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### Abstract

Though responses to the Anthropocene have largely come from the natural and social sciences, religious responses to the Anthropocene have also been gaining momentum and many scholars have been calling for a religious response to complement scientific responses to climate change. Yet because Genesis 1:28 does indeed tell human beings to “subdue the earth” monotheistic religions have often been understood as complicit in the human exceptionalism that is thought to have created the conditions for the Anthropocene. In distinction to such Biblical traditions, indigenous animistic cultures have typically respected all forms of life as “persons” and such traditions have thus become a source of inspiration for ecological movements. After discussing contemporary Christian efforts to integrate the natural sciences and the environment into their responses to the Anthropocene, this article will turn to animism and seek to evaluate the risks and benefits that could ensue from a postmodern form of animism that could provide a necessary postsecular response to the Anthropocene.

**Keywords**            Anthropocene; climate change; religion; human exceptionalism; relationality; animism.

Thanks to many recent scholarly attempts to view Western intellectual achievements as regional anthropological contributions rather than universal objective criteria, notions such as ‘nature’ and ‘culture’ have come to be understood as the product of a particular historical process and express the specific distribution of ontological properties developed and structurally maintained by Western modernity. Other civilizations have adopted different systems of distribution, resulting in ontologies and principles of association between humans and non-humans that differ widely from the one which emerged in Europe a few centuries ago. It is by understanding the natural world as somehow empty of symbolic meaning and social relations, that the Western world could dissociate it from ethical consideration, and thereby justify the destruction, extinction and depletion of the ecosystem. According to this modern separation, all entities either have objective material properties, and hence no intrinsic value, or have subjective moral properties that inhere in human beings alone. For most non-Western civilizations, and thankfully, for much contemporary natural and social science, such boundaries have become permeable and such oppositions are necessarily inter-dependent and relational. All relations are social, and hence moral, and there are no entities that stand outside of relation. Today, when human culture has finally reached the ends of the earth in what has come to be called the Anthropocene Age, this antithesis between nature and culture has lost all credibility. As Ulrich Beck succinctly puts it:

‘At the end of the twentieth century nature *is* society and society is also *'nature'*. Anyone who continues to speak of nature as non-society is speaking in terms from a different century, which no longer capture our reality’ (Beck, 1992, 81).

If such a divide was the central illusion of modernity since, in the words of Bruno Latour, ‘we have never been modern,’ such dualities nonetheless gave rise to very real effects in how modern humans have transformed economies of human labor, practices of agriculture and animal husbandry, and in consequence, the entire ecosystem. If we are to respond to anthropogenic climate change, it is important to interrogate the ideology that justified these practices and set the human animal apart from the world that sustains it. Indeed, there is a deep

irony in understanding the Anthropocene Age as the epoch when human values must be re-introduced into the non-human world, since modernity has devoted considerable energy for several centuries in evacuating all such values from the non-human world. As anthropologist Alf Hornborg aptly puts it:

"it seems ironic that calls are now being made for an "environmental ethics". The very idea indeed poses a conundrum for Cartesian objectivism. How shall we be able to reintroduce morality into our dealings with our non-human environment, now that we have invested centuries of training and discourse into convincing ourselves that Nature lies beyond the reach of moral concerns?" (Alf Hornborg, 2014: 248)

Though scientific advances have clearly shown that we are part of an evolutionary system based on interdependence and co-relation, many modern human beings continue to falsely believe that they are not animals at all but rather autonomous individuals, somehow separate from the living material planet, created and endowed with an eternal soul by a God not of this world, a God who set human beings over and against a material world to be 'subdued.' Because such an ideology found justification in monotheistic religiosity, a solution to the Anthropocene Age cannot come exclusively from science. Though science is essential in order to understand the eco-system and the functioning of its many parts, it is not enough. Religious and moral motivations, sustainable ideologies and cooperative action are also necessary.

Yet the role of religion in sustainability efforts has been controversial. For the Dalai Lama, for instance, compassion is the key, and its cultivation across different cultures the means to address the ecological and genocidal horrors of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Indeed, after the terrorist attacks in Paris in 2015, the Dalai Lama came to the conclusion that religions had utterly failed to unite people and direct them toward improving life on earth. He writes:

'Every religion persists in cultivating that which divides us, instead of uniting us around what brings us together. None has succeeded in creating a better human being, or a better world. That is why now, in 2017, I have no qualms about telling you that there is an urgent need to go beyond religion. It is possible to live without religion, but can one live without love and compassion? The answer is no' (Dalai Lama, 2017: 43).

Indeed, for many monotheists, coming to terms with the Anthropocene as a new geological age marked by the anthropogenic nature of climate change has not been easy, and has created what

theologian Sigurd Bergmann calls a ‘spiritual earthquake.’ He asks:

‘How can a human be at home on an Earth that is shaken at its foundations by humans themselves? And, how can one, in such a context, continue to believe in God as the Creator and Sustainer of all between Heaven and earth?’ (Bergman, 2017, 75-76).

If such an alliance between science, ecology and religion has proven easier for polytheistic, pantheistic and animistic religions than for monotheisms, monotheists have nonetheless taken up this challenge, and have been seeking ways to re-interpret their religious heritage, no longer in terms of medieval dogma, imperialism and patriarchy, but in harmony with both science and ecology. For climate change does not only transform the geological earth but also all of the societies that depend upon it, and the cultures and religions within these societies, such that we may ask with Bergmann, just as ‘climate change changes religion, what change might religion make?’ (Bergmann, 2010, 2010, 37).

