

‘SUPERNATURAL WILL’ AND ‘ORGANIC UNITY  
IN PROCESS’: FROM SPINOZA’S NATURALISTIC  
PANTHEISM TO ARNE NAEISS’ NEW AGE ‘ECOSOPHY T’  
AND ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

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Very few notions – amongst those someone may come across while rummaging the history of ideas<sup>1</sup> – are less obscure and ambiguous than the one signified by the term *supernatural*<sup>2</sup>. Yet it could not have been otherwise, since the very word itself foreshadows nothing but puzzling ambiguity. For, to be specific, we tend to use the term *supernatural* when we need to describe – or, in general, to refer to – everything that transcends what is thought to be natural<sup>3</sup>, to wit what we tend to perceive as attuned to the natural order of things and events<sup>4</sup>. However, as for what is actually *natural*, and in what exactly that *natural order* consists, hard-

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1. “the natural-supernatural antithesis has had its own complex history in Western thought.”, A. I. Hallowell, “Ojibwa Ontology, Behavior, and World View,” in *Culture in History: Essays in Honor of Paul Radin*, Stanley Diamond (ed.), Columbia University Press, New York 1960, p. 28.

2. “The supernatural may mean that which is above the created order of things. It may mean the spiritual as distinct from the physical. It may mean the miraculous, considered as an event outside the course of nature, produced by divine action. Popularly, it means ghosts. Ecclesiastically, it has been used to mean a sort of hypostasized grace conveyed by the church and sacraments. Here is confusion of every kind. No very cheerful prospect lies before one who would discuss the supernatural. It is like wrestling with Achelous”, Edward S. Drown, “What Is the Supernatural?”, *The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (Apr., 1913), p. 144.

3. “In order to say that certain things are supernatural it is necessary to have the sentiment that a natural order of things exists, that is to say, that the phenomena of the universe are bound together by necessary relations, called laws”, Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, Free Press 1965, p. 41.

4. “That is above nature; belonging to a higher realm or system than that of nature; transcending the powers or the ordinary course of nature”, Oxford English Dictionary.

ly could one assume<sup>5</sup> that there is even rudimentary unanimity among those thinkers who have employed their spirit with the matter in question. Therefore, whether one wishes to deal with the supernatural as an isolated term, or in relation with any other being or circumstance, it is utterly impossible to do so if prior to that he doesn't endeavor to define the import – *grosso modo*, at least – of the term “natural”.

## I.

The most habitual and common use of the term *natural* corresponds to that which is – or could be – property of our experience, irrespective of whether that experience is mental or physical, viz. whatever can be known, perceived, determined and categorized by human mind, after it has bumped into and passed through the channels of our senses. The cooperation between our intellectual and sensual capabilities in relation to the usurpation of what is considered to be “natural”, is extremely crucial for us to presume something as such, even if we are not familiar with – or sympathetic to – the duality of the Kantian Theory of Knowledge. That is inasmuch as the human mind, to be specific, is characterized by the intrinsic ability to conceive and contemplate on beings or events, which anything but belong to the natural order of things, beings such as Pegasus or the Valkyries, for instance, and counterfactual realities like the Purgatory or the Valhalla. Our sensory equipment, on the other hand, is quite susceptible to offering sensational data which could in no way be appreciated as properties or attributes of *natural* entities and events. A vast series of totally convinced miracle eye witnesses serves as an irrefutable proof for this. Miracles, though, could on no account presumed to be natural phenomena. Accordingly, any being or event which is not apprehensible by the senses and the intellect at the same time, could count as supernatural.

Another meaning of the term supernatural, close to the one previously cited, is that which implies the existence of entities that do not belong to the wholeness of created things. According to that view there exist two separate orders of beings: created and uncreated ones, to wit the world

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5. “the word nature is probably the most equivocal in the vocabulary of the European peoples”, Arthur Lovejoy and George Boas, *Prolegomena to the History of Primitivism, and Related Ideas in Antiquity*. chap. 1, Johns Hopkins Press 1935, p. 12.

and the beings it entails, and God along with his acts, or the divine substance in general. Resulting from that approach, which we could call restricted, there is an elaborated one as well, according to which, the term *supernatural* refers to superhuman or super earthly beings, such as angels, demons, the heavens etc.

