

Pantheism

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Pantheism is a metaphysical and religious position. Broadly defined it is the view that (1) "God is everything and everything is God ... the world is either identical with God or in some way a self-expression of his nature" (Owen 1971: 74). Similarly, it is the view that (2) everything that exists constitutes a "unity" and this all-inclusive unity is in some sense divine (MacIntyre 1967: 34). A slightly more specific definition is given by Owen (1971: 65) who says (3) "'Pantheism' ... signifies the belief that every existing entity is, only one Being; and that all other forms of reality are either modes (or appearances) of it or identical with it." Even with these definitions there is dispute as to just how pantheism is to be understood and who is and is not a pantheist. Aside from Spinoza, other possible pantheists include some of the Presocratics; Plato; Lao Tzu; Plotinus; Schelling; Hegel; Bruno, Eriugena and Tillich. Possible pantheists among literary figures include Emerson, Walt Whitman, D.H. Lawrence, and Robinson Jeffers. Beethoven (Crabbe 1982) and Martha Graham (Kisselgoff 1987) have also been thought to be pantheistic in some of their work — if not pantheists.

The book recognized as containing the most complete attempt at explaining and defending pantheism from a philosophical perspective is Spinoza's *Ethics*, finished in 1675 two years before his death. In 1720 John Toland wrote the *Pantheisticon: or The Form of Celebrating the Socratic-Society* in Latin. He (possibly) coined the term "pantheist" and used it as a synonym for "Spinozist." However, aside from some interesting pantheistic sounding slogans (like "Every Thing is to All, as All is to Every Thing"), and despite promising "A short Dissertation upon a Two-fold philosophy of the Pantheists" Toland's work has little to do with pantheism.

1. Pantheism and Theism

Where pantheism is considered as an *alternative* to theism it involves a denial of at least one, and usually both, central theistic claims. Theism is the belief in a "personal" God which in some sense is separate from (transcends) the world. Pantheists usually deny the existence of a personal God. They deny the existence of a "minded" Being that possesses the characteristic properties of a "person," such as having intentional states, and the associated capacities like the ability to make decisions. Taken as an alternative to, and denial of, theism and atheism, pantheists deny that what they mean by God (i.e. an all-inclusive divine Unity) is completely transcendent. They deny that God is "totally other" than the world or ontologically distinct from it. The dichotomy between transcendence and immanence has been a principal source of philosophical and religious concern in Western and non-Western traditions; and all major traditions have at times turned to pantheism as a way of resolving difficulties associated with the theistic notion of a transcendent deity or reality.

Not all of the problems generated by the theistic notion of God are also problems for pantheism. But given a suitable reformulation, some of them will be. And, as expected, pantheism will also generate some difficulties peculiar to itself. Thus, although evil and creation do not present identical problems for pantheism and theism, and may even be inherent to theism; it *may* also be possible to reformulate them in a way that makes them applicable to pantheism. There may be pantheistic counterparts to the problem of evil and other classical theistic problems, and perhaps they can be resolved by pantheism.

There are probably more (grass-root) pantheists than Protestants, or theists in general, and pantheism continues to be the traditional religious alternative to theism for those who reject the classical theistic notion of God. Not only is pantheism not antithetical to religion, but certain religions are better understood as pantheistic

rather than theistic when their doctrines are examined. Philosophical Taoism is the most pantheistic, but Advaita Vedanta, certain forms of Buddhism and some mystical strands in monotheistic traditions are also pantheistic. But even apart from any religious tradition many people profess pantheistic beliefs — though somewhat obscurely. Pantheism remains a much neglected topic of inquiry. Given their prevalence, non-theistic notions of deity have not received the kind of careful philosophical attention they deserve. Certainly the central claims of pantheism are *prima facie* no more "fantastic" than the central claims of theism — and probably a great deal less so.

2. Is Pantheism Atheistic?

Like "atheism" the term "pantheism" was used in the eighteenth century as a term of "theological abuse," and it often still is (Tapper 1987). A.H. Armstrong says the term "pantheistic" is a "large, vague term of theological abuse," (Armstrong 1976: 187). With some exceptions, pantheism is non-theistic, but it is not atheistic. It is a form of non-theistic monotheism, or even non-personal theism. It is the belief in one God, a God identical to the all-inclusive unity, but pantheists (generally) do not believe God is a person or anything like a person. The fact that pantheism *clearly* is not atheistic, and is an explicit denial of atheism, is disputed by its critics. The primary reason for equating pantheism with atheism is the assumption that belief in any kind of "God" must be belief in a personalistic God, because God must be a person.

In his non-pantheistic phase, Coleridge claimed that "every thing God, and no God, are identical positions" (McFarland 1969: 228). Owen (1971: 69-70) says, "if 'God' (theos) is identical with the Universe (to pan) it is merely another name for the Universe. It is therefore bereft of any distinctive meaning; so that pantheism is equivalent to atheism." Similarly, Schopenhauer (1951: 40) said that "to call the world 'God' is not to explain it; it is only to enrich our language with

a superfluous synonym for the word 'world'." The charge that pantheism is atheistic is as old as pantheism itself. Christopher Rowe (1980: 54-5) says, "When Cicero's Velleius describes Speusippus' pantheism as an attempt to 'root out the notion of gods from our minds', he is echoing a charge which was commonly made against the pantheism of the earlier Greek natural philosophers ... like Anaximander or Heraclitus. These tended to be identified as atheists in the popular mind; and indeed Plato himself implies a similar view ... the opponents who classify them as atheists are in reality attacking them for undermining traditional beliefs about the gods — or, to borrow a phrase from the indictment against Socrates, 'for not believing in the gods the city believes in'."

At most, what Schopenhauer, Coleridge, Owen etc. can show, and probably all they intend, is that the pantheistic Unity can be explained in terms that would either eliminate the notion of deity from pantheism altogether, or that it is incoherent. They want to show that believing in a pantheistic God is a convoluted and confused way of believing in something that can adequately be described apart from any notion of deity — and in this they are mistaken.

3. Unity

Different versions of pantheism offer different accounts of the meaning of "unity," and "divinity." There is no one meaning in all forms of pantheism, and within some forms several types are found. Often, the meaning of unity present is vague and indeterminate. Because of this, the central problem of pantheism, unlike theism, is to determine just what pantheism means. For example, philosophical Taoism is one of the best articulated and thoroughly pantheistic positions there is. The *Tao* is the central unifying feature. What kind of unity is (or should be) claimed by pantheists and which, if any, is plausible? After dealing with these fundamental questions, the philosophical and religious consequences of analyzing unity in some particular way can be

examined. There may be acceptable alternative criteria of Unity. But even if there are alternatively acceptable criteria, some may be more acceptable to the pantheist than others — given criteria of adequacy in addition to those necessary. Among those that are acceptable, they need not be equally acceptable. However, just as there are alternative theisms, one would expect that there are alternative pantheisms. Pantheism need not be, any more than theism needs to be, a univocal view.

4. Misunderstandings

Schopenhauer criticized pantheism's identification of "the world" with "God," on the basis of what he took to be the meanings of both for the pantheist. He said calling the world "God," or God "the world," is "superfluous," and redundant. He also ridiculed the idea that the world could be called God given our general notions of what God and the world are like. Schopenhauer's criticism fails because he equivocates on the terms central to his argument. The meanings of both Unity and divinity involved in the pantheistic claim that there exists an all-inclusive divine Unity are different than the senses Schopenhauer attributes to the world and God in his criticism. The pantheist does not mean what Schopenhauer means by God, and the "all-inclusive unity" in pantheism is not another word for the "world" as he uses it (i.e. everything). The interpretation of "world" Schopenhauer attributes to pantheists is not what they mean when they describe it as a Unity.

For the pantheist, however Unity is interpreted, the world is not simply an all-inclusive Unity in the sense that the world, understood to be everything, is the "unity" composed of everything. This would be to interpret it as asserting that everything that exists simply is everything that exists; or to put it another way, everything is (of course) all-inclusively everything. This is true but vacuous, and it trivialises pantheism at the outset.

Attributing Unity simply on the basis of all-inclusiveness is irrelevant to pantheism. Formal unity can always be attributed to the world on this basis alone. To understand the world as "everything" is to attribute a sense of unity to the world, but there is no reason to suppose this sense of all-inclusiveness is the pantheistically relevant Unity. Similarly, unity as mere numerical, class or categorical unity is irrelevant, since just about anything (and everything) can be "one" or a "unity" in these senses. Suppose "formal unity" to be "the sense in which things are one in virtue of the fact that they are members of one and the same class ... the same universal" (Demos 1945-6: 538). Then clearly formal unity is not pantheistic Unity. Furthermore, formal unity neither entails or is entailed by types of unity (e.g. substantial unity) sometimes taken to be Unity. Hegel's *Geist*, Lao Tzu's *Tao*, Plotinus' "One," and arguably Spinoza's "substance," are independent of this kind of formal unity.

