

METAPHYSICS FOR RESPONSIBILITY TO NATURE

Bo R. Meinertsen

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ABSTRACT: On the notion of responsibility employed by John Passmore in his classic *Man's Responsibility for Nature*, the relationship of responsibility can only hold between persons (human beings, subjects), or groups and communities of them, and other persons. And in this relationship the persons that are responsible *to* other persons are responsible *for* how their actions affect these other persons, not to the direct object of these actions (in this case: nature). If this is correct, we cannot be responsible to nature without conceiving of it as a 'pseudo-person', as Passmore calls it. However, non-anthropocentric environmental ethics requires such a moral relationship. The question is, therefore, how this can be allowed in a metaphysically acceptable way. To answer this I first provide an account of what it means to stand in the relation of being 'responsible to'. Next, I describe two major paradigmatic examples of the metaphysics of nature that perfectly match the thesis that we can, and should, be responsible to nature (the Spinoza-inspired view and the Gaia hypothesis). Unfortunately, they have to be rejected for common sense or naturalist reasons. Finally, I therefore defend a *fictionalist* view of nature (as person-like) that allows for this relationship.

KEYWORDS: responsibility to nature, responsibility for nature, Spinoza, Gaia hypothesis, fictionalist view of nature

1. INTRODUCTION

By 'responsibility' in this paper, I understand *moral* responsibility, so the issue under discussion here is moral responsibility to nature. In order to be responsible to nature, a substantial notion of responsibility is required. It should be just as substantial as the notion of responsibility in ethics in general. Such a conception of responsibility to nature is one of the basic assumptions of 'anthropocentric' environmental ethics, e.g. the one laid out in John Passmore's classic *Man's Responsibility for Nature*. It is also a basic assumption of 'non-anthropocentric' environmental ethics, the difference between the two being that the former denies that nature is suitable for standing in the relationship while the latter does not always do so. Passmore considers the

environmental problems such as pollution and the depletion of natural resources all within the framework of traditional human-centred ethics. By contrast, ‘non-anthropocentric’ environmental ethics considers nature to be a bearer of intrinsic value and/or literally a bearer of certain moral rights. By the same token, it also (in some forms) sees nature as an entity human beings can and should be literally responsible *to*. In my view, all anthropocentric environmental ethics is flawed. It fails dramatically in taking into account the interests of animals and other non-human entities with morally relevant interests. Often, but not always, non-anthropocentric environmental ethics goes hand in hand with an explicit metaphysics of nature on which nature is such that we can indeed literally be responsible *to* it. In what follows, I first provide an account of what it means to stand in the relation of being ‘responsible to’. Next, I describe and reject two influential ‘realist’ views of the metaphysics of nature each of which fits in perfectly with the thesis that we literally can, and should, be responsible to nature. Finally, I appeal to extant *fictionalism* from other areas of philosophy – especially the philosophy of religion – and argue from its analogy to our subject matter. This enables me to propose a fictionalist view of the metaphysics of nature (as person-like) that allows for the required relationship.

2. RESPONSIBILITY *FOR* VS. RESPONSIBILITY *TO*

Passmore complained that the title of *Man’s Responsibility for Nature* was often quoted incorrectly:

[T]he title of this book [*Man’s Responsibility for Nature*] is often misquoted, as man’s responsibility *to*, rather than *for*, nature. The difference is fundamental. ‘Nature’

is not a pseudo-person, to whom human beings are responsible...Human beings are [only] responsible *for* nature. (1980, p. xii)

On the notion of responsibility employed by Passmore, the relationship of responsibility can only hold between human beings (persons, subjects), or groups and communities of them, and other human beings. And in this relationship the persons that are responsible *to* other persons are responsible *for* how their actions affect these other persons, not to the direct object of these actions (in this case: nature).