The authors of an article entitled ‘Climate Change and Religion as Global Phenomena’ claim that religions will indeed play an essential role in the global response to climate change for the following four reasons: religious traditions “influence the worldviews or cosmologies of believers,” wield “moral authority” for many people, have “institutional and economic resources, which can be channeled into or against sustainability” and have the “potential to provide social connectivity and collective action (Veldman/Szasz/Haluza-DeLay, 2014: 309).” Both positions are justifiable, religions having caused, and continuing to cause, violence and intolerance in the world, while at the same time motivating ecological and social activism and collective moral action. This article will focus on religious traditions that are seeking to evolve in order to provide new or transformed ideologies that rather than reinforcing the nature/culture divide, can help to overcome it and replace it with a religious understanding in line with 21<sup>st</sup> century science and ecology. After outlining some of these religious responses to the Anthropocene, we will assess the contribution that different religions can provide toward sustaining a scientifically justified, inter-dependent, and monistic worldview to replace the dichotomous one of modernity. In particular, we will focus on some recent Christian attempts

to integrate science and ecology into a coherent religious response to the Anthropocene and then compare such approaches to pantheistic and animistic contributions.

### **I. Re-interpreting Stewardship: Christianity in the Anthropocene Age**

Because Genesis 1:28 does indeed tell human beings to ‘subdue the earth’ and ‘have dominion’ over ‘every living thing that moveth upon the earth,’ monotheistic religions have often been understood as complicit in the human exceptionalism that is thought to have created the conditions for the Anthropocene. Such a view was most famously exposed in Lynn White Jr.'s infamous 1967 article ‘The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis.’ In this article, White Jr. highlighted the anthropocentrism intrinsic to the biblical justification for the spoliation of nature. Though other species, such as the coral polyp, also profoundly modify their habitat, our present combustion of fossil fuels, population explosion, planless urbanism, and problems of sewage and garbage led Lynn White Jr. to claim that ‘surely no creature other than man has ever managed to foul its nest in such short order’ (White Jr., 1967: 497). Looking at the ideological presuppositions of our modern techno-scientific world, White Jr. sought to show that the technological dominance of the Western world could be traced back to medieval Catholic dogma that had justified the actions of these early moderns. In the words of White Jr., ‘No item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man’s purposes. And, although man’s body is made of clay, he is not simply part of nature: he is made in God’s image’ (White Jr., 1967: 502). Sharing God’s transcendence of nature, the human being exploits nature for its proper ends. Whereas the pagan world was animistic, which meant that trees and streams had guardian spirits that had to be consulted before chopping a tree or poisoning a river,

‘by destroying pagan animism, Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects... Despite Darwin, we are not, in our hearts, part of the natural process. We are superior to nature, contemptuous of it, willing to use it for our slightest whim... Hence we shall continue to have worsening ecologic crisis until we reject the Christian axiom that nature has no reason for existence save to serve man’ (White Jr., 1967, 502-505).

Though for White Jr. Christianity bears ‘a huge burden of guilt’ (1967: 504), he firmly believed that science and technology are not enough to solve the ecological crisis, and that religion is necessary. Though he notes that other religions, such as Buddhism, are more ecological, he felt that the West needs to build upon its own foundations, and thus calls for us to ‘rethink our old one’ (1967: 506). Calling for humility instead of hubris, he turned to Saint Francis of Assisi, as the patron saint for ecologists. Celebrating a form of panpsychism wherein all animals are equally God's creatures, Professor White Jr. calls for a revolution from within Christianity, in the hopes that Saint Francis' example could overcome Christianity's anthropocentrism and provide an adequate ecological response.

In his 2015 *Laudato Si'* Encyclical, Pope Francis responded to Lynn White Jr.'s influential essay and did his best to enact just such an internal revolution in order to rehabilitate the ecological contribution of the Christian tradition. Though Pope Francis admits that Christians have sometimes erred in their scriptural interpretations, the sanctioned interpretation of Scripture should focus not on dominion over nature but on stewardship of nature (Gen 2,15), where ‘to steward’ means ‘to protect, care for, preserve, conserve, watch over. This implies a relationship of reciprocal responsibility between human beings and nature’ (Pope Francis, 2015: 77). And Pope Francis follows Lynn White Jr. in turning to his namesake Saint Francis for inspiration and direction. Though many of Francis' followers were burned at the stake by the Church as heretics, and Francis himself escaped heresy only due to his immense popularity, Pope Francis firmly places the contemporary Church behind his eponym, focusing particularly on the fact that for Saint Francis, the care for nature, justice for the poor, social effort and inner peace were all inseparable (2015: 34). In this sense, ecological decline and human and ethical decline are, he claims, ‘intimately connected’ (2015: 68). Pope Francis reminds us that the austerity and poverty of Saint Francis were a means of rejecting a worldview that transforms reality into an object of use and domination. He asks us to be wary of allowing technology, tied to financial gain, to provide the unique solution to the ecological disaster, because such a

response is not capable of ‘seeing the mystery of the multiple relations that exist between all things, and thus, in trying to resolve one problem, creates others’ (2015, 43). Instead of one-sided approaches that ignore that reality is interconnected, Pope Francis asks us to seek a productive dialogue between science and religion, in order to seek a solution that is both scientific and moral, material and at the same time spiritual (2015: 73).