Apart from these imports of the term *supernatural*, there is a somewhat more vague third one, on which we intent to focus a bit intensely. According to that view, the employment of two distinct orders – or natures – of being is not at all valid. Therefore the distinction between the *natural* and the *supernatural* is a forged one, superimposed to our comprehension of the world by the limitations of our mind. The distinction in question only *prima facie* appears to explain the nature of beings, but it proves to be unstable when subjected to thorough scrutiny<sup>6</sup>. For actually nature is inclusive of all beings or events, that run into our sensual and intellectual capabilities<sup>7</sup>. Since our intellect has the ability to capture the import of God, then God is as natural as a butterfly. According to Theodore Parker, God is the most natural of beings<sup>8</sup>. Duns Erigena believed that nature includes all things, created and uncreated<sup>9</sup>. Even miracles are

6. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and some of the energies granted to men born of the spirit may be manifested only on certain conditions and on rare occasions; and therefore be always wonderful and miraculous, though neither disorderly, nor unnatural. Thus St. Paul's argument to the Agrippa Why should it be thought with you a thing impossible that God should raise the dead should be suicidal, if he meant to appeal to the miracle as a proof of the authority of his mission. But claiming no authority, he announces as a probable and acceptable fact the opening of a dispensation, in which it was as natural for the dead to be raised, as for the Gospel to be preached to be preached to the poor, though both the one and the other were miraculous signs that the Master of Nature has come down to be Emmanuel among men, and that no prophet was in the future to look for another", John Ruskin, *On the Old Road: A Collection of Miscellaneous Essays, Pamphlets, etc*, volume 2, Adamant 2005, p. 362-3.

7. According to the famous Pablo Picasso's adage: "Everything is a miracle. It is a miracle that one does not dissolve in one's bath like a lump of sugar".

8. George T. Knight, "The Definition of the Supernatural", *The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (1910), p. 311.

9. "Saepe mihi cogitanti, diligentiusque quantum vires suppetunt inquiringenti, rerum omnium, quae vel animo percipi possunt, vel intentionem ejus superant, primam summamque divisionem esse in ea quae sunt, et in ea quae non sunt, horum omnium generale vocabulum occurrit, quod graece φύσις, latine vero *natura* vocitatur", Erigena Joannes Scotus, *Peri Physeos Merismou*, id est *De Divisione Naturae libri cinque*, Migne, Patrologia Latina, v. 122, 0441A

absolutely natural, if we abide by the beliefs of Friedrich Nietzsche and W. A. Brown. According to the former<sup>10</sup> miracles correspond to an inner human need, that of deliberate self-mockery<sup>11</sup>, which renders men reluctant to interpret natural phenomena<sup>12</sup>. In the latter's opinion, a miracle is the most natural of all events<sup>13</sup>. It is only a matter of perspective: a human act may be super-doggish, and a divine act superhuman, but both of them are absolutely natural, says Ruskin<sup>14</sup>. If the *natural* and the *supernatural* are so closely interconnected, as to be seen as interdependent and overlapping, then the boundaries of each one fade away in a manner which indicates that a borderline may even not exist at all. The natural and the supernatural become identical, so as one could maintain that either all natural things are at the same time supernatural, or the exactly

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10. "One kind of honesty has been unknown to all founders of religions and their likes -- they have never made of their experiences a matter of conscience and knowledge. "What did I really experience? What happened in me and around me then? Was my mind sufficiently alert? Was my will bent against fantasy?" -- none of them has asked such questions, none of our dear religious people asks such questions even now: they feel, rather, a thirst for things which are contrary to reason and do not put too many difficulties in the way of satisfying it -- thus they experience "miracles" and "rebirths" and hear the voices of angels!", Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff, Adrian Del Caro, ed. Bernard Williams, Cambridge University Press 2001, p. 180.

11. Christianity has done its utmost to close the circle and declared even doubt to be sin. One is supposed to be cast into belief without reason, by a miracle, and from then on to swim in it as in the brightest and least ambiguous of elements: even a glance towards land, even the thought that one perhaps exists for something else as well as swimming, even the slightest impulse of our amphibious nature -- is sin! And notice that all this means that the foundation of belief and all reflection on its origin is likewise excluded as sinful. What is wanted are blindness and intoxication and an eternal song over the waves in which reason has drowned" Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, trans. R J Hollingdale, Cambridge University Press 1997, p. 52..