In the present section, I shall show how the relation of responsibility is related to the nature of its relata; specifically, I shall show that Passmore is correct in implying that responsibility *to* nature presupposes that nature is a person or, as I mostly put it, ‘person-like’.¹ A lot of work has been done on the notion of (moral) responsibility (cf. Eshleman 2014), but little, if any, of it seems to concern the formal properties of the relation. Let us in any case set out by distinguishing between *responsibility to* and *responsibility for*. At the most elementary level, the relation of *responsibility to* holds between two subjects, S1 and S2. It is a non-symmetrical relation (asymmetrical in some cases and symmetrical in others). S1 is responsible to S2 in some cases, S2 is responsible to S1 in some other cases, and S1 and S2 are responsible to each other in still other cases. Of course we can add more subjects to either relatum: subjects S1, S2, S3,..., Sn can be responsible to subjects S4, S5, S6, ..., Sn and conversely, but this we can for simplicity leave understood. In any case, the relation of *responsibility to* always holds between subjects (persons). But the relation of *responsibility for* holds between a subject S and an action (as well as

¹ Someone might claim that the relation only requires that its object be sentient (which could probably be met by certain lower animals, such as fishes), or perhaps that it requires even less: that it simply be a living organism. I shall briefly return to this idea in section 3 below.

morally relevant facts that are effects of this action). For example, John is responsible *for* the accident that occurred as a result of his driving under the influence of alcohol. This relation is asymmetrical: the accident is not responsible for John, and similarly in other cases. But we often stand in both kinds of responsibility relation at the same time, i.e. we are responsible to someone for something. Let us say that, in general, a subject S1 is responsible *to* a subject S2 *for* the action A. For example, a teacher is responsible *to* her students *for* her teaching.

As we saw in the passages quoted, Passmore dismisses talk of ‘responsibility to’ nature. He, in effect, only recognises our being responsible for certain actions that affect nature. An example is the adverse effects of excessive burning of fossil fuels. He would also, of course, recognise that we might be responsible *to* other people in this context, for example, to the people worst affected by global warming. It would in any case be apt to say that we are responsible *to* these people *for* the excessive burning of fossil fuels.

By contrast, consider now the situation where the relation of *responsibility to* is to hold between us and nature. We can now see that the implication for this relation to hold is that nature is a subject (person) or subject-like (person-like): as we saw, it only holds between subjects. For this reason, this relationship is endorsed in the kinds of non-anthropocentric environmental ethics in which nature is treated as a person or person-like (or ‘pseudo-person’, with Passmore’s scornful expression) such that other subjects (we, the moral agents) can stand in the *responsibility to* relation to it. Conversely, if one’s environmental ethics is promoting responsibility to nature, the metaphysics of nature that coheres with it is one that conceives of nature in precisely this way.²

² Contrast this metaphysical demand of responsibility to nature with the case of the relation of *gratitude*

3. SUBJECTS OF NATURE?

In my view, there are only two major conceptions of nature as literally person-like worth considering in the present context. Let us look at each in turn.

3.1 *The Spinoza-inspired view*

On one prevalent understanding of Spinoza in the *Ethics*, he is a substance monist, that is, he holds that there is only one substance. Notably, he thus rejects Descartes' dualism of mind and body. Instead of a mind, whose essence is thought, and a body, whose essence is extension, Spinoza postulates only one substance with only two 'infinite attributes' that can be known to the human mind, thought and extension. Thereby he also rejects other forms of dualisms, for instance, between God and the world of creation. Similarly, things, whether stones, plants animals or persons, which on some views are substances in themselves, are merely parts of the one substance, God or Nature (with capital 'N'). Thus, In Spinoza's metaphysics, every entity is connected with every other entity. In that sense it is very 'holistic', to use a very contemporary expression that has gained much currency outside academic circles.