Unity is explained in various ways that are often interrelated. These connections range from mutual entailment, to different types of causal and contingent relations. Roughly, Unity is interpreted 1) ontologically; 2) naturalistically — in terms of ordering principle(s), force(s) or plans; 3) substantively — where this is distinguished from "ontologically"; and 4) genealogically — in terms of origin. Christopher Rowe (1980: 57) calls 4 a "genealogical model of explanation" of unity. "Thales, Anaximander, and Anaximenes, the Milesian monists appear to have claimed that what unifies the world is that it sprang from a single undifferentiated substance.

Unity may have to be explained partly in terms of divinity. The all-inclusive whole may be a Unity because it is divine — either in itself (Spinoza's substance), or because of a divine power informing the whole — as with the Presocratics. The Presocratics give an account of why they think the unifying principle is divine. It is immortal and indestructible. But this does not satisfactorily explain the relation between Unity and divinity, or why divinity might be seen as a

basis of Unity. Similarly, though less naturally, the question arises as to whether the all-inclusive whole is divine because it is a Unity. Can Unity be a basis for attributing divinity to the whole? If divinity is the basis for Unity, as it may be for the Presocratics; or alternatively if Unity is the basis for divinity; then there is something of a redundancy in the definition of pantheism as the belief that everything that exists constitutes a divine Unity. A simpler non-redundant definition would be that pantheism holds that "everything is divine".

5. Divinity

"Divine" is defined as pertaining to God ("of, from, or like a god"), but also as "sacred" or "holy." Either definition suits the present purpose, since determining why pantheists regard the Unity as divine, or god, is equivalent to determining why they regard the Unity to be sacred or holy. The idea of "divinity" in pantheism is similar in some respects to its theistic meaning.

Why do pantheists ascribe divinity to the Unity? The reason is similar to why theists describe God as holy. They experience it as such. In Otto's (1950) experiential account, what is divine is what evokes the numinous experience. This can be a theistic god, but it can also be a pantheistic Unity. And, when looked at from socio-scientific perspectives in terms of how the concept of divinity functions intellectually and affectively (e.g., its ethical, soteriological and explanatory roles), its application in theism and pantheism is much the same.

There is no reason to suppose the idea of "divinity" relevant to pantheism should be modelled after a specific tradition's concept of divinity-like Christianity. At best, this tradition-dependent concept would be relevant to Christian/pantheist and other theist/pantheist hybrids (e.g. panentheism). It is too specific for any general analysis of pantheism, and it refers to the theistic variants of pantheism which are most inconsequential for pantheistic practice.

From a pantheistic perspective, panentheism is just a variety of theism. It involves both the belief that God is a person (has a mind, is conscious etc) and the belief that God is partially, or in some respect, transcendent. Like deism and pantheism, it too is best seen, from a Western perspective, as a response to theism — a way of overcoming allegedly unacceptable aspects.

Whatever criteria are decided upon as necessary for attributing divinity to something, one cannot decide *a priori* that the possession of divinity requires personhood without ruling out the possibility of the most typical types of pantheism (i.e. non-personal types). After all, theism is what pantheism is most of all trying to distance itself from. I am not sure the reverse is true-but theism does ordinarily strongly oppose itself to pantheism. In any case, Spinoza's God and Lao Tzu's *Tao*, for example, are distinctly non-personal, as are the governing principles of the Presocratics. It seems unwarranted, therefore, to suppose that a necessary condition of something's being divine is that it be personal on the grounds that "Of all the modes of creaturely existence, personality is the highest and so the fittest to serve as an analogy of divine being" (Macquarrie 1984: 42). At least to do so begs the question against Spinoza, some of the Presocratics, Lao Tzu, probably Plotinus, as well as against experiential and socio-scientific accounts of divinity.

6. Monism

Following a long and still current tradition H.P. Owen (1971: 65) claimed that "Pantheists are 'monists'...they believe that there is only one Being, and that all other forms of reality are either modes (or appearances) of it or identical with it." Although, like Spinoza, some pantheists may also be monists, and monism may even be essential to some versions of pantheism (like Spinoza's), pantheists are not monists. Like most people they are pluralists. They believe, quite plausibly, that there are many things and kinds of things and many different kinds of value. Even in Spinoza's

case, explaining his pantheism in terms of his substance monism glosses the far more significant, pantheistically speaking, evaluative implications he sees as entailed by that monism for his pantheistic metaphysic and his concept of Unity. The *Ethics* is not about monism, but about what it entails. Why Spinoza sees things as a Unity cannot be explained wholly or even primarily in terms of his monism.

Whether or not substance monism is ontologically necessary for Unity, an explanation of its relevance requires something extra-ontological to be cited. The same is true of any factual ground for Unity. Delineating metaphysical or modal properties of a substance, or anything else, does not make their relevance to Unity obvious. So what if everything is made from one self-subsistent immutable substance? So what if everything is really a single organism when considered macrocosmically? Why would this be pantheistically, rather than merely metaphysically significant? What is the evaluative or religious significance of natural features of the totality that pantheism claims is central to Unity? Because value must be partly constitutive of Unity, it must be explained in partly evaluative terms. This is a necessary condition for an adequate criterion of Unity. Without it one is left only with this or that fact as a basis for positing Unity, but no adequate account of the relevance of the basis, and so no account of Unity itself.

There may be ways of conceiving of the monistic "One" such that it is taken both as a unity and as "divine" — yet still not as a pantheistic Unity. The monistic unity (the "One") may not be regarded as a "Unity" (i.e. unity in some relevant pantheistic sense). Not just any monistic unity (e.g. mere substance monism) suffices for pantheism, whether or not it is also regarded as divine. Thus, although Hegel conceived of Reality as unified and rational in terms of the Absolute (Geist), and in a manner that I take it would qualify Geist as divine, he denies he was a pantheist. Similarly, Sankara's Brahman is ontologically all-inclusive and is part of a metaphysical account of the

nature of Reality that is religiously significant (i.e. "Reality" is divine in some sense). However, it may be denied that advaita Vedanta, although monistic, is pantheistic. "Unity" is seen as absent from, or even antithetical to, essential aspects of advaita Vedanta such as its monism.

Monists, like pantheists, believe that Reality, or an aspect of it, is "One" or unified. Of course they also deny it is "One" or a "unity" in most other senses. Whatever similarities there are in this regard, there is insufficient reason for attributing pantheism to monists, because the oneness of Reality is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition of pantheism. It is at most a necessary condition if monistic "oneness" is construed in a unitive sense that is constitutive of some particular pantheistic account of the divine Unity. An alleged entailment between pantheism and monism is even less likely since pantheists, like everyone else, are generally pluralistic. Any appearance to the contrary has been fostered by simply conflating Unity with monism, or by considering the few pantheists who were also monists and taking them as the norm. The connection between Spinoza's monism and his pantheism, does not rest on an identification of the two positions, but is instead the result of the wider metaphysical position constructed in his *Ethics*.

Substance monism need not have any implications concerning God or an Absolute in either a theistic or pantheistic sense. Differences among substance monists may be greater than differences between monists who deny and theists who affirm that God and creation are substantially distinct. For example, a substance monist (e.g. Sankara — interpreted atheistically) need not identify substance with God, or recognize any God, at all. In this case it is plausible to hold that the difference between such an atheistic monist and a theistic or pantheistic monist is far greater than that between the theistic monist who perhaps holds that creatures and creator are co-substantial (though the theistic monist need not hold this view), and the theistic

non-monist who believes that all creatures are substantially distinct from the creator. The latter two have their theism in common, while the former two have their monism in common. The latter two are "closer" in kind than the former, if (and so far as) one assumes that theism is a more significant common denominator than monism.

7. Transcendence

Like the notions of "Unity" and "Divinity," understanding transcendence and immanence is essential to any account of pantheism. A defining feature of pantheism is allegedly that God is wholly immanent. However, what is actually (or mostly) involved in this claim is that pantheism denies the theistic view that God transcends the world. Pantheism clearly does not claim that God in the theistic sense is immanent in the world since it denies such a God — transcendent or immanent — exists. According to pantheism it is (of course) the pantheistic "God" (i.e. the all-inclusive divine Unity) that is immanent, not the theistic one. Theists and pantheists do not differ as to whether the theistic God is immanent or transcendent, but whether the theistic God exists. So to differentiate between them on the basis of one's affirming and the other denying immanence is utterly confused.

Many of the difficulties associated with theistic transcendence are not dissipated for the pantheist when relevantly adjusted. For example, theistic transcendence presents *prima facie* difficulties concerning knowledge of and relations with God. The pantheist is part of the Unity, but both the nature of Unity, and its practical implications must be determined. In the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius this appears as much a problem for pantheists, if Aurelius is one, as knowing and relating to God is for theists.