Though there is much to praise in Pope Francis' encyclical, and one may hope that it will have a profound influence on reforming the Catholic tradition, he nonetheless retains the human exceptionalism inherent in humanism, and warns against pantheisms that divinize the earth, which he claims lead to an ‘asphyxiating closure within immanence’ (2015: 117).<sup>1</sup> He thus remains clearly apologetic. According to this apologetic approach, the Christian tradition has always provided an adequate response to the environmental crisis, and there is thus no need for radical revision and transformation.

The Christian Orthodox tradition as well remains apologetic, though there are leaders who have gone far in placing the environment at the center of Orthodox faith. Metropolitan John of Pergamon has attempted to develop a religious and environmental ethos that might existentially touch humans more deeply than fear and utility. He writes:

“We must be ready to propose not simply an ethic but an ethos, and to root our ethical demands deep in human existence and not simply in human behaviour.... What kind of existential reasons suggest or necessitate an environmental ethic?”<sup>2</sup>

And Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew has also dedicated much effort toward aligning the Orthodox Church with ecological renewal. He has organized many environmental journeys to raise awareness, has highlighted the sacramental and hence material nature of the creator’s relationship to the created, and has explicitly named environmental degradation a sin. For example, in a homily given in Saint Barbara’s Church in Santa Barbara, CA, November 1997, he said the following words:

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<sup>1</sup> ‘asfissante rinchiudersi nell’immanenza’ (117).

<sup>2</sup> Metropolitan John of Pergamon, “Towards an Environmental Ethic,” see <http://www.rsosymposia.org/themedia/File/1151678281-Ethic.pdf>. Cited in Grim, John/Tucker, Mary Evelyn, 2014: 105.

‘it follows that to commit a crime against the natural world is a sin. For human beings to cause species to become extinct and to destroy the biological diversity of god’s creation; for human beings to degrade the integrity of the earth by causing changes in its climate, by stripping the earth of its natural forests, or by destroying its wetlands; for human beings to injure other human beings with disease; for human beings to contaminate the earth’s waters, its land, its air, and its life, with poisonous substances—all of these are sins.’<sup>3</sup>

But theologian John F. Haught is not alone in thinking that boasting of St. Francis or making ecological degradation a sin is not enough to make Christianity ecologically attractive. For Haught, such an approach is insufficient, as it does not go far enough ‘in opening Christian faith to the radical renewal the ecological crisis seems to demand’ (2004: 235). Claiming that Christianity ‘has been at best ambiguous’ (2004: 233), he cites Saints Martin and John of Ephesus, who called for and abetted deforestation, and points to the widespread Christian desire to escape from nature to reach the transcendent realm of God. Indeed, Haught is not alone in taking issue not only with human domination over nature but also with the Biblical call for stewardship reiterated by the Pope. Haught writes:

‘Stewardship, even when it is exegetically purged of the distortions to which the notion has been subjected, is still too managerial a concept to support the kind of ecological ethic we need today. Most ecologists would argue that the earth’s life systems were a lot better off before we humans came along to manage them... So even if we nuance the notions of stewardship and dominion in the light of recent scholarship, the biblical tradition is still too anthropocentric’ (2004: 239).

Environmental chemist James Lovelock concurs with this view, emphasizing the hubris involved in such a Christian view. He writes:

‘Our religions have not yet given us the rules and guidance for our relationship with Gaia. The humanist concept of sustainable development and the Christian concept of stewardship are flawed by unconscious hubris. We have neither the knowledge nor the capacity to achieve them. We are no more qualified to be the stewards or developers of the Earth than are goats to be gardeners’ (2006: 137).

Religious studies scholar Anna Peterson also points to the vertical relationship between the human being and God as dangerous, for it makes it difficult to recognize the embodied nature of our inter-being on the earth with other species. When tied to our exclusive ownership of a

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<sup>3</sup> Spoken in November 1997, Saint Barbara’s Church, Santa Barbara, California. Reported in Chryssavgis, “Cosmic Grace, Humble Prayer,” (221). Cited in Grim, John/Tucker, Mary Evelyn, 2014: 104.

soul to the exclusion of other animals, she holds that such doctrines are not in harmony with ecological concerns. She writes:

‘In any of these interpretations of Genesis 1, it is clear that the assertion of humanity’s uniqueness – its creation in the image of God – is inextricably tied to human power over the earth and other animals. The soul that all other animals lack both defines humans and gives them transcendent value... This means, crucially, that humanity’s real home does not lie among the rest of creation but rather with God in heaven. It also means that human’s most important relationship is the vertical stretch to the divine rather than – or at least before – horizontal ties to other people or creatures. Thus humanity is defined first and foremost not by relations among persons, by physical embodiedness, or by embeddedness in the natural world, but by an invisible tie to an invisible God’ (2004: 116).

Similarly, theologian Anne Primavesi points to the patriarchal and violent traits intrinsic to the Christian tradition that make it difficult to reach an understanding of the interdependent ecosystem from its premises. She writes:

‘Both implicitly and explicitly it has ignored and even promoted the violent character of our interactions with the more-than-human community and their effects on our shared environment. When made aware of it, all too often it has sanctioned an increase of that violence: in the name of an omnipotent, punitive God invoked on behalf of our self-interest alone. Exploitation of land and animal resources for financial gain has been formally and consistently blessed by Christian ministers throughout western Christendom and in its colonialist expansion across the world’ (2010, 87-88).