Arne Næss, the most influential environmentalist among professional philosophers, distinguishes between 'shallow ecology' and 'deep ecology' (1973). The former is more or less the same as (the metaphysics of) anthropocentric environmental ethics. In line with Passmore, shallow ecology focuses on practically alleviating environmental problems that obviously go against 'human interests', such

to nature, which in my view is also important to environmental ethics (Meinertsen 2017), albeit perhaps less so. Gratitude to nature does not require any substantial metaphysics of nature, since, roughly speaking, we can be grateful to anything that is a good for us irrespective of its metaphysical character.

as the problems of pollution or resource depletion. Deep ecology, by contrast, is its non-anthropocentric counterpart and calls for a radically different attitude to nature. It endorses a ‘biospheric egalitarianism’, the view that all living things are alike in having value in their own right, independent of their usefulness to others. The deep ecologist respects this intrinsic value, taking care, for example, when walking on the mountainside not to cause unnecessary damage to the plants. For Næss, it is clear that the metaphysics of nature corresponding to each of these ethical positions are fundamentally different. The former sees nature (excluding human beings) as the world of value-neutral inert objects of mechanistic science. But the latter is, Næss argues (1977), very much the substance monistic and holistic view of Spinoza.³

Now, it is obvious where the personhood of nature, and hence something we can literally be responsible to, comes in if nature/Spinoza’s substance is identified with God. But what if we leave the notion of God entirely out of the picture? In what sense, if any, can we be responsible *to* Spinoza’s substance? Perhaps this question is best answered by considering Spinoza’s view of the drive to maintain itself found in all being, its *conatus*: ‘[e]ach thing...endeavours to persist in its own being’ (IIP6). In human beings the conscious reflection of this drive is ‘desire’. But how, one might ask, can an inanimate natural object, such as a stone, have a drive to maintain itself? This is in a way a mistaken question, since it presupposes that stones are independent of the one substance – that they are individual things. But this is precisely what they are not: they are only ‘finite modifications of the infinite attributes’ of the one substance (MacDonald 2001, p. 49). They are ‘all parts of the cosmos which work

³ For other versions of Spinoza-inspired deep ecology, see e.g. Matthews (1991) and Jong (2004).

together towards the maintenance of the whole' (ibid.) And as plants consume soil and water, animals consume plants and other animals, etc., we can say they each take part in the exchange of energy of the greater whole. Consequently, Spinoza's nature (or Nature) is – if not a person – then 'alive in the broad sense of panpsychism' (Næss 1977, p. 46). And someone might hold that it makes good sense to consider such an entity – indeed a *being* – the object of the *responsibility to* relation (cf. footnote 1 above).⁴ In general, perhaps being a living thing *per se* comes with a moral status sufficient for this relation to hold to it. However, the paradigm objects of the *responsibility to* relation are persons, so it seems it would at most be in a weak and derivative sense that it could have living things *qua* living things as objects. For this reason, I shall not consider this option any further.

In any case, at least from a Western point of view, Spinoza's metaphysics is unfortunately an extremely implausible worldview. It clashes radically with many common-sense or naturalist assumptions about the world. For example, one of the most basic of these assumptions is the Aristotelian view of the world as consisting of a plurality of substances, with each one of us being a paradigmatic example of them. This flies in the face of Spinoza's substance monism. Another example is provided by the assumption that the natural objects we consider inanimate are as non-living as objects can possibly be – stone dead, so to speak. Of course, this conflict does not supply us with a non-question-begging argument, but I think non-anthropocentric environmental ethics should not look to Spinoza for its metaphysics.

⁴ The cosmos, and hence Spinoza's nature, of course includes entities that are not very relevant to environmental ethics, e.g. dark matter, but this is of no consequence. Spinoza's nature, by definition, includes all entities that are part of nature in the sense that *is* relevant to environmental ethics.

3.2 *The Gaia-hypothesis view*

However, perhaps a suitable metaphysics can be found in the contemporary *Gaia hypothesis*? This is the view put forward by chemist James Lovelock (e.g. 2000 [1979]; 1988).⁵ Briefly, on the Gaia hypothesis organisms interact with the non-organic objects in their environment in a synergistic and self-regulating way that supports optimal life on Earth. On the initial ‘biospheric’ formulation of the hypothesis, Lovelock held that this ‘regulating’ was done by living organisms, or simply by ‘life’. Later on, however, he came to believe in a more ‘geographical’ version of the hypothesis on which ‘regulation, at a state fit for life, is a property of the whole evolving system of life, air, ocean, and rocks’ (2000 [1979], p. 144). Both formulations of the view contain many scientific complexities, but for our purposes, it is not necessary to go into any of them.