12. "How's that? The "miracle" is only a failure of interpretation? A lack of philology?", Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. Marion Faber, Oxford University Press 2009, p. 46.

13. George T. Knight, "The Definition of the Supernatural", *The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (1910), p. 311.

14. "We have indeed come to use the words supernatural and superhuman, as if equivalent. A human act may be super-doggish, and a divine act superhuman, yet all three acts absolutely natural. It is, perhaps, as much the virtue of a Spirit to be inconstant as of a poison to be sure, and therefore always impossible to weigh the elements of moral force in the balance of an apothecary", Ruskin John, *On the Old Road: A Collection of Miscellaneous Essays, Pamphlets, etc*, 2<sup>nd</sup> vol., Adamant 2005, p. 363.

opposite. From that point of view supernatural is either considered as not at all existing, or as all-inclusive, since it embraces all beings and every event. Schelling adopts the latter view, insisting that nature, creation, is not the mere phenomenon and revelation of the Eternal, but it is rather the very Eternal itself<sup>15</sup>.

All three above mentioned approaches are seemingly quite legitimate, but though not helpful at all. That is because what they mainly do is to describe but not explain what supernatural is. They focus on how supernatural manifests itself in a world of natural entities, how it functions and what makes it distinct from what is usually called natural, but they enlighten us next to nothing on what really supernatural is, or as what should we be justified to perceive it.

The first approach in fact endeavors to describe that which *is not* supernatural. It proudly announces what we already know, to wit that supernatural cannot be grasped through the coordinated effort and cooperation of our sensory and intellectual equipment. But as for its real essence, hardly anything is added to our knowledge.

If we turn to the second view, we can only convince ourselves that there exist beings such as angels, demons, God etc. Yet we enrich our knowledge not even with the slightest idea about the properties or the essence of such beings, apart from the fact that they belong to a supernatural order of existence. Actually it is like if someone was asking: "What does the Supernatural consist in?", and receiving the answer: "It is the God, the angels, some demons etc." However, when he expectedly comes to ask: "So, what exactly God, demons, angels etc. are?" he is surprised to be informed that: "They are just supernatural entities." At the end of the day, we evidently know nothing either about the supernatural, or about God, angels and demons.

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15. "in everlasting nature the godhead now recognizes its' own eternal nature and is from now on, albeit free with respect to nature and neither bound to nor grown together with it, nevertheless inseparable from it", Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling, *The Ages of the World: (fragment) from the Handwritten Remains*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Version, trans. Jason M. Wirth, SUNY Press 2000, p. 38 and "Nature should be Mind made visible, Mind the invisible Nature. Here then, in the absolute identity of mind inside us and nature outside us", Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling, *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature: as Introduction to the Study of this Science*, trans. E.E. Harris and P. Heath, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1988.

The third approach tends to identify the natural order of beings with the supernatural, leaving unaddressed the primary question about the essence of what is deemed to be supernatural, as well as the utterly justifiable suspicion that if natural and supernatural were indeed of identical essence, people would not have since the dawn of time felt the urge to distinguish between these two notions. It also produces a rather epistemological problem, which we are just about to address.

## II.

The last viewpoint unavoidably leads us to two seemingly contradictory tracks: we either have to altogether reject the notion of any kind of supernatural existence and, accordingly, any order of beings or reality to which the notion in question seems to correspond, or to completely identify and equate the natural and the supernatural order of beings. In any case, consequently, there exists only one order of beings, part of which – as Ruskin implies – is at a given time incomprehensible and inaccessible to us<sup>16</sup>. In other words, either a) whatever exists is natural, and only that actually exists, or b) whatever exists is supernatural, and only that actually exists. In both cases, the limitation and inadequacy of the senses and the intellect render us incapable of grasping the whole picture.

