

## Response to My Critics

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It is a rare privilege to have two such outstanding interlocutors with whom to discuss issues pertinent to my own way of seeing things. In what follows I will deal with each in turn and make some final comments on common themes.

Robert Neville has isolated four themes that he feels show some weaknesses or at least incompletions in my philosophical perspective. As always, he goes to the heart of the matter and compels me to think hard about the foundations. To recapitulate, he puts forward four critiques: 1) that I take otherwise useful categories from dynamic psychoanalysis and apply them to those dimensions of nature that antedate the human process, 2) that the use of the self-designation of “ecstatic naturalism” forces me to defend a type of philosophy that is not really a distinct philosophy at all but rather a cluster of oft-times competing perspectives under an alleged common genus, 3) that there is no solution to the traditional problem of the one and the many thus brooking unintelligibility around the issue of mutual relevance within the domains of *nature natures*, and 4) there is no real semiotics of culture, read as religious culture, that would realistically transfigure the kinds of religious symbols that people actually use, for example, the concept/experience of the Atonement.

I have indeed been accused of trying to “psychoanalyze nature” as if I could put the innumerable extra-human orders of the world on the analytic couch of ecstatic naturalism and find deep undercurrents in the hills, stars, oceans, lakes, and trees (all potential sacred folds). To attempt to do so is to risk the charge of anthropomorphism and to simply transfer regnant traits of the human unconscious onto where there is no real difference between the conscious and unconscious. Why, so the argument goes, would you want to project complexes, archetypes, transferences and counter transferences, unconscious developmental teleology, and a kind of brooding self-reticence on those orders that surround and even mock us?

Put this way it does seem like a major category mistake to talk of the unconscious or underconscious of *nature natures*—as located in and as *nature naturing* (nature creating itself out of itself alone). But suppose we put the evolutionary argument upside down. In this

inversion we can say that the human process, emergent from millions of years of rather brutal evolutionary ramifications, is a cumulative (relative) end product of a process of *involution* in which a nascent, yet always antecedent, process of self-othering, but not yet conscious momentum, envelops the human on all sides. The depth of the unconscious of nature makes possible the depth of the human unconscious, not the other way around. Involution reinserts consciousness and its unconscious compensatory shadow into the one and only nature that is an ejection from something only darkly related to *nature natures*. For us, for the fractured *anthropos*, our unconscious is the nonlocated location for the full eruption of *nature natures* qua nature's unconscious.

Hence we can perhaps, echoing Schleiermacher, speak of an anthropomorphism of a higher order, one based on the continuity of the natural and human unconscious, but not an anthropomorphism that requires the anthropic principle to sustain its categorical structure. Nature may or may not have been "designed" with us in mind but it is the eternal seed bed of both our infinite unconscious and our finite consciousness. We have an unconscious because nature has an unconscious and we quicken those potencies of *nature natures* that bring both fire and structure to all that we contrive, say, and do.

The reflections are directly pertinent to the second critique. Here I find myself very much in agreement with Neville and find his statement of the problem very helpful. It is certainly the case that I have tried long and hard to carve out a place where naturalism could be opened to its religious depth. In the process more materialistically inclined naturalists find themselves sailing into alien waters and argue that I am not a naturalist at all but am trying to bring in a Trojan horse into the citadel of a rather complacent materialism with its almost exclusive commitment to efficient causality. On the other side of the fence religious thinkers wonder what happened to the divine creator who, in Neville's sense, creates both itself and the cosmos in a special act. Ecstatic naturalism thus turns out to be neither fish nor fowl, but perhaps a strange amphibian creature that lives underwater too much of the time to do anyone any good.

Neville wants to propose two terms for designating my perspective; namely, that of aesthetic naturalism and that of nature romanticism. I feel comfortable with both terms but for different reasons. Of late I have found myself returning again to Plotinus who

figured out that beauty was one of the direct epiphanies of the One. His understanding of the unfolding of the One and the archetypically rich *Nous* (which is the first enfolded unfolding) remains, so I would argue, one of the great achievements of Western thought. I commend Plotinus for his sense of involution (the dialectic of the perennially unfolded and enfolded) and for his breathtaking combination of mysticism with the strenuousness of the concept. I would hesitate to label his perspective for the same reason that I am now more hesitant to designate my own—it would produce closure and stunt the growth of potential interlocutors. Be that as it may, to call my perspective a form of aesthetic naturalism is helpful in sketching some of my discriminanda. And being labeled as a nature romantic is a way of honoring the potencies that surge forth out of the bosom of *nature naturing*. Whitehead gives high marks to the British Romantic poets while I find the realm of the plastic arts more congenial. If I were now to come up with a tentative label for my perspective it might be something like “Deep Pantheism.” But Neville is right. It is best to leave such tasks to others.