On either formulation, the name *Gaia* gives away the notion of nature as person-like.⁶ I think this aspect of the view comes out at three different levels, as it were. At one level, nature is an *agent*. For instance, Lovelock holds that the ‘biosphere actively maintains and controls the composition of the air around us, so as to provide an optimum environment for terrestrial life’ (ibid., p 64). An agent is to some extent person-like, but it is different from a person: many living things that are non-persons, such as lower animals, are agents (Steward 2014), though no person is a non-agent. At another level, nature (or at any rate the Earth) is also seen as having a

⁵ Lovelock co-developed the thesis with microbiologist Lynn Margulis in the 1970s.

⁶ Gaia was in Greek mythology the name of Earth, personified as a goddess, daughter of Chaos. She was the mother and wife of Uranus (Heaven). Their offspring included the Titans and Cyclopes. Lovelock chose the name ‘Gaia hypothesis’ following a conversation with novelist and Nobel laureate William Golding.

body, as reflected by some of the titles of the central literature of the Gaia hypothesis, for instance by biologist Tyler Volk's 2003 book *Gaia's Body: Toward a Physiology of Earth*. A being with a body is also to some extent person-like, though again, a being with a body is different from a person: many living non-person things, such as animals, have a body. At still another level, in line with the meaning of Gaia in Greek mythology, nature is conceived of as motherly (Doolittle 1981). Being motherly is person-like as well, though of course it does not imply being a person (for example, females of lower animals can be 'motherly'). These formulations jointly paint a picture of nature as rather person-like, more so than Spinozistic metaphysics of nature, it seems. Other formulations of the hypothesis are less 'personalistic', though, and describe or suggest it merely as a view on which Earth is a living organism, a view for which the Gaia hypothesis perhaps is famous outside academic circles.⁷ For our purposes, 'Earth' and 'nature' can be considered co-extensional terms. And, as we observed above in connection with Spinoza's view, perhaps being a living thing suffices for being an object of the *responsibility to* relation. But, as I pointed out, it seems this can at most be in a weak and derivative sense. In any case, on the Gaia hypothesis, nature is person-like in a quite strong sense, or at least a highly complex living organism.

Like Spinoza-inspired deep ecology, the Gaia hypothesis has influenced a lot of environmentalist thinking. Often this is reflected in discourses where science, metaphysics, ethics and even religion mix freely. Consider for instance two of Lovelock's own formulations: '[f]or me, Gaia is a religious as well as a scientific concept, and in both spheres it is manageable...God and Gaia, theology and science,

⁷ For instance, the first public symposium on the Gaia hypothesis, held in 1985 at the University of Massachusetts, was entitled *Is the Earth a Living Organism?*

even physics and biology are not separate but a single way of thought' (1988, pp. 206, 212). Indeed the similarities between Spinozistic deep ecology and the Gaia hypothesis are striking. As far as I can tell, it only makes 'holistic' claims about interdependence of all things for natural objects that play some scientifically identifiable role in the biosphere. For this reason, it might not be susceptible to the common-sense Aristotelian objections that, as we saw above, count against the Spinozistic metaphysics. But then it faces objections from a more scientifically informed common sense. Firstly, it violates one of the most basic naturalist assumptions about nature on this outlook. This is the assumption that, to put it bluntly, there can be a person or person-like entity in the spatiotemporal realm if and only if there is a brain – or if, in more special cases, certain physical objects, such as silicon-based networks, are configured in way highly similar to a brain. Secondly – and judged from a perhaps more educated stance – it is not clear if the more established physical sciences, with their focus on discovering lawlike causal connections between the 'inert' and hence 'non-regulating' things in nature, can properly accommodate the Gaia hypothesis.⁸

Thus, although both Spinozistic deep ecology and the Gaia hypothesis offer worldviews on which we can be responsible to nature in the required sense, they must

⁸ There seems to be somewhat opposing stances on this issue within the scientific community concerned with the Gaia hypothesis. On the one hand, the historic Amsterdam Declaration, signed by several scientific bodies at a major conference in Amsterdam in 2001, accepts aspects of the Gaia hypothesis, cf. Lovelock (2003). On the other, Lovelock himself, in his autobiography *Homage to Gaia* (2000), maintains that his earlier talk of Earth 'regulating' and otherwise acting intentionally is just a metaphorical way of speaking, and not something to be taken literally.

be rejected. Which option does this leave the non-anthropocentric environmental ethicist with?