In a sense, the Unity in pantheism is wholly immanent, but this is bare ontological immanence that follows from the Unity's all-inclusiveness (i.e. there is nothing else). Yet even this overstates the pantheistic commitment to immanence. Aspects

of the Unity or the unifying principle often have a transcendent aspect to them. Unity is "all-inclusive" but with the possible exception of Spinoza, pantheists generally deny complete immanence. Thus, the metaphysical *Tao* informs everything and is part of the all-inclusive Unity, but it does have a transcendent aspect to it. It does transcend the phenomenal world of "myriad things." The same is true of Hegel's *Geist*, the Plotinian "One," and Presocratic unifying principles as well. So the claim that pantheists deny "God's" transcendence is altogether misleading on several counts unless taken to mean what it usually does mean when asserted by theists — which is that pantheists deny the transcendence of a theistic God.

If pantheism is seen as the quintessential expression of divine immanence, then it is not difficult to see why it might be combined with panpsychism or animism. Like pantheism, both of these express a kind of pervasive immanence — "mind" in the former case and "living soul," "spirit," or "animal life" in the latter. But however consonant or combined with pantheism these may be, they should be distinguished from both from each other and from pantheism. None of these three views entail one another, and the suggestion that pantheism and panpsychism naturally go together is vague apart from specific accounts of the two positions.

What immediately sets panpsychism apart from pantheism is its belief that mental activity, usually of a kind we can only at times be mildly aware of, is all-pervasive. Although such a supposition is not necessarily inconsistent with pantheism, it is not part of pantheism. Pantheism does not imply that the material/immaterial, or organic/inorganic dichotomies must be rejected. It does not reject these distinctions, but implies that Unity ranges over such divisions. There are other major differences between the two positions as well. Pantheism is a much broader theory. It has implications beyond the scope of panpsychism where the latter is seen as an account of the origin

of mind and the relation between mind and matter.

Animism, panpsychism, and especially the doctrine of a world-soul as embodied in the macrocosm/microcosm distinction, have at times been equated with pantheism. These positions may be intrinsic to particular versions of pantheism, but pantheism as such is broader than these and distinct from them.

8. Creation

"Why is there something rather than nothing?" Pantheism rejects the theistic response that God exists necessarily and freely creates the universe from nothing. But does pantheism require an alternative doctrine of creation? What might such a doctrine be? For pantheism, creation remains problematic and even mysterious. However, difficulties associated with the theistic doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* (i.e. God creating the world out of nothing) vanish. If pantheism requires a creation doctrine, some type of emanationism seems most plausible. This is the type usually associated with, and probably most congenial to pantheism (e.g. Taoism, the Stoics, Plotinus) — although pantheists can also eschew such doctrines.

Assuming pantheism does require a doctrine or view about creation, what can be said positively about it? Pantheism has a range of options unavailable to theism since the theistic doctrine is extrapolated from scripture. A pantheist might be a kind of existentialist with regard to questions like "Why is there anything at all?" They could believe existence is a brute fact, with no explanation possible. This might be seen as a refusal to deal with the issue of creation — as rejecting the idea that pantheism requires a theory of creation suited to the notion of a divine Unity. But this is not necessarily so. For all its seeming negativity, this is a positive position and not one that simply denies other views. It is a theory of origin or creation that could be acceptable to some pantheists.

One reason any account of origin, including the view of existence as a brute fact, might be rejected as being especially relevant to pantheism, is that the account is not thought to be intrinsically connected to the notion of Unity. Indeed, pantheists might reject the idea that they require an account of creation intrinsic to their idea of Unity. Instead, *any* account that does not conflict with the way in which Unity is conceived of might be accepted.

In distinguishing between creation *ex nihilo* and emanationism as he does, Macquarrie (1984: 34-5) makes it easy to see why emanationism is often closely associated with pantheism. Emanationism is the view that "creation" is not a "making," but in some sense a "flowing forth" from God or its origin, as Macquarrie puts it. And, what "flows forth" "maintains a closer relation to [its] origin. It participates in the origin, and the origin participates in it." He says, "...emanationism does not necessarily lead to pantheism, but it does imply that in some sense God is in the world and the world is in God."

Even though doctrines of creation *ex nihilo* do not necessarily conflict with that central pantheistic claim, they are usually seen as doing so — partly because they are associated with other incompatible theistic elements (e.g. the creator is a person). On the other hand, emanationism appears to provide a doctrine which — if not an explicit ground on which to base pantheism — is at least one that is seen as congenial. As a doctrine of creation, it may even provide a partial basis for pantheism — as it has (arguably) for Plotinus, Eriugena, and even for Spinoza where "God" is the immanent cause of all things. The view that God is the "immanent cause" of things is a kind of creation doctrine for Spinoza and a basis for Unity. So far as Lao Tzu has a doctrine of creation it too is emanationist. "The Tao engenders one, One engenders two, Two engenders three, And three engenders the myriad things" (*Tao Te Ching*, XLII) (Ku-ying 1981: 49). The *Tao* is "the primordial natural force, possessing an infinite supply of power and creativity" (Ku-ying 1981: 6).

Not only does the *Tao* create things — it is responsible for, or makes possible, their growth. "It nourishes them and develops them ... provides for them and shelters them" (*Tao Te Ching*, LI).

Emanationism tends to affirm rather than deny a common ontological, substantial, and evaluative base among everything that exists (e.g., whatever it is which creatively emanates, it is "Good"). It is therefore seen as in keeping with the central tenets of pantheism, and where pantheists adhere to a doctrine of creation it tends to be emanationist. Since Unity must partly be explained evaluatively, the fact that emanationism is often linked to the "Good" provides further reason for supposing it consonant with pantheism. Thus, although Macquarrie is right in claiming that the emanationist view of creation "does not necessarily lead to pantheism," the implication is that it often does.

9. Evil

The problem of evil is basically a theistic one that is not directly pertinent to pantheism. It is not, as Owen (1971: 72) claims, "an embarrassment" intellectually speaking, to pantheists, nor can it be. The "problem of evil," as it appears in classical theism, cannot be relevant to pantheism since pantheism rejects all of the aspects of theism that are essential to generating the problem. The "problem of evil" is peculiar to theism. This conflicts with the common view among Spinoza's earliest critics that pantheism, unlike theism, can neither account for evil nor offer any resolution to the problem of evil. The reason for claiming pantheism cannot account for evil usually rests on an unwarranted conflation of pantheism with monism, and on the even more untoward supposition that the pantheist's "God" is "theistic" in important respects.

It is not the case that pantheism need not address the existence of evil and associated moral issues. It offers both its own formulation(s) of a "problem of evil" and its own responses. However, the very idea of evil may be something the pantheist

wishes to eschew. "Evil" is essentially a metaphysical rather than a moral concept; or it is moral concept with a particular theistic metaphysical commitment. The pantheist may prefer, as most contemporary ethical theorists do, to talk of what is morally or ethically right and wrong. The term "evil" could be retained and applied to particular (usually extreme) instances of moral wrongness, but it would be understood in a sense that divorces it from its original theological and metaphysical context.

Given the classical argument from evil in either its logical or empirical versions it is surprising that anyone should think evil presents any problem whatsoever for the pantheist; for example, that evil counts against the existence of the pantheistic Unity in a way similar to the way in which it counts against the existence of the theistic God. Evil might be taken to be indicative of a lack of pantheistic Unity, as evidence of some kind of chaos instead. But it cannot count against the existence of a pantheistic Unity in the way it can count against the existence of a theistic God. The argument from evil states that given the following propositions it is either impossible that God exists, or it improbable that God exists. 1) God is omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good. 2) God would prevent all preventable evil. 3) The world contains preventable evil. The pantheist rejects the proposition needed to generate the problem to begin with. The pantheist accepts (3) "The world contains preventable evil." The pantheist also accepts that if there was a theistic God, which for the pantheist *ex hypothesi* there is not, then (2) "God would prevent preventable evil." But the pantheist rejects (1) "God is omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good." Undeniably there is evil in the world that could be prevented, and supposing there was a theistic God one would assume that he would prevent it. But since there is no such God why suppose that proposition (3) requires some kind of special explanation or is cause for any "unease" on the part of the pantheist? The existence of preventable evil, for all that has been, does not even constitute a *prima facie* reason for rejecting the coherence of a

pantheistic notion of Unity, or the probability of the existence of Unity. (3) is not incompatible with anything the pantheist believes to be true. Certainly it is not incompatible with (1) since the pantheist denies the truth of (1), and it is not incompatible with (2) which is only hypothetically true for the pantheist. The pantheist has no need to explain evil, or to explain evil away — at least not in any way resembling theism's need to do so.

