feelings and perceptions of something sacred in Nature? And to their intuitive understanding that all living beings are as ensouled and of the same divine process of conception and manifestation as they are themselves? Animism and pansychism are belief systems derived from experiencing the sacred and that enable the sacred dimension of reality to be experienced. Through panempathy, our capacity to have feeling for other living beings, communities, systems and processes leads to the theology and spirituality of panentheism. This is the natural developmental progression from more primitive forms of animism, pantheism, and polytheism that in their ancient origins have more to offer us than contemporary monotheism, humanism, instrumental rationalism and scientific determinism. These latter conceptual fabrications of anthropocentrism are heretical and primitively crude compared to the blossoming of a humanity that consciously manifests its inherent divinity through right mindfulness and relationship with all sentient life.

A Simple Exercise

Find a place where trees and shrubs have not been planted by people and where ideally there is some free running water or a pond or shoreline, or some cliffs or gorge that wild creatures may still dwell. Just walk about slowly and carefully, mindful that your presence causes the least disturbance to all that is around you, above you and beneath your feet. Let your breathing fall in rhythm with your stride and the lay of the land. Feel the breeze, sniff the air. At comfortable intervals, stand still and close your eyes. Listen.

As you open your eyes, slowly turn in a clockwise circle so that you face the Four Directions. When you feel like it, continue your walkabout, allowing the terrain to guide you in whatever direction feels right. Stop and close your eyes and circle any time you wish.

Make a mental note of any particular sensation, natural formation or some plant or creature, or a particular stone, maybe a feather or a bone that touched you in some way. If you feel an urge to take something that you found, or that found you, on your walkabout, take it with the understanding that it will be returned in the future. If it is alive, like a cactus or a snail, it is probably best left where you found it since even removing it for a short time might cause harm. Bones, shells, rocks and dead portions of plants, including roots and seeds, are all part of the place you are visiting and should be returned at some future time.

When you have returned from your walkabout, empty your pockets and mind and ask yourself, what the particular things that caught your attention or that you took back with you "said" to you. What unexpected idea or meaning suddenly came to you as a "gift" from some natural object. Write it down and if it has a powerful visual component, try making a sketch of it.

This simple exercise is a first step into the experiential realm of animism, where natural things speak to you and where some things that find you have a particular power or personal significance. These are totemic objects. They give you power and "good medicine" as you find meaning and significance in them. Your animistic relationship with your totem is as unpremeditated as it is unmediated except by the power or spirit of the object itself that "caught" your attention and via your senses evoked certain feelings, memories, associations and awakened your feral vision.

Animism and Human Purpose

In the absence of any appreciation for the intrinsic value of other living beings that are valued only in terms of their human utility, they are emptied of spirit; unensouled. Animism thus plays an important role in enabling us to reconnect with the spirit or divinity within other beings and Creation. It helps prevent us from ultimately dis-Godding the entire cosmos, and ourselves in the process. A purely instrumental and materialistic attitude toward life is the bane of contemporary industrial-consumer society. When we deny life its sanctity and divinity, we demean our own lives. Animism, panempathy and pantheism help liberate us from the emotional, cognitive and perceptual prison of anthropocentrism. They help us regain our feral vision. Such liberation is the antidote to our spiritual autism, freeing us to develop those human potentials that, through empathy and compassion, enable us to heal and to be healed. We thus make ourselves more fully human and in the process enable our own inherent divinity to shine forth. Our place and purpose in being human is then revealed to us. As intermediaries or interlocutors between the Creator and the powers and processes of Creation, our sacred purpose is given clarity and direction, and inspiration. How and what we feel about other living beings and Nature's elements and creations, determines how and in what way we perceive, understand and relate to them. How and what we feel are profoundly influenced by our culture and by the example of parents and teachers.

Pantheism moves the Christian doctrine of transcendence toward the doctrine of immanence. The idea that Christ is within Creation (as the *logos*, the ordering, informing and sustaining principle of the cosmos that is manifested in all life and matter) is expressed in *John* 1:34. "All things were made through Him, and without Him was not made anything that was made. In Him was life and the life was the life of men."

The "child-within" is the soul-seed that is nurtured by the God-without to become one as the God-within. When we become opened to the world in this deepest and most fundamental way, Nature becomes our teacher, healer. Her powers become ours as sacred gifts that wisdom informs we cannot abuse or use for selfish ends, for then we harm ourselves.

When our soul-consciousness is in resonance with the Buddha-Light or sacred dimension of the life-force and life-field around us, above us, beneath us, and within

all beings, as in the air we breathe, the food we eat and the water we drink, we are in communion. Living in communion, we learn how to become fully human. We cease to be the only mammal that breeds before it matures, and then rarely. And we then follow what native American Indians call our "original instructions." Grandfather David Monongye puts it this way: "The original instructions of the Creator are universal and valid for all time. The essence of these instructions is compassion for all life and love for all creation. We must realize that we do not live in a world of dead matter, but in a universe of living spirit. Let us open our eyes to the sacredness of Mother Earth, or our eyes will be opened for us."⁹

Spirit and Soul

The spirit is not in the body. Rather, the body is in the spirit. The spirit is universal and is described by some as being the essence of truth, beauty, goodness, harmony and peace. We feel these things and experience the clarity of wisdom and the compassion of an open heart when our consciousness is connected and at one with this universal spirit.