Because awareness of what she calls "violence-of-God traditions" is a pre-requisite for any attempt to remedy such negative religious impact on the planet, such traditions must be acknowledged by all Christians in order to re-envision:

‘our religious narratives within the larger context of earth's history. Discarding our theological partiality (in every sense) means giving up a view of ourselves as specially created and blessed by God, with its implication that we are outside general evolutionary processes and the constraints of ecological principles. Furthermore, we must learn to discard the idea that we are destined to enjoy a life with God in some distant heavenly world rather than the earthly one we now inhabit’ (2009: 34).

Because monotheisms retain anthropocentrism, which is considered one of the chief causes of our environmental crisis, and treat the management of the natural world as a God-given human responsibility, ‘none of the ‘world’ religions is an earth religion’ to cite the phrase of Professor Ronald Grimes (2014, 510).<sup>4</sup> For this reason, much apologetic Christian theology

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<sup>4</sup> Grimes writes: ‘The monotheistic traditions bear a large share of the blame, because of their entanglement in Western ideologies of natural domination and dualistic separation. The truth is that none of the large-scale

has been replaced by what Haught calls the sacramental approach, which places the emphasis on the sacred quality of the universe, rather than on religious textuality and stewardship. The sacramental approach interprets the natural world as the primary symbolic disclosure of God, such that overcoming sin means overcoming our alienation from the cosmos (Haught, 2004: 235). According to such a view, the mystery of God is revealed in the evolution of matter itself. Since the natural world is itself the expression of divinity, it has no need for human stewardship.

Defrocked Dominican priest Mathew Fox takes this sacramental approach in his attempt to provide a 'liberation theology' for first world peoples. In his book *Creation Spirituality: Liberating Gifts for the Peoples of the Earth* he claims that his liberation theology provides a necessary bridge between science and religion (1991: 15), by providing a sense of awe to the scientific creation story. Such a sense of awe is intended to enact a metanoia, a conversion to respond differently to creation and overcome the alienation that accompanies a human-centred world. Fox thus goes beyond the bounds of Catholic dogma in order to overcome the anthropocentrism intrinsic to its placing of the human being in an exclusive relationship with God, to the exclusion of other beings. A panentheist, Fox agrees with German mystic Mechtild of Magdeburg that 'all things (are) in God and God in all things' (1991: 41). Such an interpretation allows for an interpretation of Christianity that focuses on mutuality and interdependence rather than a scale of values with the human being at the top. In his own words:

'Panentheism is not only democratic, it is also ecological. Theism, on the other hand, reinforces anthropocentrism because it puts the human at the top of the ladder in an exclusive relationship with divinity... Panentheism renders our relationships with other species more mutual, reminding us that we are all beautiful, all interdependent, all necessary in a single web of life' (1991: 105).

In a similar sacramental move, religious studies scholar Mark Wallace has defended Christian animism in his recent book entitled *When God Was a Bird: Christianity, Animism, and the Re-Enchantment of the World*. Attempting to defend Christianity from Lynn White Jr.'s

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religions has resources adequate to the crisis. None of the "world" religions is an earth religion' (Grimes, 2014, 509-510).

attack, Wallace claims that White's critique is 'inattentive to historical complexity and contemporary nuance.' Though the Christian triumph over animism did involve the desacralization of nature, and the 'axe-wielding saint' is part of Christian history, for Wallace, 'this trope only tells one side of the story' (2018: 42). Telling the other side of the story would entail drawing attention to the immanence of Jesus Christ as man and the Holy Spirit as a bird, what he calls "living enfleshments of divinity in the world" (2018: 3). If the Holy Spirit was a Bird-God in early Christianity, such an incarnation "opens up the possibility that all things today are filled with God and thereby deserving of our reverence and care" (2018: 32). Such "enfleshments" are what he calls "sublations" of animism, which preserve "animism's reverence for sacred nature within the horizon of its own incarnational belief system" (2018: 42).<sup>5</sup>

Though responses such as that of Fox and Wallace could go far toward adapting Christianity to the Anthropocene age by transforming the nature/culture divide into a symbiotic and interdependent relationality, to the extent that Fox and other panentheists have been defrocked and Wallace pushed to the periphery of his own religious tradition, their work may lack the moral authority, institutional resources and collective action that religious traditions wield (Veldman/Szasz/Haluza-DeLay, 2014: 309) and thus limit the reach of such transformations.

## II. The Reenchantment of the World: Animism

Such attempts to transform monotheistic foundations into 21<sup>st</sup> century religions in line with science and ecology present one means to give religion a central place in the ecological struggle to improve the human environmental footprint. Yet for many scholars and religious activists fighting for ecological awareness, adopting an evolutionary, scientific and ecological perspective can come only at the price of sacrificing transcendental monotheistic beliefs. For

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<sup>5</sup> Wallace seems to have misunderstood the meaning of animism in his attempt to salvage an immanent Christianity. Whereas in the Christian tradition God takes on human form in the figure of Christ, or bird form, according to his analysis, in the figure of the Holy Spirit, in animism, each person is ontologically itself, not an incarnation of a transcendent deity that remains ontologically other.

such scholars, even the deity of pantheism isolates the sacred in a transcendent realm. Such activists thus tend toward pantheism and animism, infusing nature with the sacred in what Pope Francis called an ‘asphyxiating closure within immanence.’ Yet rather than understanding immanence as asphyxiating, such a sacralisation of nature enables what Morris Berman calls the ‘reenchantment of the world’ (1989: 10).