The problem of the one and the many is either a Big Problem at the heart of any generic portrayal of the *way* of things or it is one that can be better addressed in a more tactical way. I propose two solutions to this real or alleged problem. The first is that in the domains of *nature natured* there are innumerable forms of the one and of the many. Each order of relevance can be seen to belong to some kind of unifying structure and as such has “solved” the problem of the one in a more humble manner (if I may put it this way). So I suggest that there is no need for a mega-One in the innumerable orders of nature, but an indefinite number of somewhat mobile *ones* that do all of the work that needs to be done for the world to cohere as a realm/realms of mutual forms of relevance. God does not need to be behind the *ones* of *nature natured*—it is as if they do their own work balancing the one and the many without outside help.

However, on a second level Neville and I come closer to agreement. For many years I have been persuaded that *nature naturing* was a self-othering realm of radical heterogeneity and that its depths are so mysterious that it cannot be understood to have anything like a homogenous and knowable One. But recently I have been more and more compelled to see that there is something even deeper down than *nature naturing* or the unconscious of nature and this “deeper down” is remarkably like what Plotinus meant by the One. Beneath radical

heterogeneity is a homogeneity that is perhaps best characterized by the Vedanta formula of *sat chit ananda* (being, consciousness, and bliss). However, this is a One that doesn't *do* anything within the orders of *nature natured*. It is only by becoming permeable to the One on the nether side of creation that the human process is transfigured. This One solves no philosophical problems. Echoing Wittgenstein I would say that the whole point is to let go of the idea that the one and the many is a problem that needs to be dealt with before a categorical array is shown to be adequate to nature in its twin modalities of *nature naturing* and *nature natured*.

Finally, there is the issue of cultural semiotics. Here I think that my perspective does show a bit of austerity, perhaps reminiscent of Karl Jaspers's devolution of religious language into that of the ciphers of Transcendence in the momentum where *Existenz* (depth Self) faces the Encompassing. Perhaps the issue is one of temperament (as described by William James in his Pragmatism lectures). My temperament compels me to focus on the forms of closure found in all of our tribal religious symbols and this tribalism is something that my perspective hopes to see undermined. But further than this, I am concerned with unfolding a true world theology that uses symbols (as tied to sacred folds) as ciphers of the Plotinian One rather than markers of a special sacred history, founder, text-of-texts, or eschatological and apocalyptic delusions. I believe that the three Western monotheisms are growing toward a self-transcending state, but I also believe that this process make take several centuries. However, to give the devil his due, it is possible within the current resources of Deep Pantheism to revivify the regnant symbols of Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. By further extension, Confucianism, Daoism, Hinduism, and Buddhism can find some congenial aspects in my perspective. Lest this sound like hubris I hasten to add that that is only because their own symbols have been a goad to my categorial work.

Symbols become generic, that is, nontribal, when they become luminous manifestations of the archetypes of *Nous*. The archetypes themselves are prior to the domains of *nature natured* and are, and here Neville and I partly agree, part of the self-shaping of the One that takes place before the eruption of temporality from out of the pretemporal. But what does this mean in practice? If I think of the concept of the Atonement I am reminded of how Josiah Royce envisioned it; namely, as a loyal act that helps heal the beloved community after a traitorous

deed, thus making the community stronger than it was before the destructive deed took place. I find this a partly congenial notion. If we keep the concept of Atonement alive then I suggest that it be understood to refer to an act that shakes the merely natural community out of its tribal slumber and opens it to the sheer prevalence of the beauty of the archetypes. In this process the natural and tribal community atones for its nongeneric imposition of narrowly circumscribed meanings and allows for its nascent heart, the community of interpreters, to emerge more fully into the light of the One.

There is a bit of humility in this process. My job as a philosopher is not to tamper with any given set of tribal images but to provide the broadest categorial clearing I know how to construct such that it can help tribal images to suffer shipwreck on the way to a more capacious and nonviolent horizon of meaning.

Charley Hardwick has written a deeply argued paper that covers many of my publications and shows an amazing breadth combined with a sharply delineated focus. While finding much that is commensurate in our respective foundational perspectives he also finds something problematic in the heart of my foundations; namely, around the key issue of whether the category of *natura naturans* does any necessary work, or indeed, any work at all that might not be done better by other categories, thereby avoiding invoking this ever elusive reality.