The mind is our bridge between the body (and the physical world) and the spirit. If we define "soul" as the union of body and spirit, what is ensouled or embodied in us is universal spirit. The content of the soul is universal spirit, and our individual awareness of the spirit or inherent divinity within is our soul consciousness. The degree of such awareness and consciousness varies from individual to individual and from species to species. Enlightenment is essentially the realization of the universal nature of the Self, the individuated soul being seen as a minute droplet in the ocean of universal spirit or "Oversoul."

Animism, therefore, is a belief system that facilitates an empathic and cognitive connecting of the individual's soul with the universal spirit and with the souls of other sentient beings at a level that is consciously experienced and directed by ethical considerations.

German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer saw the world with feral vision like Bill Neidjie, stating: "My own true inner being actually exists in every living creature as truly and immediately as known to my consciousness only in myself. This realization, for which the standard formula in Sanskrit is *tat tvam asi*, (thou art that), is the ground of that compassion upon which all true, that is to say unselfish, virtue rests and whose expression is in every good deed."

Reverence is Absolute

My friend Thomas Berry says that reverence will be absolute or not at all. In one sense, it must embrace all beings, plants and animals, ecosystems and “natural resources.” This is because when we start making distinctions and exceptions, we begin to disrupt the sacred order, natural diversity and interdependence of life forms that we should not judge from the anthropocentric yardstick of useful and useless, harmful and beneficial.

Reverence must be absolute in a bioregional sense also. It's no use if one community is endeavoring to establish a sustainable, hallowing covenant with their ecozone while other communities occupying the same watershed/foodshed are trashing and polluting their own ecozones that are part of the same bioregion. The “multiplier effect” of different communities beginning to establish a reverential covenant of sustainable use with the land and the natural resources in their region, is the only economically viable future for their descendants. Ecojustice, social justice and transgenerational equity are the ethical, legal and political fruits of bioregionally sustainable community organization and covenanting. Reverence will be absolute, or not at all. These fruits will be well earned. Now is the time to sow the seeds and plant the trees.

Primitive Animism

A primitive form of animism persists today in the use of amulets and in folk medicines made from various animal parts, especially in the Orient. Specific cures, such as relief from fever, rheumatism, or asthmas and more general ‘tonic’ effects and increased libido are based to a large measure on the animistic belief that one can gain physical and psychological benefits from assimilating various body parts of animals that contain certain unique essences or qualities. Hence the cruel trade in animal parts, from bear gall bladders and rhino horn to snake oil and tiger bone continues. This form of animism should be eradicated since it is a disease of anthropopsychism and superstitious belief that is surely far more serious than any of the ailments that these animal-based folk medicines might ever alleviate. To kill the last few rhinos and tigers on Earth, to “farm” deer for their antlers and velvet and to keep bears in captivity with abdominal cannulas to collect their bile is animism in its most barbaric and

perversely anthropocentric form. It cannot be condoned on cultural or religious grounds since there are pharmaceutical, herbal, homeopathic and other effective medical alternatives like acupuncture and cleansing diets.

There are other cultural and religious traditions and practices that involve animal suffering and killing with an animistic component that are also unethical and cannot be justified on the grounds of religious freedom and cultural preservation. These include ritual slaughter and mutilation, as in Voodoo and Santeria cults; public torture, mutilation and killing of bulls in religious festivals (Saint's days), especially in Spain and Central and South America; tying firecrackers to foxes and releasing them into the forests in India; killing lions with spears in Africa as a test of manhood.

The killing of animals for subsistence rather than for commercial purposes by traditional peoples often has ritualistic and animistic components linked with religious beliefs and ceremonies. Animals should be spared suffering and endangered species protected. Commercial exploitation is unacceptable, even if it is claimed to include animistic and other culturally significant components, since commercialism is nontraditional and almost invariably unsustainable and culturally eroding.

Since compassion and reverential respect are the most widely accepted spiritual principles of all religious faiths and denominations, the abuse and killing of animals on the grounds of cultural tradition and religious freedom is unethical and barbaric.

The increasing trade in various wildlife parts—turtle shell rattle, decorated bear skulls and wolf pelts—for use in neo-pagan cult rituals that are becoming popular with Western Caucasians seeking a closer religious communion with animals and nature, is to be deplored. The taking of any animal's life except when there is no alternative to insure one's own survival, is a total contradiction of the empathic animist's world view, since the real powers of animals are in their *being* and not in their killing, or dismembered parts.

Old Beliefs for New Ways

Life, to the animist, is the greatest gift and mystery. It is divine process *and* presence. And it is from feeling and sensation, that all thought and meaning, language and the great arts of imitation, celebration and

communion, arise. But when we do not feel and perceive the sacred, what ever arises from us in thought and action will be less than our full measure and potential.

Animism helps us return to and rediscover our roots, our Sacred Connections. This is as important to humanity as it is for the forests. Neither can continue without roots.