Evil may be a problem for the pantheist, but it is not the kind of problem that it is for the theist. It does not even conflict, *prima facie* with the existence of a divine Unity. Pantheism does not claim that its divine Unity is a "perfect being" or being at all (generally), or that it is omniscient etc. Surely it is mistaken to interpret Spinoza's "God" as "perfect" and "omniscient" etc. in anything like the way these predicates are interpreted theistically as applying to God. It might be supposed that the existence of evil is inconsistent or incongruous with the "divinity" of the Unity. But this would have to be argued. In theism it is assumed that what is divine cannot also be (in part) evil. But why assume this is the case with pantheism? Even in Otto's account of the "holy" the holy has a demonic aspect. There seems little reason to suppose that what is divine cannot also, in part, be evil. At any rate, there is little reason for the pantheist to argue that what is divine can also be evil, since they can deny that evil falls within the purview of the divine Unity. To say that everything that exists constitutes a divine Unity (i.e. pantheism's essential claim) need not be interpreted in such a way so that it entails that all parts and every aspect of the Unity is divine or good. There can be a Unity and it can be divine without everything about it always, or even sometimes, being divine.

10. Ethics

Pantheists, like theists, tend to be "moral realists." They believe it is an objective fact that some kinds of actions are ethically right and others wrong, and what is right and wrong is independent of what any person thinks is right and wrong. With

the exception of religious ethics, moral realism has not been a widely accepted philosophical position in recent times. However, the pantheist, like the theist, is not troubled by the fact that her moral realism is based on metaphysical assumptions that some regard as otiose. Furthermore, pantheists, like theists, generally think that moral judgements, and value judgments generally, are not empirically verifiable — at least not in the way one verifies matters of fact generally.

"Natural properties" are properties such as being a certain colour, shape, temperature or height, causing pain, "producing the greatest good for the greatest number" etc. They are properties that one can, in principle, verify that an object or action has or lacks. Some ethical "naturalists" (e.g., some Utilitarians) claim that moral properties are identical with natural properties. For example, a morally right action is sometimes equated with the action which "produces the greatest good for the greatest number." Others claim that moral properties are entailed by natural properties. Pantheists, however, generally believe that moral properties are both distinct from natural properties and are not entailed by them. Thus, they are usually "nonnaturalists."

Despite their nonnaturalism, pantheists, like theists, reject G.E. Moore's contention that these properties (i.e. goodness and badness) are ultimate and irreducible. For the theist the fact that "X is wrong" will be explained, and partially analysed, in terms of (even if not reducible to) nonnatural facts about God's will and nature. And, for the pantheist the fact that "X is wrong" will be explained, and partially analysed, in terms of (even if not reducible to) nonnatural facts about the divine Unity. Nonnaturalism is the position most congenial to pantheism, but a pantheist could make a case for being an ethical naturalist just as one could argue for a naturalistic theistic ethics.

Pantheism leaves the option between ethical naturalism and ethical nonnaturalism open. For

the pantheist, though perhaps not for the theist, value-properties and predicates may be empirical or natural, or supervene upon natural properties, even if they are not entailed by such properties. So pantheists may be ethical naturalists. This may be the case even if assertions containing value predicates are not taken to be empirically verifiable in any straightforward way as they often are for naturalism. Such value-predicates are not "empirical" in a narrow sense in which facts in the physical or even psychological sciences are empirical; but neither are they facts about some transcendent reality. Pantheism may, in a sense, deny the existence of any properties that are not "natural." It depends on how much one is willing to broaden one's notion of "natural." Of course, classifications such as "objectivist" and "nonnaturalist," are only a partial explanation of pantheists' ethical views.

11. Ecology

It is not accidental that pantheism is often taken to be a view inherently sympathetic to ecological concerns. This makes a decision to deal with ecology alongside pantheistic ethics less artificial than it might be if I were discussing, for example, theism and ethics — or a particular normative theory of ethics. There is a tendency to picture pantheists (i.e. pantheists other than Spinoza), outdoors and in pastoral settings. This has roots in the Stoics' veneration of nature, and in the much later nature mysticism, and perhaps pantheism, of some of the nineteenth century poets such as Wordsworth and Whitman. It has been fostered in the twentieth century by pantheists such as John Muir, Robinson Jeffers, D.H. Lawrence and Gary Snyder who explicitly "identify" with and extol nature, and claim people's close association and identification with "nature" and the "natural" is necessary to well-being. The belief in a divine Unity, and some kind of identification with that Unity, is seen as the basis for an ethical framework (and "way of life") that extends beyond the human to non-human and non-living things. The divine Unity is, after all, "all-inclusive."

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

The pantheist's ethic, her environmental ethic and her ethics more generally, will be metaphysically based in terms of the divine Unity. It will be based on the Unifying principle which accounts for an important commonality, and it will be the grounds for extending one's notion of the moral community to other living and non-living things. Everything that is part of the divine Unity (as everything is) is also part of the moral community. Aldo Leopold (1949: 219, 240) says, "The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively, the land ... A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise." Looking towards pantheism as a metaphysical justification of, for example, Leopold's "land ethic" is not unreasonable — or no more unreasonable than pantheism itself is.

An anthropocentric view of morality can at best make the non-human and non-living world an object of moral consideration. But it cannot,

according to some, provide a basis for regarding those things as having a "good" of their own or as being non-human members of a moral community. Pantheists (and theists) will generally reject any environmental ethic as unsound if it fails to regard the non-human world as a full-fledged member of the moral community. In their view, to do otherwise is ultimately to rest the prospects of environmental well-being on the good will of the only members of the moral community there are — humans. This is seen like resting the welfare of colonies on the goodwill of the colonisers. In order to enlarge our understanding of the moral community in the appropriate ways a metaphysical basis for an environmental ethic is needed which limits the significance of the anthropocentric view.

Furthermore, it is clear that those, like deep ecologists, who argue that our notion of the moral community must be enlarged to include the "good" of the non-human and non-living, and that it is metaphysically correct to do so, also claim that practical consequences *are* involved. The issue is not merely one of providing a rational basis for an environmental ethic.

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

12. Salvation and Immortality

Like the term "evil," "salvation" may be rejected by pantheists as being too integral to the theistic world view they reject. It is a term borrowed from theism and one not consonant with pantheism. I use the term "salvation" with this in mind.

Pantheistic ethics are, in some ways, Aristotelian. For pantheism the notion of "the good life" as a regulative ideal — a *telos* or end to be strived for — is an aspect of salvation. This can be explained by examining some similarities between pantheistic ethics and Aristotelianism. The pantheist has what Paul Taylor (1975: 132) calls "an essentialist conception of happiness." Like the Aristotelian; Platonist; and theist — the pantheist's conception of happiness "presupposes that there is such a thing as an essential human nature." They all disagree as to what that essential nature is. The pantheist's conception of human nature, her philosophical anthropology, is generally broader and less specific than the others. When goals are stipulated that man *qua* man should achieve this indicates an essentialist conception of human nature.

Furthermore, in an essentialist conception of happiness (one which presupposes that there is such a thing as an essential human nature), "happiness" is largely a function of how well one fulfils one's essential nature. Pantheism's wide conception of human nature allows for a broad range of ways for people to achieve happiness. There are fewer ways for the Aristotelian or theist to achieve happiness than there are for the pantheist. To the extent that a human being is able to achieve "happiness" by actualising the properties that "define the good of man as such" — they will be leading an intrinsically good life. "Happiness" is then the standard by which to judge the non-derivative (intrinsic) value of a person's life.

Pantheism has a nonanthropocentric conception of human well-being. The human good is characterised partly in terms of relational

properties. One must have a certain kind of relation to the Unity in order to live "properly." The set of properties common and unique to humans, which also define the good for humans as such, include relational properties. When a person exemplifies their essential human nature in this way — and it can only be exemplified in this relational way — they are living the "Good" life and can thereby achieve well-being and happiness. This nonanthropocentric conception of human well-being constitutes pantheism's standard of human perfection and virtue. It is a standard of intrinsic value.

As in the case of Aristotle's essentialist conception of the nature of things, the Human Good (defined as it is in terms of human nature) will be different from an animal's good or a plant's good. For the pantheist, the Good of these other things must also be understood partly in terms of their relation to the Unity. Furthermore, the Good associated with various things (humans, plants, etc.) is incommensurable. There is no standard external to each kind of thing by which all things can be measured in terms of perfection, or virtue, or intrinsic value. There is no such thing as intrinsic value *per se* given an essentialist account of the nature's of things which includes essentialist standards of perfection. It is not just wrong to say that a human being is intrinsically more valuable than a tree. It is also nonsense. Of course this does not mean trees should not be used by people.

Taylor (1975) claims that according to the essentialist conception of human nature, the value achieved in human life by fulfilling the standard of intrinsic value is independent its consequences in the lives of others. If this is right then the pantheist will reject any unqualified account of the essentialist's standard of human perfection and virtue. (Indeed, an Aristotelian need not hold such an absolute non-consequentialist account either.) Intrinsic value is, of course, value that is non-derivative. But, what determines the intrinsic goodness in a person's life will, for the pantheist, rely on that person's relationship to the Unity. A

person's "good" is partially constituted by the divine Unity of which everything is a part. In pantheistic terms it makes little sense to speak of the intrinsic value of a human life as measured against a standard independent of how that life affects others, since for the pantheist all such value, even so-called "intrinsic value," is partly derivative. The standard of intrinsic value and perfection cannot be determined without reference to the divine Unity. The essential nature and well-being of a person, or anything else, cannot be analysed apart from its context in relation to the Unity and everything it includes.