Because such a reenchantment involves adopting a holistic scientific worldview, certain fundamental aspects of monotheism must be abandoned. An understanding of contemporary biology, for instance, requires leaving behind an understanding of the human animal as a ‘unique soul-substance’ a *res cogitans* with an independent identity created in God's image. According to Philip Clayton and Elizabeth Singleton, such a view is an impediment to understanding how the planet functions and must be abandoned if one hopes ‘to take on board the lessons that contemporary biology is teaching’ (2017: 148). Because such views obstruct an understanding of evolution as a system of processual inter-being, reciprocity and inter-dependence, Clayton and Singleton claim that:

‘Non-Western cultures are millennia ahead of us in this regard: indigenous cultures and lifeways, India’s *Advaita Vedanta*, the Jain call to do no harm (*ahimsa*) to any living being, and the wealth of cultures nourished on the Buddhist teachings of Dependent Arising and interbeing. Indeed, the whole dispute between Gaia’ advocates and their opponents could be reread as a battle between the world view or “metaphysic” of interbeing and that of independent or substantial being’ (2017: 149).

In his elaboration of ‘dark green religion’ Bron Taylor has similarly called for a “sensory post-Darwinian religion” (2010: 222) that is both rational and socially powerful, capable of developing innovative responses to Darwinian evolution while channeling religious sentiments. Such ‘dark green religions’ often take the form of Gaian and indigenous spirituality, as well as panpsychism and animism, forms of religiosity that tend to be non-supernatural and non-theistic, in order to celebrate what Dave Foreman calls the blind and nonteleological ‘flow of life’ (cited in Taylor, 2010: 125).

Therefore, notwithstanding the apologetic and sacramental attempts to the contrary, for many scholars monotheisms remain mired in anthropocentrism and individualism when

compared with other traditions. The sacred evolution that such scholars foster is understood as replacing anthropocentrism with biocentrism, a view that attempts to move beyond the monotheistic idea of stewardship in order to take into consideration the agency and well-being of all of nature. Having adopted such a biocentric approach, environmentalist Paul Watson calls for the development of a religiosity where:

‘a redwood tree is more sacred than a human-made religious icon, where a species of bird or butterfly is of more value and deserving of more respect than the crown jewels of a nation, and where the survival of a species of cacti or flower is more important than the survival of a monument to human conceit like the pyramids’ (2005: 177).

For John B. Cobb Jr., to cite another example, because monotheisms are focused on the salvation of individuals, they are disconnected from changes in the physical world. For Cobb, if we hope to find truly ecological religiosity, indigenous traditions are far more qualified than monotheistic ones. He writes: ‘a truly ecological consciousness was far more clearly and effectively present in hunting and gathering societies than in our traditions. When we look for religious versions of deep ecology, it is to them that we should turn’ (1996: 248).

Due to these ideological setbacks, a renewed interest in indigenous ecology and religiosity has brought to the fore non-Western ontologies that are eco-centric instead of anthropocentric. Indeed, if it was indigenous anthropology that allowed us to see that the nature/culture divide was a particular Western invention, we might learn something from indigenous peoples who, instead of separating the world into active subjects and passive objects, attribute subjectivity universally to all entities. Indeed, perhaps such indigenous cultures can help us to develop a new myth or metanarrative to replace what Bronislaw Szerszynski calls the ‘amythia’ that plagues the secular West. In line with science and with ecology, such a new myth would need to provide a holistic vision of our place on the earth capable of inspiring what Szerszynski calls a ‘second axial age’ (2017: 42).

Because animistic ontologies are ontologies of relation, rather than of intrinsic autonomous substances, such relationality may very well provide the semantic core for such a ‘second axial age.’ As anthropologist Philippe Descola explains, ‘the entities of which our

universe is made have a meaning and identity solely through the relations that constitute them as such' (Descola, 1996, 99). In a relational ontology, there is no way to differentiate between nature and culture, us and them, since neither element has an intrinsic identity outside of its relation to alterity. Such perspectivalism entails understanding that all species are political entities, and thus that society and environment cannot be clearly differentiated, since each object is in truth a multiplicity of perspectival subjective relations (Danowski/de Castro 2017: 68-69).

'Once the ancient nature-culture orthogonal grid has been disposed of, a new multi-dimensional anthropological landscape may emerge, in which stone adzes and quarks, cultivated plants and the genome map, hunting rituals and oil production may become intelligible as so many variations within a single set of relations encompassing humans as well as non-humans' (2017: 99).

When constituted in terms of relationality, personhood is no longer the exclusive property of human beings, but rather is shared by all beings who enter into relations. All animals are persons, meaning they all share consciousness and soul. In the terms of anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, to be a person 'is to be conscious and self-conscious, to act intentionally, with agency, and to communicate intelligently and deliberately' (2017: 187). Since all animals testify to personhood, what differs is embodiment, since different shapes, sizes, limbs and sensory organs embody consciousness or soulhood in different ways. Philosopher of religion Graham Harvey relates the Ojibwe understanding of personhood as derived from Anthropologist Irving Hallowell as typical in this regard:

'According to the Ojibwe, the world is full of people, only some of whom are human... To be a person does not require human-likeness, but rather humans are like other persons. Persons is the wider category, beneath which there may be listed sub-groups such as 'human persons', rock persons', 'bear persons', and others. Persons are related beings constituted by their many and various interactions with others. Persons are wilful beings who gain meaning and power from their interactions. Persons are sociable beings who communicate with others. Persons need to be taught by stages (some marked by initiations) what it means to 'act as a person'. This animism (minimally understood as the recognition of personhood in a range of human and other-than-human-persons) is far from innate and instinctual... That is, humans might become increasingly animist... as throughout life they learn how to act respectfully (carefully and constructively) towards other persons' (Harvey, 2005: 17-18).