Although these viewpoints seem to be intrinsically contradictory, let us be allowed for the sake of our investigation to consider them identical. For the point, in which they differentiate from each other, is solely the aspect from which they face what they presume to be *the one and only* existing order of beings. Under the scope of the first view the one and only order of beings ought to be addressed to as natural, while the second one names it supernatural. Yet they both adopt a holistic view of reality, inasmuch they accept *only one* order of beings. They presume that whatever bumps into perception actually exists, irrespective of our ability to

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16. “Portenta esse Varro ait quae contra naturam nata videntur: sed non sunt contra naturam, quia divina voluntate fiunt, cum voluntas Creatoris cuiusque conditae rei natura sit. Vnde et ipsi gentiles Deum modo Naturam, modo Deum appellant. Portentum ergo non fit contra naturam, sed contra quam est nota natura. Portenta autem et ostenta, monstra atque prodigia ideo nuncupantur, quod portendere atque ostendere, monstrare ac praedicare aliqua futura videntur.”, Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi *Etymologiarum sive Originum*, Liber XI, 3:1, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1911.

explain, understand or totally grasp it<sup>17</sup>. They also allow for other possible parts of the one and only reality, which so far have not become manifest. Yet comprehensible or incomprehensible, manifest or veiled, the actual order of beings is just one, and all entities exist in the same degree, regardless with their interaction to human perception.

### III.

Since all three above cited approaches leave open the question about the essence of the supernatural, let us be excused to proceed with – and modestly propose – an alternative one.

It really seems to be unattainable to directly grasp the notion of the supernatural. Thus, a crooked line of reasoning seems if not the only permissible, at least the most effective one. So let's leave aside for a while the obscure term *supernatural* and focus on what we perceive as natural. Albeit many definitions of the term *natural* have time and again been proposed, I feel that the most irrefutable approach would only but underpin the fact that natural is manifest to exist in harmony and under the control of the so called laws of nature. In other words, natural is only what can be explained by virtue of the laws of nature, or, at least, even if that is not possible at the present, we feel that in the future we could discover the natural laws who produce or govern it. That means that, even if the underlying law may not be evident or profound, the very being or phenomenon does not exist or take place *contrary* to any of the laws of nature. Every being or phenomenon that conforms to the laws of nature is presumed to be natural. But what exactly do we mean when we attribute the property of *naturality* to a being or a phenomenon? About everything that exists in the realm of the physical world we can ask whether "Whence?" or "Why?" In other words we can query its' efficient and its' final causes. Suppose someone observes the famous *La Pedrera*, the architectural masterpiece of Gaudi. We can ask "Whence?" and "Why?" it was built. By the first question we investigate the antecedent conditions

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17. "Hoc certe Varro tantus auctor portentum non appellaret, nisi esse contra naturam uideretur. Omnia quippe portenta contra naturam dicimus esse; sed non sunt. Quo modo est enim contra naturam, quod Dei fit uoluntate, cum uoluntas tanti utique conditoris conditae rei cuiusque natura sit? Portentum ergo fit non contra naturam, sed contra quam est nota natura", Augustini *De Civitate Dei Contra Paganos*, K.G. Sauer Verlag 1998, XXI, vii.

which lie behind the achievement, its' efficient causes, to wit the clay and the water of the bricks, the cement, the iron skeleton which sustains it, etc. But the enumeration of the efficient causes will apparently not suffice. For a building is something more than the raw material from which it was composed, just like an orchestral suite is much more than the notes on the composer's score. In order to fully explain the building as well as the suite, we have to ask "Why it was built or composed?", to wit we have to pin point and reveal its final cause, the purpose either of the architect or the composer. If we succeed in doing so, we feel that we have secured an ample explanation of the being in question. It is obvious that, while efficient causes belong to the dominion of nature, final causes do not. That is because final causes are narrowly tied upon the will of the doer, which obeys none of the laws of nature. This is the reason why natural sciences ever since Bacon are reluctant to examine final causes, while on the other hand are ardently directed to efficient ones. *Scientia est rerum cognoscere causas* and, in Bacon's words, the investigation of final causes is like a consecrated virgin, it produces nothing<sup>18</sup>. The laws of nature, to which every natural being, event or process obey, do offer a quite convenient regularity, something which does not at all apply to the functions of the will<sup>19</sup>. Although human will supersedes nature and its laws, it is not the very will what we tend to regard as supernatural. That's because human deeds, no matter how dependant on the will of the agent, are still bound together with their efficient conditions. Even in the most irrational human reaction, we can still detect efficient causes. Suppose a fellow of yours all of a sudden decides to cut off his limp. Though totally irrational, his act is still determined by antecedent conditions which lie beneath it, produce it or allow it to happen. An efficient cause, for example, for someone to amputate himself, might have been a momentarily lack of reason, or preexisting mental condition, even the fact that a razor was handy, etc. The final cause lies in the fact that he simply *intended* to mu-

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18. Francis Bacon, *Collected Works of Francis Bacon*, Routledge 1996, p. 56.