Although both theism and pantheism have essentialist conceptions of human nature, well-being on either of those accounts cannot be achieved apart from one's relation to others, or the consequences of one's actions for others. And, the pantheist and theist are not the only kind of essentialists for whom consequences and relations matter. For the Aristotelian, in order to achieve well-being it is necessary to develop a certain kind of character. This requires, in part, certain virtues (e.g. courage, temperance etc.). Since the development and display of character and virtue is connected in significant ways with the consequences of an individual's actions in relation to other people — the concept of one life having "intrinsic value" apart from how it affects any other life is vacuous. Aristotle's account of the virtues makes a practical impossibility of living a "good life" that is fundamentally bad for others. Plato too claims that the virtuous life has its rewards for all. Thus, essentialist conceptions of human nature and the Good need not preclude, and may even entail, an account of persons in relation to other things. For the pantheist, "realising the good for man as man" must be interpreted in terms of the Unity. For pantheism, an essentialist account of human nature does not suggest that there is necessarily only one kind of ideal person or way to achieve happiness.

An essentialist conception of human nature may recognise a range of human natures compatible with "Human Nature" as such. Just as various

plants are constituted in such a way that their different requirements must be met if they are to thrive and flourish (i.e. what constitutes their well-being varies), so too will conditions for a person's "well-being" vary from person to person. The pantheist maintains that there is no such thing as an (i.e. one) essential human nature — although some properties are shared. Yet given various human natures, well-being can only be achieved to the extent that the individual satisfies their own nature — achieve their own potential — in their particular circumstances in relation to the Unity. Pantheists eschew hierarchies that have as a criterion for the "good life" any particular intrinsic feature that certain human beings may have which others lack. A good mind used in a good way may help one lead a better life, but so will good looks and a good job.

Pantheists deny personal immortality. There is no life after death in the sense that it is "they" who survive. Historically, the denial of personal immortality is one of pantheism's most distinctive features. This is partly because it is in clear opposition to the theistic view. But, it is primarily significant because it is constitutive of the pantheist's world-view and ethos, and so has implications for pantheistic practice. Believing that one is not going to live again after one dies, just as believing one will live again, has implications for one's choices in this life. There, is of course, nothing like a direct correlation in terms of what one believes concerning immortality and how they choose to live. But for some people, seeing death as the permanent end of one's existence, or alternatively as a prolegomenon to another life, will be a constitutive factor of the ultimate context in which to live. The goals they choose to pursue, the relationships they have, their vocations, may to varying degrees be affected by their belief that death is or is not the permanent end of the individual. The pantheist need not believe that it would be tedious to live forever. They just claim that no one does. This fact is not so much something to be lived with — as to be lived in terms of. The denial of personal immortality is as

determinative of how the pantheist lives as the belief in an afterlife is for the theist.

The fact that pantheists (e.g. Spinoza) deny personal immortality is at times given as reason why pantheism is atheistic. The doctrine of immortality is so central to classical Christian theism, that rejecting the former is taken as entailing the denial of the latter. Yet, denying personal immortality can hardly be regarded as grounds for atheism unless theism, with its insistence on personal immortality, is taken to be the only position asserting the existence of a "God" that is not atheistic. The doctrine of personal immortality is not even essential to all forms of theism. Since many theists, e.g. many Jewish theists, deny immortality, it would seem this denial is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition of atheism.

People who are interested in personal immortality, like people who are not interested (perhaps because they do not believe people survive death) may nevertheless be concerned with their continued existence in an impersonal sense. Impersonal forms of "immortality," or surviving death, can include "surviving" in people's memories, being remembered for one's work, a bone in a reliquary, or becoming another part of the matter/energy cycle once again. One may want to be remembered for what one has accomplished, or for the person one was. Impersonal "immortality" may seem to pale next to the theists' insistence on personal immortality and the meeting again of people known in this life. Nevertheless, people's notions of impersonal immortality may be important in various ways. Whether or not they believe in personal immortality, it matters to some people how they will be thought of. No doubt, people who believe in personal immortality are also generally concerned with the impersonal forms. Some may even value being remembered for something they produced as more important than personal survival after death. But typically, the person who believes in personal immortality regards it with a

concern that they do not have for various impersonal types of survival.

Some pantheists believe in various types of non-personal immortality (e.g. Spinoza and Robinson Jeffers), and they regard this as significant for reasons other than, or in addition to, the reasons non-pantheists give. They reject the view that personal immortality is more valuable than impersonal immortality. This is not to say that if pantheists believed there was personal immortality they could not regard it as desirable. Perhaps they could even though the idea is anthropocentric and uncongenial to pantheism. But pantheists do not believe in personal immortality, and they regard some types of impersonal immortality as important on distinctively pantheistic grounds.

Robinson Jeffers suggests that what may be important to the pantheist, and regarded as "a kind of salvation," is neither the realisation of the theist's hope for personal immortality, nor the atheists' (or theists') desire to be remembered in certain ways — although the pantheist can desire this as well. Instead, what is distinctively significant is the recognition of the individual as a part of the Unity — what Jeffers calls the "one organic whole ... this one God." The "parts change and pass, or die, people and races and rocks and stars," but the whole remains. He says, "... all its parts are different expressions of the same energy, and they are all in communication with each other, influencing each other, [and are] therefore parts of one organic whole." (See, *George Sessions 1977: 481-528*). Part of what Jeffers is suggesting is that "salvation" (or immortality) it is not so much a matter of the fact of one's survival in some form; rather, "salvation" consists in the recognition of the "oneness" or Unity of everything. "[T]his whole alone is worthy of the deeper sort of love; and that there is peace, freedom, I might say a kind of salvation, in turning one's affections outward toward this one God, rather than inwards on one's self, or on humanity." This is impersonal rather than personal immortality or salvation, but it is different from the kinds of

impersonal survival discussed above. It may even be regarded as a kind of personal salvation, since Jeffers suggests that salvation can be experienced for oneself while alive — and only when alive. Such salvation resembles neither impersonal forms of immortality, nor theists' personal life after death.

13. Pantheism in Practice

Can pantheists employ traditional modes of theistic and non-theistic practice such as worship, prayer, and meditation? What form might a distinctively pantheistic type of practice take? Pantheists believe in a divine Unity. Yet, in pantheism there is no apparent community of believers organised around their common (though not identical) beliefs by an established body of religious teaching and scripture. Without these traditional constituents of religion pantheists may find themselves wanting to practice their faith-seeking to relate their actions to their beliefs — and yet wondering how to go about it. Pantheists have to ask themselves what they should do given what they believe.

Even if we are not at all clear about what pantheists should do, it may seem we are relatively clear about what they believe. However, if theorists who claim that action sometimes explains belief, or that action and belief must be understood together are right, then it follows that we do not yet know what pantheists believe. Insofar as pantheists lack a distinctive practice, they may be taken not to believe anything (pantheistically) at all. Such theorists claim that systems of belief and practice, if not individual beliefs and practices, are intrinsically related so as to define one another — and they develop together. Therefore, it may not be possible to keep the question of what pantheists believe distinct from the question of what they do. One need not accept such theories to believe, as a matter of commonsense, that belief and practice are connected in such a way that they cannot be adequately understood apart from one another.

In attempting to construct an account of what the contemporary pantheist should do, it would be useful to examine practices that pantheists have traditionally undertaken. But it makes no sense to suppose contemporary pantheists could replicate the representation of social relations that pantheistic rituals might be analysed as having by a symbolist account. If a pantheistic ritual symbolically represents social relations, it represents those of its own society. At any rate, the point is largely moot since the practice of pantheism has never been associated with ritual practice but with a way of life. Thus, Lao Tzu, explicitly eschewed ritual, and Spinoza thought that while ordinary religious practice, ritual etc., was a good idea for the common people since it inculcated valuable ideals, it was beside the point for him. The fact that pantheistic practice has never been associated with ritual may partly explain why pantheism has not been practiced communally in a church.

In literalist or Geertzian terms it makes sense to ask what to do, given certain beliefs, in a way it does not for a symbolist. The kinds of practice suitable to pantheism are explicable in terms of beliefs literally and symbolically understood; and especially (in Geertz's account) in terms of a world view (e.g. belief in a divine Unity) and corresponding ethos. Thus, Lao Tzu describes the *Tao* as a metaphysical reality; as natural law or system of self-regulated principles; and also as a principle, pattern and standard for human conduct. One emulates the *Tao* after discerning its manifest characteristics in the phenomenal world, and to emulate the *Tao* is to practice *Taoism*. In "Song of Myself" Whitman articulates a world view, and evokes the connected ethos he envisages. For Spinoza, examining the nature and implications of Unity (substance) in the *Ethics*, and trying to live in accord with that account, was itself a form of pantheistic practice. Similarly, in writing and living as depicted in "Song of Myself," Whitman practiced the pantheism he preached. The relationship between the thought and practice of Hegel, Plotinus, Bruno etc. is less apparent, but should be of interest to pantheists. If pantheists

find any of the various world views and 'ethos' described as consonant with their own, they may pattern their practices after those associated with such views. In having a particular pantheistic view of the nature of things, certain practices and a way of life must, to an extent, follow.