Intuitively I agree with him that there is something special about the validation conditions for *nature naturing*. There is little that is problematic around the issues of the constituent traits of *nature natured*, but the depth dimension of nature seems to lie on the other side of anything that metaphysics can legitimately say about it. Indeed, it is not clear that it is an "it" at all, given the strictures of my quarantine on special talk about *natura naturans*. Clearly we cannot probe into some kind of clear and distinct whatness for *nature naturing*. But does that end the matter? The ontological difference is unlike any other kind of difference within the one nature that is. It has two relata that are different in kind, one constituted by innumerable orders of relevance (and nonrelevance) with the other constituted by these mysterious "things" called, following Schelling, *potencies*. In talking about *nature naturing* we are also talking about preordinal potencies that have an absolutely unique form of prevalence.

Formally I think that all talk about the underconscious of nature is in the unusually difficult (and rich) position of being caught between two primal strategies in metaphysics. On the one hand any formal analysis of the ubiquity of *natura naturans* involves a Kantian style transcendental argument in which one goes, in fear and trembling, from the conditions that are observed to the necessary and perhaps sufficient conditions in the unobserved making the observed possible. On the other hand there are, so I would argue, phenomenological components in the various descriptions of the way of *nature naturing*. But the form of phenomenology involved in the evocation of *nature naturing* is different in kind from transcendental or even hermeneutic/existential phenomenology. Neither Husserl nor Heidegger, not to mention Sartre, were able to enter into the back-draft of the innumerable potencies of *nature naturing*. I use the phrase “back-draft” to denote, or at least connote, the wayward momenta of the vibrating open spaces left when given potencies silently return to their heterogeneous source and seemingly abandon the orders with which they are implicated.

Some transcendental strategies are better than others. Jung’s are more successful than Kant’s because they have the advantage of being pragmatic and evolutionary in implication and functioning. If Kant gives us a Euclidian space of all spaces that is too rigid for the actual woof and warp of spatial reality, then Jung gives us more direct access to the how of archetypal intrusion into the human process. His perspective shares this feature with mine; namely, that we both sense that there is something in our encounter with nature that cannot be exhausted with what is observed, either actually or potentially. But in what sense are the potencies objects of experience? Hardwick rightly observes that, for me at least, *nature naturing* and “its” constituents can only be caught out of the corner of the hermeneutic eye, a process I liken to seeing M31 (the Andromeda galaxy) from the side of the eye where the relevant rods and cones are thicker. How does this play itself out in our encounters within the experience that ranges across the orders of *nature natured*?

We have one of two *relata* that is known in fairly direct ways—*nature natured*. The other *relatum* is shrouded in mist, a mist seemingly of its own (not our) making. There are, however, relational traits that connect the unknown with the known, in particular the traits of potentiating depth dimensions that are rooted in the archetypes. We can see what a potency does if not see the doer. And, I argue, nothing

within the orders of *nature natures* can do this instantiating of archetypes. The archetypes of the underconscious of nature are the necessary gathering points for the potencies in the time process—moving from the pretemporal to the entropic arrow of thermodynamic time to the posttemporal and the return of the One from its mysterious self-splintering. The relation between the known and hidden relata is one of ejective gathering of the not yet archetypal into the archetypal (Plotinus's *Nous* as the home of the archetypes of self sustaining nature). The tremulous power of the archetypes leaves a back-draft in their wake that pulls phenomenological reflection down into the resonance of the receding potency that has left its gift of the archetypes and moves back in on itself. It is as if we see something momentous sinking below the waves that mark the surface of *nature natures*.

Finite human experience encounters the sheer self-othering infinitude of the potencies in its ongoing wrestling match with the archetypes emergent from *nature naturing*. The question of the necessity of a theory of *natura naturans* within an otherwise self standing naturalism is translated into a question concerning whether or not there are grounds that ground in a different way. There is no principle of sufficient reason bridging the abyss between *nature naturing* and *nature natures* any more than there is a direct analogical bridge. *Via negativa* is one touch stone for this ontological abyss but by no means the only one. There is a kind of phenomenology of lack that rides precariously within the cleft of the ontological difference. It is a phenomenology that only uses the most innocent of transcendental arguments. For the relational lack, tied to a deep fecundity, is available to phenomenological description, precisely as it encounters the often abrupt infolding of the potency. In commensurate language, the potency unfolds from the heart of nature naturing to enfold itself around the nonarchetypal to, in turn, infold back in on itself as it becomes post-relational. I argue that this process is not only available to circumspect phenomenological insight but that we cannot explain the most generic and powerful traits of *nature natures* without it.