In her anthropological studies in south India, Nurit Bird-David uses the term 'devaru' which she translates as 'superpersons' in order to explain 'animism as relational epistemology' (21).

She writes:

'We do not personify other entities and then socialize with them but personify them *as, when, and because* we socialize with them. Recognizing a 'conversation' with a counter-being - which amounts to accepting it into fellowship rather than recognizing a common essence - makes that being a self in relation with ourselves' (Harvey, 2005: 21).

Anthropologist Viveiros de Castro has taken this relationality a step further in an ironic twist to the Anthropocene narrative. In his research on Amazonian tribes, he shows that not only are all entities subjects, but they are all *human* subjects, since being human entails placing oneself at the center of the world and interpreting the world in terms of one's own bodily form and needs. For the jaguar, as the Runa people put it, blood is manioc beer (Kohn, 2013: 27). It is thus not nature that all entities share, but rather humanity as the ability to interpret the world from a subjective point of view, for, as de Castro puts it, 'the basis of humans and non-humans is humanity' (Interview given to Melitopoulos and Lazzarato, 2009: 48). Such a shared humanity is possible precisely because each living body is capable of thinking itself into the being of another. It is this humanity as common ground that allows for a shared politics, because in enunciating, in expressing its humanity, each human is able to think itself beyond the boundary of the unitary and enclosed self of the Western tradition into a shared world.

If to be human means to see the world from a particular embodied perspective, each animal species thinks of itself as human in respect to other beings. Such a relational ontology is founded in the ability 'to see as,' to put oneself in the place of the other in order to relate to it. To refuse 'to see as' is thus a refutation of humanity, for it is this ability that is its defining trait. Viveiros de Castro writes:

'Typically, in normal conditions, humans see humans as humans, animals as animals and spirits (if they see them) as spirits; however animals (predators) and spirits see humans as animals (as prey) to the same extent that animals (as prey) see humans as spirits or as animals (predators). By the same token, animals and spirits see themselves as humans: they perceive themselves as (or become) anthropomorphic beings when they are in their own houses or villages and they experience their own habits and characteristics in the form of culture - they see their food as human food (jaguars see blood as manioc beer, vultures see the maggots in rotting meat as

grilled fish etc.), they see their bodily attributes (fur, feathers, claws, beaks etc.) as body decorations or cultural instruments, they see the social system as organized in the same way as human institutions are (with chiefs, shamans, ceremonies, exogamous moieties etc.)' (Harvey, 2005: 470).

In such a worldview, humanity is both universal and subjective, since each species sees itself as human and other species cannot occupy the deictic position of the 'I'. Yet each species knows that other species see themselves in a similar way, and thus all inter-relations are political, or function as what Danowski and de Castro call a 'cosmopolitics' (2017, 71).<sup>6</sup>

Rather than supporting the mind/body dualism of modernity, such an animist attribution of subjectivity to all actants transforms the meaning of immanence, for 'subjectivity' and 'thinking' are not transcendent categories in animism, but rather inhere in material bodies that transversally communicate with each other and co-constitute each other. As such, all entities, not just humans, express themselves, and through enunciating, assemble and disassemble subjectivities and collectivities. It is in this sense that nature has always been culturally invested, since in the words of Eduardo Viveiros de Castro 'it is matter itself that is infused with soul. Subjectivity is not an exclusively human property, but the basis of the real' (Interview given to Melitopoulos and Lazzarato, 2009: 48).

Instead of anthropocentrism, such a worldview testifies to what Danowski and de Castro call anthropomorphism, which inverts the problems of anthropocentrism, since the human being is no longer placed in a transcendent sphere in relation to other animals. It also provides a solution to the inverse problem of resolving anthropocentrism by using a materialist reduction to reduce all animals to predefined automata. Instead, the anthropomorphic view holds that all animals are human 'just like us.' In their view, "pan-psychic" generalization or expansion is

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<sup>6</sup> They explain as follows: 'This entails that we humans (Amerindian humans, that is) do not see animals as humans. They are not human *for us*; but we know they are human *for themselves*. We know just as well that we are not human *for them*: that they see us as game, or ferocious predators, or powerful enemy tribes..., or cannibal spirits, depending on our respective positions in the food chain. When an Indian interacts with a being from "another species" – which includes, we stress again, the members of other collectives that *we* would call "human" – he or she knows that they are dealing with an entity that is human in its own domain. It thus follows that every trans-specific interaction in Amerindian worlds is an international intrigue, a diplomatic negotiation, or a war operation that must be undertaken with maximum circumspection: cosmopolitics' (Danowski and de Castro, 2017, 70-71).

the basic method for bringing the world up to the same level as the ancestral pan-humanoid condition' (2017: 72), and such generalization entails that 'anthropomorphism should be granted full philosophical citizenship owing to the as yet unexplored conceptual possibilities it opens' (2017: 71).