The idea of looking to religions with pantheistic practices for examples of what to do may seem promising in a literalist or Geertzian approach. Similar kinds of practice should follow similar beliefs. The difficulty is that there seem to be no pantheistic traditions to examine — not even *Taoism*, since as practiced, it is not pantheistic. In traditional religions, practices that might be identifiable as pantheistic are always seen in the context of wider religious (e.g. theistic) practice. In traditions that are partly pantheistic like some native American Indian religions, it is difficult to discern how practices relating to pantheistic beliefs can be distinguished from various kinds of god and spirit worship. Since pantheism has largely been non-communal, individual pantheists, not traditions, must be examined.

Religious practice is usually prescribed by teachings and doctrine, and informed by other beliefs widely held among the community of believers. Since there is no widely recognised body of scriptural or other religious teaching in pantheism and never has been (there is little doctrine and no church), there should be little in the way of prescribed practice. As already noted, the philosophical *Taoism* of the *Tao Te Ching* is pantheistic, but it has never been widely practiced and there is no body of ritual associated with it.

The kind of activity undertaken by a believer ideally reflects (i.e. is explainable in terms of) the way in which the religious object, and one's relation to it, is conceived. Differences in practice are the products of varying views on the nature of God and the world-set in the context of a more comprehensive world view. Since pantheistic and theistic accounts of God and the world are best regarded as mutually exclusive, it is likely that the practices of each would be dissimilar. Theistic

practice, the intent and so forth, is inappropriate for the pantheist, and *vice versa*. Pantheists will not want to practice in a way that reflects beliefs they do not hold.

If specific pantheistic practices could be identified, these might be adapted to modern pantheism. Yet, to talk of adapting practices in this way is artificial. As a whole, practice neither precedes nor follows the body of beliefs formulated and codified by a religious community. It develops along with them. Even where religious beliefs are taken (e.g. Durkheim) to be rationalisations of practices that precede them, practice occurs in a context of shared conceptions, beliefs and concerns, and are — whether literally or symbolically — expressions of these. Ritual, and religious practice generally, is a product of conscious and unconscious, literal and symbolic, communal religious reflection. Given (and one wonders why) that there has been little structured pantheistic communal reflection, despite the fact that there are many pantheists, there is no identifiable pantheistic practice. There are only identifiable pantheistic world views and beliefs. This does not explain why individual pantheists have not developed recognisable rituals, unless a community of believers (i.e. a church) is necessary for such practices. The practice of pantheism seems confined to individuals acting in ways they see as according with the nature of things.

If contemporary pantheistic ritual exists, it is scarce. (Is the solstice gathering at Stonehenge pantheistic?) The extent to which one can self-consciously set out to construct a ritual is, for reasons already given, suspect. But, given that one can consciously construct symbols that address a community's concerns, there seems no reason why pantheistic rituals cannot be formulated. Indeed, various theistic rituals are self-consciously created. Furthermore, ritual is only one aspect of religious practice, and pantheists may develop other ways to express their beliefs in action. Since belief and practice are interdependent and evolve together, if some future pantheistic communal reflection results in doctrines, then it is likely to

result in practices of various sorts as well. Other than the fact they have lacked what seems to be requisite in terms of a community of pantheists, there may be additional or alternative explanations of why pantheists have not developed rituals. Maybe the lack of community can just as easily be explained by the lack of a developed mode of practice as *vice versa*.

Pantheists basically lack scripture and an established body of doctrine and discourse that could help establish the nature of pantheistic practice. However, it this is not entirely true. The pantheist can, to some extent, rely on traditional religious scripture that is recognisably pantheistic; for example, some *taoist* texts, and some Western and non-Western theistic scripture. Pantheists also have recourse to numerous philosophical sources — Spinoza etc. But, the pantheist is not without alternatives to the scripture and discourse theists have at their disposal. To some extent, the pantheist too will know what to do to practice pantheism. Art, music, literature and poetry, fulfil the same kinds of roles in pantheism as they do in theism. As representations of cultural patterns they reflect and sustain a world view and ethos. In Geertz's (1973: 93) terms they symbolically function as both a model *of* reality and a model *for* reality. "Culture patterns are 'models' ... they are sets of symbols whose relations to one another 'model' relations among entities, processes or what-have-you ... they give meaning, that is objective conceptual form, to social and psychological reality both by shaping themselves to it and by shaping it to themselves." Pantheists recognise cultural patterns and symbolic representations that "model" their beliefs. Given such beliefs, and the efficacy of symbolic representations of those beliefs; certain other beliefs, actions, and attitudes will be regarded, cognitively and affectively, as appropriate and correct.

In theistic traditions, prayer — which is a type of worship — and sometimes meditation, are the principle forms of religious practice. They are often set in the context of ritual. Theism gives a

variety of reasons why prayer and worship are appropriate and necessary forms of theistic practice. But, what about for the pantheist? In principle, pantheists will not do things that literally conflict with the beliefs they express. They will not worship if worship implies the recognition of an independent and superior god, since this theistic belief is antithetical to a central tenet of pantheism. Are prayer and worship appropriate kinds of practice for the pantheist? Given that the pantheist should not pray to or worship a theistic God, can she worship the pantheistic Unity?

14. Worship and Prayer

Worship and prayer are not suitable to pantheism. It has often been claimed by theists and atheists that pantheistic worship (e.g. worshipping the Unity) is idolatrous. It is worshipping a false god. Unlike the theist or atheist, however, the pantheist believes a divine Unity exists — a kind of god. So pantheists, if they do worship the Unity, reject the idea that they are worshipping a false god. What is wrong with pantheistic worship is not that it is idolatrous, but something more basic having to do with both the nature of worship and Unity. Even if the Unity exists, worshipping it would not be proper pantheistic practice.

Pantheistic worship might naively be thought to be a kind of self-worship; worshipping something of which one is a part or identified with. This too is a mistake. As we have seen, pantheism is not the view that "everything that exists," including oneself, is god; and it is not the view that every particular thing or person is equally god. If worship is not acceptable religious practice for pantheists, it is for reasons other than that such practice involves adoring and venerating (i.e. worshipping) oneself. Worship and prayer are not consonant with pantheism. Like "evil" and "salvation," they are connected to the theistic world-view that pantheists reject. Therefore, except in a highly derivative sense (i.e., derivative from theism) worship and prayer are types of practice that are not acceptable to pantheists.

Devotion to the universe, artistic expression, nature observation, etc., are not types of worship as theistically understood — though they may be ways of respecting, honouring, and revering.

What makes worship and prayer inappropriate for the pantheist is not the lack of ontological separation from the Unity that theism claims God has from the world. If there is a sense in which pantheists are ontologically, or in other ways, distinct from the divine Unity, worship and prayer are still inappropriate. If a necessary condition of worship is that it has to be in some significant sense "other regarding," then worship would not on that account be inappropriate to pantheism. What makes it unsuitable is that worship, and especially prayer, are basically directed at "persons" — or at a being with personal characteristics separate and superior to oneself. Whether one's reasons for worship are petitionary or devotional is irrelevant; and so is one's motivation — whether a Freudian way of coping with guilt, or a rationally-based sense of duty. Objects of worship are not oneself, and perhaps not even ontologically distinct from oneself as theism claims, but they are generally taken to be conscious, personal and superior.

Given the nature and goal of worship objects of worship must have a personal character. It might be thought that showing the pantheistic Unity should not, on conceptual grounds, be worshipped is rather uninteresting. That may be right. The implications of this result, however, are anything but insignificant. For the pantheist, the practical consequences of worship and prayer being unavailable as forms of religious practice are enormous.

In the theistic view, worship and prayer are practically synonymous with religious practice. And, even in (theoretically) non-theistic religious traditions such as Buddhism and Taoism, worship and prayer are frequent if not prevalent. Yet, the pantheist is faced with the problem of finding a way to practice pantheism that is consistent with the finding that worship and prayer make sense

only in a theistic context. As a result, one of the defining and most noticeable characteristics of pantheism will be the type of practice it takes up. The practices involved, whatever they are, will be different not only from those in theistic traditions, but also from those in non-theistic ones in which theistic practice is so much a part.

15. Goal: Relationship or State?

Do pantheists seek a relationship with the impersonal Unity rather than a "state"? The choices of the religious objective for the pantheist are either a relationship with the Unity or a state of some kind. The kind of religious practice pantheism (like theism) engenders is a function of the kind of goal sought. What then is the religious objective of pantheism? If there were no such objective to pursue through practice, the question of how to practice pantheism becomes superfluous. That there is a goal to pursue is intrinsic to the nature of religion.