19. "And I say this, not because those final causes are not true and worthy to be inquired in metaphysical speculations; but because their excursions and irruptions into the limits of physical causes has bred a waste and solitude in that track. For other wise, if they be but kept within their proper bounds, men are extremely deceived if they think there is any enmity or repugnancy at all between the two." Francis Bacon, *The major woks*, Oxford University Press 2008, p. 199.



tilate himself. Efficient and final causes, the antecedent conditions as well as the purpose, are both quite evident.

Now let us return to the examination of the notion of *supernatural*. Whether Mother Mary appears or a spirit manifests itself through a psychic, although it makes perfect sense to ask "Why?", it is utterly meaningless to ask "Whence?". In other words we usually are able to make out some kind of purpose to the phenomenon, but we are helpless concerning its' antecedent conditions. But that just will not suffice for us to presume that something is supernatural. As we already have underpinned, not everything that falls out of the dominion of natural sciences could be presumed to be supernatural. Human will is not at all presumed to be supernatural, although it does not obey or conform to the laws of nature. Thus, in order to presume an event or being as supernatural, it has to imply or entail the existence of some kind of will, other than human. In other words, in order to consider something to be supernatural, it ought to have no efficient, but only final causes, which, in turn, reside in no human intellect. If we embrace that view, we are ready to accede to the idea that the supernatural is nothing more than the natural manifestation of a will residing in a non natural being, given that the only natural beings in the universe capable of forming and possessing will are humans.

#### IV.

So far we have endeavored to define supernatural as a form of non human will, which resides in no natural brain but manifests itself through natural phenomena, so as it can be perceived by human sensory or intellectual equipment. If this short text was dealing with the supernatural from the point of view of Metaphysics or Ontology, it ought to address a vast list of correlated ambiguities, concerning the essence of supernatural, the degree and the way of its' existence etc. Fortunately, our purpose is only to examine the interconnections between the existence of the supernatural on the one hand and human morality on the other, so we can promptly bypass such an insidious reef. What really matters in our inquiry is the importance of that supernatural will to the formation and function of morality. Concerning that issue there exist two opposing views: some hold that morality is only an aftermath of the belief to the supernatural or, at least, that moral rules are founded on and sustained

by the presumed supernatural will, to wit God, angels and demons. Others maintain that the formulation of ethics was only due to interrelations which were – and are – being formed in the framework of human society; hence morality is totally irrelevant to the existence of the so-called *supernatural*. Even if the belief in the supernatural ceased to exist, they insist, morality would neither vanish nor devitalize.

We will endeavor to exhibit that, whether the origins and the vivacity of morality are to be found in the belief in the supernatural or not, the appeal to an external, non human, supernatural will is devastating for the very core of ethics. In other words, we intent to show that ethics allow only for human will, by the sole virtue of which can moral agents be praised or blamed for their choices and deeds. Before we proceed with our argumentation, though, we ought to refer to all possible modes of existence concerning the supernatural, assuming – for the shake of the debate – that the supernatural actually exists and has some kind of influence over morality. Given that we can perceive the existence of a supernatural will by virtue of our sensory or intellectual equipment, it ought to be in some relation to the natural order. Consequently, the supernatural might [a] partake in nature, so as to be grasped through our senses in cooperation with our intellectual forces. It might also [b] abstain from nature, in which case intellect alone perceives the existence of it. Moreover, it could [c] identify with nature, a fact that would be perceived by both sensory and intellectual capabilities. Reason leaves no fourth alternative.