Hardwick is also right that my concept of salvation has changed over time. Initially I was committed to the grand liberal synthesis running from Schleiermacher to Tillich, with a strong component of existentialism. This was modified by an equally strong commitment to the creation of communities of interpretation as they fitfully emerge out of more inert natural communities. Natural communities are primarily

concerned with preserving antecedent signs of origin and tribe than with ramifying new interpretants that can bring the community closer to justice in time. Communities of interpretation are more fragile and precarious than the more enveloping natural communities from which they momentarily emerge. The prospects are not great for the creation of such communities.

The change in my perspective can be outwardly marked by my increased interest in the above discussed Plotinus but also in the searingly brilliant reflections of Schopenhauer. Neither thinker entertained the supremacy of historical transfiguration over nature and natural transformation. Plotinus and Schopenhauer both assert that nature is the genus of which history is a mere species. The only *kairos* available is that of the monad-like self as it is shriven of its ersatz plenitude in the fact of either the One or the Will to Life. Simply put, we each affirm that there is no salvation of history and that historical cycles are more prevalent than any consummation of history. We all reject eschatology, and certainly apocalypse, as the way of the unfolding of history.

It follows that my conception of salvation or transfiguration is tied to the monadic soul as it negotiates the pilgrimage back to the One. Schopenhauer has been misunderstood to be grounding his system on something like a Will to Live at the expense of others and has been further hampered by Nietzsche's misreading of his erstwhile mentor. The Will to Life (not "Live") is better seen as the Will to expression in the realms of genius and the higher religious epiphanies where the Will turns around and becomes pure. The genius both creates and creatively assimilates the archetypes that give depth to personal and, one would hope, communal life. Insofar as I have an ecclesiology it is that of the invisible church of genius that holds forth the depth dimension of *nature naturing* through an eternally cycling history. The way out of history is through the church of genius not though a *kairos* of the non-historical.

This latter idea seems to be in tension with my earlier Dewey-like affirmation of radical democracy. Here Schopenhauer and I part company. I am persuaded that the power of genius comes from its uncanny ability to awaken slumbering potencies in all individuals, given certain conditions of openness and self-education. And while I privilege high culture I do so with the sense that it is continuous with common experience if quickened by its own internal dynamism.



Let me reiterate my profound gratitude to Robert Neville and Charley Hardwick for their carefully crafted and wisely insightful papers on my work. I have been challenged to stand on the very edges of my perspective and to confront some difficulties and perhaps inadequacies in my way of going about things. By way of conclusion I want to say a few things about where I think my perspective is going.

I agree with Tillich that the function of one's fundamental categories is soteriological and that the whole point of being either a philosopher or a theologian is to struggle toward a personal transfiguration that can be shared by one's readers and interlocutors. I believe that there is a genuine power transaction between those monadic souls who attain openness to the One or the Will to Life and other struggling monads. This is a radical individualism but an individualism of a higher order. There is a charismatic transfer of power from a realized monad to the partially realized monads that interact with the first. When this happens a new community is born, but one that refuses to write its will across the elusive trances of history. I further believe that this process takes many life times and that we enter into the incarnate state with antecedent powers, problems, and a certain level of wisdom.

This sounds suspiciously like that kind of supernaturalism that naturalism, ecstatic or otherwise, has overcome. But I feel that the reincarnation theory to which I adhere is fully natural. The incarnate and the disincarnate states are alike part of the one nature that there is and that even with different modalities of body, time, space, and semiosis, each state has natural support conditions.

Naturalism has come a long way from its materialistic past, but it still has some surprises in store for us. Insofar as my version of Deep Pantheism, to settle on a designation for now, speaks of the life divine (to use Sri Aurobindo's phrase) it will do so in terms of pure light, a light that is the homogenous ungrounded ground for both *nature naturing* and *nature natured*. Nature has both evolved and involved. Evolution has produced realms of astonishing complexity, whether intended or not, but it has also reinserted the inner light of the life divine into evolved creatures. The neo-Hindu view of involution has absolutely nothing to do with creationism or intelligent design, views which are profoundly weak in conceptual power and scope. I can affirm with the neo-Darwinian synthesis that we are here simply

because we are here and also say that the presence of pure divine light is perennially available to the human process and is the light from which we have come—the true One behind the many of *nature natured* and the potencies of *nature naturing*.

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