In pantheistic systems such as Spinoza's or philosophical Taoism, the objective is best described as a state rather than a relation. However, just as theism correctly claims that although the principle goal of theistic practice is a relation to God, this also involves a "state of the individual"; so the pantheist claims that although pantheistic practice is principally concerned with a "state of an individual," a crucial and intrinsic aspect of this state is one's relation to the divine Unity. However, granted that a dichotomy between the objective as "relationship" or "state" is not firm; the principal form of practice — contemplative and meditative on the one hand, or worship on the other — follows from the objective emphasised. In theism it is on a personal relationship to God. In pantheism, the emphasis is on an individual state resulting from an understanding of, and a right relation to, the Unity. Practice will be contemplative and meditative rather than devotional. As in the case of theism, pantheistic practices — like the beliefs they are related to — are meant to have practical

consequences both in terms of what one does, and more generally, the way one lives.

The question, of course, is how the pantheist is to arrive at "the right relation" to the Unity thereby achieving their objective. Answering this is the principal focus of both Spinoza's *Ethics*, the *Tao Te Ching* and most other pantheistic literature (e.g. Whitman's "Song of Myself"). What one actually does depends partly on the individual (i.e. Spinoza is no Whitman), and also on the particulars of the state sought. Since the pantheistic conception(s) of reality is ultimately very different from, for example, that of the Theravada Buddhist, there is no reason to suppose the pantheistic objective to be like *nirvana*. The pantheist's relation to the divine Unity does not entail the obliteration of self or liberation that a Buddhist's identification with Brahman does; nor is it like the theistic mystic's union with God. There may be aspects of the state pantheists seek that are similar to Buddhist goals, and even to theistic ones — though to a far lesser extent. But, even if the pantheist's objective is as different from what the Buddhist seeks as it is from what the theist seeks, the means for achieving it remain contemplative or meditative, rather than devotional.

For Spinoza, acquiring the happiness described in the *Ethics* is largely an intellectual achievement. It is difficult to see how one can attain the understanding and identification with "God" that Spinoza claims leads to peace of mind and "blessedness" (i.e., the highest achievement of the individual) without addressing the problem discursively rather than affectively by intuition and meditation — although discursive thinking and these other methods are by no means inconsistent. But even though Spinoza's approach involves little that is not discursive; it is contemplative, and the objective remains primarily a state rather than relation. Worship is not a mode of practice conducive to achieving the state Spinoza seeks. Granted that Spinoza's method is intellectualistic; other approaches are possible — especially where the objective itself is

conceived of differently (i.e. less intellectualistic). Spinoza of course recognises that his own method is not suited to most people and acknowledges that ordinary practice such as worship and prayer may at times engender ends he describes. Just as theists use various methods to pursue their objective — some more intellectualistic than others — so in pantheism certain kinds of practices are suited to certain kinds of people. As in other religions, the means by which pantheists pursue their objectives are generally not overtly or overly intellectualised. To do so can undermine practice by upsetting the balance between the affective and intellectual aspects of their belief system.

The pantheist is likely to view the kinds of goals that most religious traditions envision as excessive and grandiose — as neither believable nor desirable. What is more, although they are not humanists, like humanists pantheists are likely to view those objectives and related beliefs much as theistic traditions viewed those of "primitive religions" and of each other: as superstitiously anthropocentric and so capable of being naturalistically explained. The state sought by the pantheist supervenes (as in Taoism) on establishing the right relation with the Unity by means of cultivating a life suited to the nature of the Unity and of oneself. But for the pantheist this is a goal in itself, a this-worldly happiness. The pantheist eschews a notion of their being further goals; for example, the theist's beatific vision; personal immortality; *nirvana*; and even Spinoza's "blessedness," interpreted as something other-worldly.

The pantheist's happiness is nevertheless a special "state" that is difficult to achieve. Being a kind of utopian ideal it too is perhaps grandiose. Ordinary happiness is part of it but should not be conflated with the kind of thoroughgoing happiness the pantheist thinks it is possible to attain now and again. Much as Kierkegaard denied that "truth," "subjectivity" and even "immortality" are attainable once and for all, the pantheist denies their objective is a once and for

all achievement. It is a state of well-being that involves a sustained peace of mind and the kind of happiness that comes from, or is identical with, such a state of mind. Since one's own state of mind and relation to the all-inclusive Unity are partly dependent upon other people and things, the state the pantheist seeks is not something achievable in isolation. Pantheism involves a this-worldly utopian vision based on individual's relations to, and identification with, the Unity.

"Nature" — which appears to be equated with the "Great Outdoors" — has pride of place in a pantheistic world view and ethos. It is assumed that pantheists are nature lovers, if not nature mystics. This view of pantheists as naturalists and rural outdoor people as opposed to city dwellers, is common. A reason for the pantheist's stress on Nature is that anthropocentrism is seen as incompatible with a proper recognition of Unity. It is seen as undermining the cosmocentric perspective required by pantheistic ethics, and a pantheistic way of life; as antithetical to the pantheist world view and ethos. Involvement in nature de-emphasises the anthropocentrism pantheism believes endemic to theism and detrimental to well-being and Unity.

This characterisation of pantheists as loving nature and as having to establish a relationship to things natural is what principally informs vague views as to how pantheism is to be practiced — especially among contemporary pantheists. Practice becomes an expression of a love of nature — usually by "communing" with it. It is no wonder pantheism is often regarded as little more than a type of nature mysticism. But for the pantheist, "love" of nature is expressed primarily in ethical rather than in mystical or quasi-mystical terms. Pantheistic ethics focuses on how to live and on the individual's relation to the natural order — an order of which others are a part. One's own well-being and that of others depends on it. Since nature is taken as intrinsically valuable, and because relating appropriately to nature presupposes its preservation and protection; nature in general and environmental issues in

particular, are important to the pantheist. Like many others, pantheists see their well-being as intrinsically connected to the wider environment as well as to things more immediate (e.g. employment).

Is the urban person at a *religious* disadvantage from a pantheistic perspective? Without denying the significance Nature has for the pantheist (e.g., as a standard of behaviour, and as an object of meditation conducive to a "right" state of mind), is there reason to believe a pantheist who prefers an urban to a pastoral setting, and who likes technology, is risking spiritual depravity? Does the pantheist have a duty to spend time in natural settings if they prefer the city? Technology is associated with the Urban, and the pantheist may see much of it, or too much of it, as inimical to Unity and well-being. Technology is devalued when it is taken as undermining the kinds of value pantheism seeks to promote. Technology (people using it) despoils the environment. At any rate, since the world is increasingly urban, for pantheism to be viable it will have to be possible to practice it in cities.

A person who prefers city street life may claim there is a bias towards the non-human in a pantheist's exclusive insistence on Nature. Why cannot cities — themselves "natural" in a way — also be conducive to the practice of pantheism? Perhaps cities could be if they and many of their people were not as neglected and abused as much as some wilderness areas (if the comparison makes any sense). "God's country" for the pantheist denotes urban as well as pastoral settings — indeed it extends to the suburbs. Given the existence of a divine Unity one should not regard all personal preferences (e.g., for a garden), as cosmically endorsed. If the goal of pantheism is a way of life and a kind of "state," then any locale that is generally conducive to promoting those goals is acceptable. This may have more to do with the kind of urban or rural setting one lives in rather than just whether the setting is urban or rural.

In terms of its practice, one of the striking things about pantheism is that it has not produced a church or any kind of organisation engaged in overseeing its practice. Apparently a community of pantheists is not necessary for the practice of pantheism. Either this is an historical accident, or it has to do with structural features of pantheism. Pantheists, like many theists, tend to regard Churches and religious leaders with suspicion. The kind of orientation that the pantheist seeks vis a vis the Unity is not taken to be something a church can facilitate. The mediation churches provide is seen as superfluous or harmful — just as it has been by many mystics. Organised religions are seen as divisive and exclusivist, and churches perhaps are seen as essentially anthropocentric. It is for these kinds of reasons that there never has been a pantheistic church and probably never will be.

Pantheism remains a fertile subject for natural theology. Natural theologians have hardly approached it. Pantheism should be of interest to those in the philosophy of religion who seek a way out of the constrictions (often institutional ones) put upon them by working within the confines of classical theism; especially as the issues relating to classical theism have been taken up by the contemporary christian conservative analytic philosophers of religion. Perhaps pantheism will be of most interest to those who do not believe in a theistic God, yet are concerned with many of the traditional questions that natural theologians have always asked, and that religious traditions necessarily address.

Pantheism's lack of "success" in worldly terms on the religion market may have to do with the fact that it is antithetical to any power structure; the kind, for example, found in the Catholic church. If so, then even though pantheism may be more profoundly religious than institutionalised religions, it may be doomed to ineffectiveness because it cannot manipulate power — it cannot "play the game." Wielding various kinds of power has been a feature of religion from its most "primitive" to its most sophisticated levels — a

feature churches can generally not control. Pantheism negates the power struggle through its emphasis on Unity. It refuses to see religion in political and hierarchical terms. Pantheism is the religion that tries most completely to escape the limitations created by anthropocentric models of religion that create god in man's image.