## VI.

The first [a] and the last [c] view call for panentheism and pantheism accordingly. The panentheistic aspect presumes a potentially omnipresent supernatural will, which substantiates nature, but does not identify with it. In the words of Tertullian, it might be presumed as pervading through the natural world, just like honey pervades the honeycomb<sup>20</sup>. If that is the case, then natural reality may – in some degree, at least – be

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20. “Stoici enim uolunt deum sic per materiam decucurrisse quomodo mel per fauos, at tu ‘Non’, inquis, ‘pertransiens illam facit mundum, sed solummodo apparens et adpropinquans ei, sicut facit quid decor solummodo apparens et magnes lapis solummodo adpropinquans”, Terulliani *Liber Adversus Hermogenem*, XLIV.

regulated by the supernatural agency. In other words the circumstances in which human agents find themselves are – in part, at times, or potentially – adjusted by something other than the laws of nature and their own agency. The panentheistic view presumes that nature identifies with – a part, at least – of the supernatural will, which supersedes it. According to Spinoza, the only substance that can possibly – by “possibly” he means logically – exist is God<sup>21</sup>. Matter and intellect can be nothing else than properties of God<sup>22</sup>, who is, anyway, infinite by all aspects and, consequently, as far as his attributes are concerned<sup>23</sup>. Everything which to us, humans, seems to exist is just a mode – or modification – of the infinite existence of God<sup>24</sup>.

According to the pantheistic aspect, all is God and God is all. Nature, universe and God are equivalent<sup>25</sup>. God identifies with the natural world. If that is the case, then separate beings are nothing more than manifestations of the divine essence, which reveals itself to itself. There is no borderline between the beholder and the spectacle anymore, between the doer and the deed, between the natural and the supernatural. Everything is part of an all-encompassing immanent abstract God who, as Saint Augustine puts it, “is a kind of womb of nature containing all things in Himself, so that the lives and souls of all living things are taken, according to the manner of each one’s birth, out of His soul which vivifies that whole mass”<sup>26</sup>.

Both panentheism and pantheism share the burden of common ontological and metaphysical inconsistencies, due to which they have been rejected by numerous thinkers and scholars during the past, as well as

21. “Except God, no substance can be or be conceived”, Spinoza Benedictus de, *Ethics*, tr. Edwin Curley, Penguin Classics 2005, Part I, P14, p. 9, and “It follows, second, that an extended thing and a thinking thing are either attributes of God or (by A1) affections of God”, *ibid.* Cor. 2, p. 10.

22. “From the necessity of the divine nature infinite numbers of things in infinite ways... must follow”, *ibid.*, Part I, P16, p. 13.

23. *Ibid.* Dem.

24. “Every mode, which exists both necessarily and as infinite, must necessarily follow either from the absolute nature of some attribute of God, or from an attribute modified by a modification which exists necessarily, and as infinite”, *Ibid.* P23, p. 18.

25. T. N. Pelegrinis, *Dictionary of Philosophy*, Ellinika Grammata, Athens 2005, pp. 449-450.

26. Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, tr. P. G. Walsh, Aris & Phillips 2005, IV:12.

at the present<sup>27</sup>. However, those who reject both pantheism and panentheism mainly focus on two points, to wit on agency<sup>28</sup> and on free will<sup>29</sup>. It is quite obvious that a pantheistic or panentheistic universe allows for neither<sup>30</sup>. Accordingly, there can be no praise or blame, for either there is no one to praise or blame – besides the omnipresent and omniscient God –, or because there exist no agents possessing free will, but only pawns who dispatch a pre determined divine plan. Spinoza, the most prominent naturalistic pantheist, rejects even the possibility of the existence of evil, since it is totally incomprehensible within the bounds of the one and only entity, that of divine essence. According to Spinoza the knowledge of

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27 “Ought not men of intelligence, and indeed men of every kind, to be stirred up to examine the nature of this opinion? For there is no need of excellent capacity for this task, that putting away the desire of contention, they may observe that if God is the soul of the world, and the world is as a body to Him, who is the soul, He must be one living being consisting of soul and body, and that this same God is a kind of womb of nature containing all things in Himself, so that the lives and souls of all living things are taken, according to the manner of each one’s birth, out of His soul which vivifies that whole mass, and therefore nothing at all remains which is not a part of God. And if this is so, who cannot see what impious and irreligious consequences follow, such as that whatever one may trample, he must trample a part of God, and in slaying any living creature, a part of God must be slaughtered? But I am unwilling to utter all that may occur to those who think of it, yet cannot be spoken without irreverence”, Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, tr. P. G. Walsh, Aris & Phillips 2005, IV:12.