Danowski and de Castro call such indigenous people terrans, and they claim that no matter how numerous (they cite 370 million indigenous peoples across 70 nations) (2017: 96), such terrans will never replace the moderns, because they will never form a majority and become 'responsible for a hegemonic ideology that could control peoples. That is not their role' (2017: 94). Yet such peoples can launch what they call, citing Deleuze and Guattari, a 'resistance to the present' and create "'a new earth," the world to come' (2017: 95). Danowski and de Castro understand such a project of 're-becoming indigenous' (2017: 122) as one of 'uncivilization,' characterized by 'a *technology of slowing down, a diseconomy* no longer mesmerized by the hallucination of continuous growth, a *cultural insurrection* (if the expression may be pardoned) against the zombification of the citizen–consumer' (2017: 97-98). Rather than testifying to backwardness, such a re-becoming indigenous delineates the possible 'subsistence of the future' (2017: 123). Only such a new people can create a new world from the ruins we will have left them.

### **III. Cosmopolitics: Thinking With and As the Other**

What might it mean then, for us moderns, to re-become indigenous" and become 'uncivilized'? Should we prepare darts for a blowgun and set up camp in a Yurt or an earthship in abandoned industrial zones, or join the *Zones à Défendre* in France or The Earth Liberation Army elsewhere? This is certainly one way. But I would like to claim that we do not need to re-become indigenous, for we have remained indigenous in at least one essential way. We remain capable of "seeing, feeling and thinking as another," and this capacity is indeed an

essential attribute of modern literature, philosophy, religion, and politics. Indeed, it may very well be an essential attribute of being human.

Though we live in a world where the influence of the capitalist utilitarian system has meant that students choose to study business instead of anthropology, engineering instead of philosophy, it is the humanities in particular that cultivate a quality essential to establishing moral values: the ability to "see as another." Studying the humanities thus fosters a way of being in the world that is similar to animistic religious traditions. Historian Dipesh Chakrabarty, for instance, believes that 'The questions of justice that follow from climate-change science require us to possess an ability that only the humanities can foster: the ability to see something from another person's point of view.' The ability, in other words, 'to imagine sympathetically the predicament of another person' (2016, 378). For Chakrabarty, a solution to the Anthropocene depends upon this quality that is cultivated in the humanities, the ability to enter other embodiments and see the world from their perspective.

Reading itself is, in the words of philosopher Frédéric Lordon, "to leave the self" (2016: 2). We can practice such a transference in literature, for instance, and imagine ourselves as men or women, beggars or Emperors, Maggie Tulliver or the Princesse de Clèves. And though we can never totally incarnate a raven, since humans will always project human complexity from the perspective of the human body, human plasticity is such that we can indeed approximate other life forms. Kafka was able to project himself into a cockroach and a mole, and the "forme mutate in corpi nuovi" described by Ovid range from Ariadne transformed into a star constellation to human bodies springing from fungus and being transformed into ants. More recent examples include John Gardner's existential beowulf Grendel, and Yoko Tawada's *Memoirs of a Polar Bear*. As a projective exercise, reading represents a major technology to enable the 'ontological boundary crossing' of an animistic cosmopolitics.

We might indeed claim with novelist J. M. Coetzee that not only reading but thinking itself fosters the inclusion of other beings within humanity, just as indigenous animism does,

and that such an inclusion is indeed constitutive of what it means to be human. Though his book *The Lives of Animals* does not directly address the Anthropocene, Coetzee imagines a world where non-human forms of life have been genetically and biologically re-engineered to serve human ends, and where such a loss of other ways of being in the world incurs a loss of humanity, because ‘the sympathetic imagination’ is dulled. To become human for Coetzee, we must be able to ‘think ourselves into the being of another,’ to be more than one. Thinking, that is to say, is always thinking alterity, and thus always about sharing a world. And if we can think ourselves into the fictional characters of literature, Coetzee’s protagonist Elisabeth Costello claims that we can think our way:

‘into the existence of a bat or a chimpanzee or an oyster, any being with whom (we) share the substrate of life... There are people who have the capacity to imagine themselves as someone else, there are people who have no such capacity (when the lack is extreme, we call them psychopaths), and there are people who have the capacity but choose not to exercise it’ (1999: 35).

Sympathetic imagination, rather than calculation, is required to see things from the point of view of a jaguar, a flying ant, or a forest. Perhaps the time has come to choose to exercise this capacity.

If such a capacity can be cultivated in the humanistic disciplines, it is also cultivated in religious traditions, and not only animistic ones. Even monotheists, after all, must think their way into the being of a formless god, or into the being of the person of Christ. Polytheists likewise are able to imagine the being of many gods and goddesses in animal form, and pantheists the unity of all being in the figure of Gaia. Such practice with figures of abstraction, absence and totality develop out of an ability to think and feel as and with the other embodied inhabitants of our living ecosystem. Learning from science that we are neither separate nor independent from these other forms of life can help religious traditions to locate the sacred not in autonomous powers aloof from evolution but rather in the very process of living and dying in a web of inter-connected forms. Eco-theologies could explicitly adopt the practice of such

transference, as is common for example in shamanism or in the *Imitatio Christi*, in order to enlarge, rather than diminish, our humanity in the age of the Anthropocene.

Indeed, such a capacity for ontological boundary crossing may very well be essential to politics as well. If such ‘thinking as’ is essential to thinking the *polis* and organizing ways of living together that can fulfil the human potential, it is because without the ability to put oneself in the place of the other, to see things from his or her perspective, one cannot develop moral judgments in a plural world of competing worldviews. In order to adopt universal norms that refer to and represent all persons equally, each normative concept must be considered from the points of view of all persons, irrespective of gender, ethnos, religious affiliation, political affiliation or even species.