4. TOWARDS A FICTIONALIST CONCEPTION OF NATURE

In this section I shall argue that the option is one of *fictionalism*. One of our assumptions so far has been that in a metaphysics of nature allowing for the *responsibility to* relation to hold to it, nature should literally be person-like. That is, our assumption has been that we should be *realists* about nature as person-like. This assumption is rejected by *non-realists*. There are many kinds of non-realism about a given domain, but the one I shall consider here is fictionalism, specifically the view that nature as person-like is a fiction, something that only exists as a fiction.⁹ But we can still talk about it as if it really exists as such (and not just as a fiction). We can also still have serious attitudes towards it and display behaviour towards it as if it were real, including moral attitudes and moral behaviour.

Fictionalism in metaphysics, which goes back to Hans Vaihinger's philosophy of *als-ob* (1911), has been influential in 20th-century philosophy of science (for a discussion, see Fine 1993). Many non-realist interpretations of theoretical or abstract entities in science (e.g. neutrons), mathematics (e.g. numbers) and philosophy (e.g. possible worlds) have been fictionalist in order to maintain a metaphysics that does

⁹ There is a distinction between a linguistic thesis of fictionalism and an ontological thesis of fictionalism (Eklund 2015). On the former, the expressions for certain entities do not refer to the entities, although we might engage in the discourse in case as if they do. On the latter, the entities at issue do not exist, or exist merely as fictions. The distinction is considered important in much of the semantically orientated literature on fictionalism in analytic philosophy, but we do not need to pay attention to it in the present paper. Here we can freely swap between talk of fictional semantics (regarding expressions, concepts, discourse, etc.) and talk of fictional ontology (entities) according to what is most suitable.

not clash with certain naturalist or empiricist beliefs in metaphysics and epistemology. On this view, we need to talk of these theoretical or abstract entities, and take this talk extremely seriously, but we do not believe that there are real entities corresponding to our talk. All our attitudes and behaviour towards them are, and should be, just like they would be if the entities were real. Similarly, on the fictionalist approach to nature as person-like, we are responsible to it without us having to postulate a 'pseudo-person'.

However, if fictionalism is tenable in our case, one might immediately be puzzled by why we spent effort on trying to find a realist theory. Could we not just have skipped the previous section altogether and gone straight to this one? I do not think so. I think realism for any given domain is preferable and that, as far as possible, it should be our default position. If the domain of entities at issue consists of (relatively) uncontroversial entities, such as ordinary mid-sized objects like tables, chairs, plants, animals, etc., realism about it does not even need to be argued for. (Of course, specific parts of it, such as colours and other secondary qualities, can still be given a non-realist interpretation at the same time.) Instead, the onus of proof is on the non-realist. By contrast, if the domain consists of entities with controversial ontological status, such as neutrinos, numbers, possible worlds or nature as person-like, the direction of the onus of proof is the converse. Perhaps we ought only to hold that realism is the 'preferred' and not also the 'default' position for such non-ordinary entities, given this change in the burden of proof. At any rate, some philosophers, especially those with a fondness for Quinean desert landscapes, will consider non-realism to be the preferred position for *any* domain, if not the default one. Be that as it may, I shall assume that non-realism (fictionalism) about nature as person-like is now our best option, since, as we saw in the previous section, the two realist candidates fail.