16. Whither Pantheism

As stated, the definition of pantheism in this entry maintains that pantheism involves, if not entails, the denial of the two key claims of theism: (i) that god is a "person," and (ii) that god is ontologically distinct from, and transcendent to all else that exists. As such, critics (Baltzly 2003) may seek to show that there are versions of pantheism or something like it (panentheism perhaps), in which one or both of these two conditions are not met. This definition, however, is not meant to be an analytical truth, but to capture what is crucial to pantheism if it is to be a genuine religious alternative to theism (Levine, 1994:1-143) — one that makes a practical difference and a difference in practice. That is why pantheism is and historically has been of interest; because it offers the possibility or promise of a genuine religious alternative to theism. Where the two significant aspects of theism are present that pantheism allegedly denies, religious practice (worship, prayer etc) will be dictated by these theistic components rather than by any pantheistic ones. Thus, it is wrong to suggest that this definition — even if it is mistaken — is analytic or merely stipulative. Instead, it is meant to capture what is crucial to pantheism as an alternative to theism. Pantheism is to be distinguished from panentheism in much the same way and for the same basic reason.

Thus, in his challenging and provocative essay Dirk Baltzly (2003:4) may be missing the context and hence the point of the above definition when he says:

The way the Stoics regard god is inconsistent with, say, Spinoza's treatment of god. But to

suppose that this means the Stoics are not pantheists is to make Spinoza not merely a highly visible *representative* of pantheism. but rather *paradigmatic* of pantheism. Everyone is entitled to use terms like 'pantheism' as he sees fit, but I think that being too narrow about what counts as a pantheist view probably invests the concept with more precision than it has historically had. If, however, you consult your intuitions about the necessary and sufficient conditions for '*x* is a pantheist view' and find that these intuitions rule out candidates that involve providence or a personal god, then read this paper as an essay on something *a bit like pantheism* in Stoic philosophy. Perhaps you would prefer to label it 'pantheistic'. I won't mind: I'll just envy you your finely articulated intuitions on what counts as pantheism.

The issue of definition, of course, is not meant to deny that "Everyone is entitled to use terms like 'pantheism' as he sees fit," nor does it concern the preciseness of one's "intuitions" as to what pantheism is. It is meant to capture something of the essential difference between pantheism on the one hand, and panentheism or theism on the other — when viewed as a religious/philosophical alternative to theism.

The definition is normative to a degree, but in way that that is meant to do justice, conceptually and historically, to various versions of pantheism. It is meant to be indicative of why Spinoza's view is, religiously and philosophically speaking, paradigmatic of pantheism *per se* in important ways, while also being representative of it. (It is probably not paradigmatic in denying freewill.) Arguments that there are undeniably elements of pantheism in Stoic philosophy alongside theistic ones need not deny any of this. Note too that elements of the Stoic philosophy (founded by Zeno of Citium c.300 BC) that Baltzly (2003) argues are pantheistic or imply pantheism, as well as those that imply theism, are themselves contested — by the Stoics themselves as well as by interpreters. They may not be as problematic or opaque as some the earliest pre-Socratics like

Thales (c.585 BC) or Anaximander (c.610–after 546 BC), but interpreting the metaphysics in these texts is not straightforward. There is no received view of some of the elements requisite to regarding Stoics as both pantheists and theists.

Baltzly's (2003) interpretation of the Stoics as both pantheists and theists arguably runs into less difficulty in terms of the claim that the Stoics see all that exists as a divine Unity, than it does with the claim that they also see it theistically, as a personal god — and associated with, for example, notions of divine providence, agency, immutability, intelligence and rationality. Baltzly's general strategy here is to claim that such issues are no more problematic for Stoic theism than for theism generally. They are, however, no less problematic either. If, for example, any acceptable — let alone plausible — theism must deny God's impassibility or immutability, as arguably it must, then the fact that Stoic theism is committed to such a view about the nature of God renders it problematic. And if the Stoic view of God is unacceptably problematic or no part of the theist's understanding of God, then it may be preferable to deny that they are theists — where ordinarily a theistic god is not taken to be impassable or immutable. Since the Stoics were also polytheists, and theism as contrasted with pantheism generally maintains a single god ontologically distinct from the world, the idea that the Stoics were theistic in the relevant sense may be further questioned. Polytheism may not be compatible with theism as used in the context of distinguishing pantheism from theism. Additionally, to assert (Baltzly 2003:15) that "far from being congenial to a deep ecology ethic that locates divinity and thus value in nature, Stoic pantheism is breath-takingly anthropocentric" seemingly on the basis of a single quotation (Cicero) is problematic. Seeing moral virtue as the only good (Baltzly 2003: 15) and as residing in persons may or may not be antithetical to a deep ecology that sees living in accordance with nature as necessary for well-being and happiness (cf. Baltzly 2003: 17). More significantly however, it is not uncongenial with the pantheistic identification

with, and attitudes towards, nature, and with seeing one's own well-being as irreducibly bound with nature. What it is incompatible with is an anthropocentrism that ignores or deprecates the connection between nature and human flourishing.

Additionally, it is important when discussing pantheism in relation to theism, to re-examine but not to reinvent a well worn wheel. Charles Hartshorne (1953), as a proponent of dipolar theism or panentheism made it a good part of his life's work to show that theism has pantheistic elements in it and that philosophical systems that are primarily pantheistic also have theistic elements in them — and he discusses the Stoics in various places. Consider, for example, Anselm who says "For nothing contains thee, but thou containest all" (cf. *Proslogion*, chapter XIX XX). Paul says "we live and move and have our being" in God (Acts 17:28). Cf., Jeremiah (23:24) "Do I not fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord." Aquinas says "... spiritual things contain the things in which they are; as the soul contains the body. So, too, God is in things as containing them. Nevertheless ... it is said that all things are in God inasmuch as they are contained by Him" (*Summa Theologiae*, Vol. I, q. 8, a.1, reply objection 2). It seems undeniable, though it usually is denied, that pantheism is intimated in these quotations.

Analogies can be misleading but may nevertheless be useful in considering the definition of pantheism. Buddhism (as well as philosophical Taoism) is generally and rightly considered to be non-theistic and/or atheistic. (Taoism is arguably pantheistic.) However, in terms of religious practice — in certain sects and types of Buddhism (and Taoism), not only are certain deities worshipped, invoked, etc as well as mediated upon, but theistic practices may be present in other ways as well. Does this make Buddhism or philosophical Taoism theistic or polytheistic? Perhaps, the easiest way to answer this question is to draw the distinction between philosophy and practice, and to deny and even consider it unreasonable or naive, to expect that

they would or should completely coincide or accurately reflect one another. Buddhism is properly regarded as non-theistic because of its basic philosophical, religious tenets — its fundamental understanding of reality — and various theistically oriented religious practices need not be taken as undermining Buddhism's non-theistic (atheistic) stance.

Blatzly's (2003) advances the discussion on pantheism, but it is a rare exception. (See also Steinhart (2004) for a discussion of "sophisticated contemporary pantheisms" in terms of contemporary ontology.) The principal reason there has been relatively little advance in examining pantheism philosophically is at least twofold. First, contemporary analytic philosophy of religion remains dominated not merely by theism but by peculiarly fundamentalist Christian approaches to theism. Plantinga's and Wolterstorff's (1983) ("basic belief"); Wolterstorff's (1995) (divine discourse); and Alston's (1991) epistemology of religious belief are examples, but so too are the creationist doctrines of Haldane (Smart and Haldane, 1996) and Van Inwagen (1995). While there is currently debate about whether creationism should be taught alongside evolution in public schools, the fact that creationist doctrine is argued for by mainstream Christian analytic philosophers of religion (as above) goes largely unnoticed or remarked upon (cf. Levine: 1998; 1999; 2000). There is little room or interest in non-fundamentalist, theologically progressive, notions of deity in this milieu — let alone pantheism. There are only two twentieth century bibliographical references in the entry on pantheism in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Version 1.0 (Yandell 1998), where the primary focus is an exposition of Spinoza's pantheism.

Secondly, while non-western and comparative approaches to philosophy of religion — the other arena in which pantheism is likely to be discussed, is no longer as concerned with an rapprochement to western theism as it once was (its *raison d'être* since the 1950s), its agenda

remains largely religious. Philosophers working in Buddhist and other traditions are engaged in first-order philosophical speculation, analytic expositions, and philosophical/religious reconstructions of their own. As with the case of Christian contemporary analytic philosophy of religion, much of this is religiously motivated for religious ends — to prove for example, that aspects of Buddhist doctrine are true and correct. If the philosophical investigation of pantheism as the denial of theism — that is, as the denial of a personal and ontologically transcendent deity — is to advance, it will have to theoretically and practically distance itself from the philosophy of religion, Western and Eastern, in which revealed religion, rather than natural theology (Human natural theology), informs the structure and nature of enquiry.

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