This ability to consider multiple points of view, to put ourselves in the place of others is a requirement in order to sustain democratic governance. It is central in philosopher John Rawls’ veil of ignorance, by means of which a citizen is to apply the *epoché* to her own experience and status in order to imagine herself in the place of others. And it is essential to what philosopher Hannah Arendt calls representation, by which she means:

‘making present to my mind the standpoints of those who are absent.... The more people’s standpoints I have present in my mind while I am pondering a given issue, and the better I can imagine how I would feel and think if I were in their place, the stronger will be my capacity for representative thinking and the more valid my final conclusions, my opinion’ (Hannah Arendt, “Truth and Politics,” 241, cited pg. 180).

For Arendt, such feeling and thinking in the place of others that is representation, is the very meaning of political thought. ‘Political thought is representative’ (BPF, 241), she writes. If the inability to relate to others by means of representative transference is a pathology that has plagued modern culture to this day, animism can help us to conceptualize relations as fundamental and representative transference as the basis of communication and thus of democratic knowledge claims.<sup>7</sup> It is such an inclusive cosmopolitics that we need, and the

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<sup>7</sup> Though Arendt differentiates her view from empathy, which she defines as trying “to be or to feel like somebody else,” such a definition does not sound so very different from feeling and thinking as if “I were in their place,” her definition of representation. Rather than drawing a boundary between representation and empathy, the discipline

ontological boundary crossing typical of animistic cultures can provide a valid alternative to the Western ontology of autonomous essences.

According to anthropologist Maurice Bloch, such a desire to share intentionality, or what he calls ‘the ability to “read” the mind of others,’ is what is particular to the human species. For Bloch, it is precisely this ability to share intentionality and understand that other persons pursue goals similar to our own that ‘makes linguistic communication, and indeed all complex human communication, possible’ (2013: 6-7). If Bloch is correct that sharing intentionality is a biological trait of the human species correlated with the firing of mirror neurons in the F5 cortex<sup>8</sup>, he is wrong to isolate this capacity to the human species alone. The sharing of intentionality with non-human others demonstrated in animist cultures has been widely corroborated by the science of ethology and the study of mirror neurons in other species.<sup>9</sup> In a world ‘humming with empathy’ (Breithaupt, 2009: 8) we can adopt the perspective of both human and non-human persons. As part of our biological evolution and the social nature of our species, empathic ‘thinking with and as another’ can explain our capacity for religious transference and political representation. It can also help us to learn ‘appropriate etiquette and

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of neuro-biology can help us to elucidate their relation. Indeed, research in neurobiology on ‘mirror neurons’ located in the F5 area of the brain has shown that the transference necessary for empathy appears to be hard-wired into the structure of our brains.

<sup>8</sup> From the perspective of neuro-biology, sharing intentionality is made possible because exactly the same neurons are activated in our brains when another person performs an action in front of us, as when we perform the action ourselves (we have all experienced the spontaneous impulse to laugh when surrounded by laughter, and to sneeze when others sneeze). Political representation, as well as other forms of imaginative transference, develop out of this biological predisposition, making relationality constitutive of being human. Fritz Breithaupt explains mirror neurons as follows: ‘The capacity of intellectual and emotive comprehension of others is manifestly grounded, to a large extent, on innate capacities of mimetism and elementary neuronal possibilities that allow us to live the observed behaviour of others as though it were our own behaviour. Men, as social beings, live in a world that is humming with empathy, such that they permanently adopt, almost involuntarily, the perspective of others’ (Fritz Breithaupt, 2009: 8. Translation is my own).

However promising such an engagement between philosophy and cognitive science may be, it is important to point toward some shortcomings that require caution in adopting the naturalization of consciousness too readily. Great attention must be taken to not reify the brain as some cognitive scientists tend to do, essentializing it (as was done with the “selfish gene”) outside of its symbiotic relationality to the entire organism and its environment. Furthermore, experience should not be reduced to brain function, as has become typical of much reductionist science. Reducing experience to behavior entails a significant loss of reality as it is actually lived.

<sup>9</sup> For animal cognition, see Bekoff, Marc, Allen, Colin, and Burghardt, Gordon (eds.), 2002, *The Cognitive Animal: Empirical and Theoretical Perspectives on Animal Cognition*, Cambridge: MIT Press. See also the work on mirror neurons in chimpanzees and other apes in Rizzolatti/Sinigaglia, 2008, *Les Neurons Mirroirs*, Paris: Odile Jacob.

protocol' from animists (Harvey, 2006: 19) in order to open our political and religious worlds to non-human persons and ecosystems.<sup>10</sup>

Because such 'thinking as' is missing in the world of the Anthropocene and in the solutions developed to address it, indigenous populations and non-human others are being pushed to extinction, leaving us in a world with no alterity left at all. However ironic, the 'new age of the human' might very well herald a loss of humanity. To respond to such a loss, we may need to cultivate a postmodern form of animism that would privilege solidarity over technological manipulation and the development of empathic transference alongside political representation. Perhaps such a postmodern representative animism, capable of incorporating the perspectives of other thinking subjects into a shared cosmopolitics, will be capable of providing us with the sympathetic imagination capable of making the Anthropocene era truly human.

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<sup>10</sup> For the inclusion of eco-systems see the beautiful book by anthropologist Eduardo Kohn, 2013, *How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology Beyond the Human*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

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