Someone might worry whether or not fictionalism in the mentioned areas traditionally belonging to ‘theoretical philosophy’ can be extended to environmental ethics, a part of ‘practical philosophy’, as ethics, aesthetics, political philosophy, etc. are called in Scandinavia. One reason for such a worry might be the common conviction that there is an unbridgeable gap between the descriptive and the normative. Indeed, nature as person-like should be capable of being object of suitable moral attitudes and behaviour. In particular, it should of course be a suitable object of the *moral* relation of *responsibility to*. It should not merely be descriptively adequate, so to speak, like successful fictionalist interpretations of electrons, numbers, and possible worlds. Fortunately, fictionalism is not just an influential position in metaphysics and philosophy of science. In metaethics, moral fictionalism is a major position (cf. e.g. Kalderon 2005). Even though on moral fictionalism moral discourse or entities are given a fictionalist interpretation, this does not detract from their having normative force. It is beyond the scope of this paper to assess moral fictionalism, but at least its prominence in metaethics suggests that that a fictionalist solution to our problem cannot be dismissed due to a putative fact–value gap.

However, the main problem for a fictionalist solution does not concern any dichotomy between the descriptive and the normative. It concerns the very fact that a fiction is precisely a *fiction* and hence not real. This brings to mind the so-called ‘paradox of fiction’ of philosophical aesthetics. This is the apparent paradox that we seem to have genuine emotional responses to fictional characters, despite the fact that we *know* they are merely fictions. Jerold Levinson provides a concise portrayal of the paradox: ‘Since fictional characters do not exist, and we know this, it seems we cannot, despite appearances, literally have towards them bona fide emotions – ones such as pity, love, or fear – since these presuppose belief in the existence of the

appropriate objects' (1990, p. 79).

Kendall Walton (1978) puts forward a plausible account of our emotional attitudes to fictional characters, which dissolves this 'paradox'. He argues that they are different from genuine feelings, but still very similar. At its centre, his account has the notion of *make-believing*: he argues that when we are engaging with fiction we are engaging in a game of make-believe. This notion can be illustrated by the make-believing of children. If a child make-believes that she is being chased by a monster that wants to eat her, her fear is not genuine, for otherwise she would not want to continue the game. But her 'quasi-fear', as Walton calls it (*ibid.*) is close enough to the real thing for us to call it 'fear' (cf. Le Poidevin 1996, p. 116), and similarly for other emotional attitudes to fictions.

However, there is obviously a crucial difference between our relationship to fictional characters and the required relationship to nature as a fiction. Our *desideratum* is to be responsible *to* nature as person-like, but we are precisely *not* responsible *to* fictional characters. Nor do we have any other genuine moral attitudes to them. We might have deep 'quasi-empathy' for Jocasta and Oedipus on the stage, but we do not feel responsible to them as the tragedy unfolds. Fortunately, *religious fictionalism* points to a way round this problem. Religious fictionalism is a view famously argued for by 'radical theologian' Don Cupitt (e.g. 1997), as well as by a number of philosophers, such as Andrew Eshleman (2005; 2016), Natalja Deng (2015) and Robin Le Poidevin (1996; 2016). Roughly, it is the view that the supernatural entities of religion (God, resurrection, afterlife, etc.) exist only as fictions, but that religion is nonetheless perfectly viable. An excellent account of it is found in Le Poidevin (*ibid.*).¹⁰

¹⁰ Le Poidevin's religious fictionalism is modelled on instrumentalism in the philosophy of

Firstly, Le Poidevin models his account of emotional engagement with religious language on Walton's theory of emotional engagement with fictitious characters. Le Poidevin argues that we can have genuine feelings to the fictions of religion by make-believing that they exist. Secondly, just as Walton's account in an important sense puts practice before theory – the practice of our *engaging* with fiction before the theoretical question of how we can have apparently genuine emotional attitude to mere fictions – Le Poidevin focuses on how we can engage in religious practice rather than on the theoretical issue of how to interpret religious language (e.g. whether or not it should be interpreted in a realist or non-realist fashion). So, on this account, to 'engage in religious practice is to engage in a game of make-believe' (1996, p. 119).