Humanity is rooted in Creation, and thus connected with the entire Cosmos of sentient life and immanent divinity. We will rediscover our humanity when we resacralize all that we have desecrated, and with the wisdom of Plato and Aristotle combined build The New Republic that is centered in the boundless circle and ethics of compassion: And which will be the womb and cradle for a more humane society. A society that is as global in its scope of concern as it is universal in its truth and relevance.

Ideas and beliefs are like genes. They are called *mnemes*, and can affect human behavior and destiny as profoundly, and even override, the latent wisdom and pathology of our genes. Animism and panentheism are significant mnemes, like ahimsa and reverence for all life.

These mnemes activate our various feelings and influence what we think and sense. They influence how and what we feel, and how we behave, relate and structure reality. The realities of those who embrace animism, ahimsa and belief in reincarnation or redemption are very different from those who embrace such notions as human superiority, animals not being ensouled, or having feelings, and all matter as being as devoid of any spirit as any landscape or place is void of anything numinous and sacred.

This plethora of different and often conflicting realities is part of the human process of development and evolution. We must embrace this plethora of ideological and cultural diversity with the same respect and enthusiasm as we are beginning to do with regard for biodiversity and its protection. Otherwise we will not transcend the limitations of monocultures, monarchies, monotheists and monopolists! Our plurality is our potentiality and our future, hence the importance of not discarding such ancient and valuable mnemes as ahimsa, animism and panentheism, that have helped sustain human communities for millennia. We will not be sustained in body or spirit, by the many mnemes that have become cultural norms, like anti-animism, materialism, secular humanism, racism, sexism and speciesism;

and by the mnemonic catechisms of progress, efficiency and productivity as espoused by the pundits and advocates of industrial growth and medical experimentation on animals.

Every animist believes that the Earth is alive. The Gaia hypothesis that proposes the Earth is a complex, living breathing and self-regulating organism is as much a product of animism as it is of ecological science. We are learning that the biosphere has an atmosphere that we are disrupting as we ravage terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems. Animism shows us another sphere of reality, the planetary *empathosphere* which is the resonant dimension of feeling that sentient life creates and participates in. Separated from the empathosphere, our individual development and species' evolution are crippled by spiritual autism. It is from this empathosphere, through panempathy, that the human species begins to realize new powers and wisdom to bring balance and harmony in every aspect of our existence, and especially in our application of scientific knowledge and technological innovations that cannot be directed to serve purely materialistic and egotistic ends.

Postscript

The New Columbia Encyclopedia (Columbia University Press, 1975) provides the following concise definition of animism as

belief that within every object dwells an individual spirit or force that governs its existence. It has been said that upon this concept rests the historic structure of religion. Since primitive man did not distinguish between animate and inanimate objects or between physical and mental processes, everything in the universe was thought to have its own individuality. Men, animals, plants, stones, as well as emotions, dreams, and ideas alike, were regarded as having indwelling spirits. More generalized is the idea of *mana*¹⁰ which originated among Melanesians of the South Seas. A kind of transcendental force, *mana* is thought to be the spirit that pervades all objects and things and is responsible for the good and evil in the universe. In philosophy, the term animism is applied to the doctrine that the principle of life,

called the vital force, cannot be reduced to the mechanistic laws of physics and chemistry, but is separate and distinct from matter.

Notes

¹ The belief that all life is produced by a spiritual force, or that all things in nature have a soul. *Webster's New World Dictionary*.

² Quotation in Dorothy Lee (1959) *Freedom and Culture*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, p. 118.

³ Chief Luther Standing Bear (1900) *Land of the Spotted Eagles*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin. p. 195.

⁴ Cited in Nancy Wood (ed.) (1972) *Hollering Sun*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

⁵ P. 11 in *Heal Thyself* (1931). Walder, Essex, UK. C.W. Daniel Co. Ltd..

⁶ Panentheism is the belief that divinity is in all as all is in God. For further discussion see M.W. Fox (1995), *The Boundless Circle: Caring for Creatures and Creation*. Wheaton, Illinois. Quest Books.

⁷ J. McDaniel. Christian spirituality as openness to fellow creatures. *Environmental Ethics* 8:33-46. 1986.

⁸ Cited in Nancy Wood (ed.) (1972) *Hollering Sun*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

⁹ Letter to the United Nations, General Assembly, in *New Age*, December 1988, p. 88.

¹⁰ In other cultures this vital force is called chi, prana, shakti, kundalini.

Books Received

Carol J. Adams & Josephine Donovan, editors
ANIMALS & WOMEN
Feminist Theoretical Explorations
Durham: Duke University Press, 1995
introduction, 352p with notes, bibliography,
notes on contributors, index
\$54.95 cloth/\$17.95 paper

Clay Lancaster
**THE BREADTH AND DEPTH OF EAST
AND WEST**
A Survey and an Assessment of Civilization
Based on Universal Considerations
Salvisa, KY: Warwick Publications, 1995
preface, 547 p with notes, list of illustrations,
index
\$42.50 cloth

Evelyn B. Pluhar
**THE MORAL SIGNIFICANCE OF HUMAN
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Durham: Duke University Press, 1995
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bibliography, index
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