Religious fictionalism can now be seen to be attractive to us for the following reason. If there is one part of human life where it is small step from the descriptive to the normative, it is religion (for the believer). Indeed, on religious fictionalism, by engaging in the above way with religious discourse as fictional, the believer has a constant source of morality, so to speak. Eshleman expresses this point elegantly when considering a religious fictionalist who he imagines kneeling in prayer at an altar in a church or temple. Her reason for doing that of course cannot be that she believes God exists and requires her to do it. Rather,

[W]e should understand the religious fictionalist as acting as if the claims are true, because she regards engagement with religious claims [as fictional] to be a useful

science. There is distinction between a hard instrumentalism that denies that scientific theories are true or false and a soft instrumentalism that does not make any claims about their truth. Just like the distinction between semantic and ontological fictionalism mentioned in the previous footnote, this one matters a lot in some contexts, but just as with that one, we do not need to consider it for our purposes.

causal means to recognizing and being moved by reasons of another kind, most notably, *moral* reasons. (2015, p. 167) [My emphasis]

It is not my job in this paper to explain further central notions of religious fictionalism, such as ‘make-believe’ or ‘engage with religious practice’, since for our purposes, I think it suffices to have a pre-theoretical or naïve understanding of what such terms involve. Nor shall I try to compare religious fictionalism with any of its competitors. All I need is the fact that it is a plausible solution to how a discourse (religion) with a fictionalist interpretation can nonetheless offer a workable ethics. For religious discourse and discourse of nature as person-like *prima facie* have a lot in common. Both of them are combining *Weltanschauung* with extensive moral claims *and* are referring to apparently supernatural entities, be it God, the afterlife, or nature as person-like. To account in detail for such similarity is also an enterprise that is beyond the limits of the present paper. Here, I shall simply assume that religious discourse is *relevantly similar* to discourse of nature as person-like. Thus, if fictionalism can succeed for religion, one would think it also stands a good chance to meet our desideratum.

The reason it can is an argument from analogy. Let us state this argument somewhat formally, since doing this both brings out very concisely what exactly I have attempted to do in this section and whether or not this argument is reasonable. The general form of an argument from analogy has two premises, the first of which asserts that a certain topic and an analogue are relevantly similar and the second of which concerns the feature of the analogue desired of this topic (Meinertsen 2015). The argument here exemplifies this general form of arguments from analogy as follows:

(P1) Discourse about nature as person-like is relevantly similar to religious discourse in that both have the features F1,..., Fn.

(P2) Religious discourse has the additional feature of being plausibly interpreted in the manner of (religious) fictionalism.

∴ Discourse about nature as person-like has the feature of being plausibly interpreted in the manner of (religious) fictionalism.

Is this argument from analogy reasonable? Briefly, the answer to this depends entirely on two further questions. The first is whether or not the claim of relevant similarity asserted in (P1) is true. I took it to be true by assuming it, although I did give a *prima facie* argument for it.¹¹ The second, corresponding to (P2), is whether or not fictionalism really *is* a plausible interpretation of religious discourse. I believe it is, but it is not my job to defend this view; instead, I have supported it by citing important proponents of it. Fortunately, that will do in the present context. So given my assumption in (P1), it follows that the argument is reasonable.

5. CONCLUDING NOTE

The relation of *responsibility to* needed by non-anthropocentric environmental ethics requires that nature be person-like. Passmore was right about this. But he was wrong to reject it for that reason. The two realist views we examined were serious candidates, but unfortunately incompatible with certain basic common-sense or naturalist assumptions and therefore unacceptable. The solution that salvaged *responsibility to*

¹¹ In future research, I intend to defend this assumption in more detail, i.e. argue that discourse about nature as person-like and religious discourse both have the features F1, ..., Fn.

nature was two-pronged: first, we let go of the belief that discourse about nature as person-like should be realist; second; we interpreted this discourse in the manner of religious fictionalism. In short, one can be a fictionalist about nature (as person-like) in environmental ethics without sacrificing the required non-anthropocentric morality. To put it somewhat paradoxically, one can believe we can, and should, be responsible to nature – without really believing that there is something to be responsible to.¹²

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