28. “All pantheism must ultimately be shipwrecked on the inescapable demands of ethics, and then on the evil and suffering of the world. If the world is a theophany, then everything done by man, and even by animal, is equally divine and excellent; nothing can be more censurable and nothing more praiseworthy than anything else; hence there is no ethics”, Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, tr. E. F. J. Payne, Dover Publications 1966, Vol. II, Ch. XLVII.

29. “Concerning the rational animal himself,—that is, man,—what more unhappy belief can be entertained than that a part of God is whipped when a boy is whipped? And who, unless he is quite mad, could bear the thought that parts of God can become lascivious, iniquitous, impious, and altogether damnable? In brief, why is God angry at those who do not worship Him, since these offenders are parts of Himself?”, Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, tr. P. G. Walsh, Aris & Phillips 2005, IV:13.

30. “...[Spinoza]... who finds it good that God be both the agent and the victim of all the crimes and miseries of man ... that there should be wars and battles when men are only the modifications of the same being, when consequently, only God acts ... is what surpasses all the monstrosities and chimerical disorders of the craziest people who were ever put away in lunatic asylums ... modes do nothing; and it is the substances alone that act and are acted upon”, Pierre Bayle, *Historical and Critical Dictionary*, trans. Richard Popkin, Bobbs Merrill, Indianapolis 1965, p. 311.

evil does not correspond to an actual entity, it is nothing but inadequate knowledge based on inadequate ideas, to wit ideas that do not adequately refer to God. Human beings may entertain inadequate ideas – and, consequently, the idea of evil – due to their restricted and imperfect nature. Spinoza refers to the imperfection of human mind using the term “passiveness”. An active mind knows no evil, entertains no evil emotions, and may even become able to look upon reality under the scope of eternity. *Sub specie aeternitatis* no evil exists, since the divine essence can only be infinitely good. The specific evil deed or unhappy issue, if placed within the major context of existence, is revealed to be utterly good. What Spinoza does is nothing more than to recognize and endeavor to confront an inconsistency which is intrinsic to both pantheism and panentheism. The evident dominance of evil over the natural world can not easily reconcile with an infinite, omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient and perfect God<sup>31</sup>. Thus a pantheist ought either to deny the existence of evil or that of God<sup>32</sup>. Spinoza obviously opts for the first alternative and rejects the actual existence of evil and, consequently, that of sin; hence he totally casts away ethics from human interaction. According to Spinoza, the notion of evil is an aftermath of the imperfect human nature, of its inaptitude to grasp and comprehend adequate ideas. Like Socrates he associates evil with ignorance, but, unlike the former, he does so only in the level of the Theory of Knowledge. While to the Greek philosopher evil deeds were actual consequences of ignorance, to his Hebrew fellow evil is only a phenomenal aftermath of actual intellectual inadequacy. To humans God works in mysterious ways, and what seems to be wrong, unfair, evil or sinful, is only a part of a divine plan totally incomprehensible to our restricted intellectual capabilities. Traditional ethics is nothing more than the official recognition and expression of human inaptitude to grasp the whole image. Such views were only likely to call forth the menace and counterblast

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31. Cf. Michael P. Levine, “Pantheism, theism and the problem of evil”, *Philosophy of Religion* 35: 129-151, 1994.

32. “Pantheists are bound to find the fact of evil (and especially moral evil) an enormous embarrassment. It is difficult enough to square this fact with belief in an omnipotent and infinitely loving Creator. It is much more difficult to square it with the view that an evil world is an actual expression of God’s perfect nature”, H. P. Owen, *Concepts of Deity*, Macmillan, London 1971, p. 72.

of Spinoza's contemporaries<sup>33</sup>, who excommunicated<sup>34</sup> him, anathematized him with the anathema wherewith Joshua anathematized Jericho and cursed<sup>35</sup> him "with all the curses in the Deuteronomy, even with the curse that Elisha pronounced to the children who, in consequence, were torn to pieces by the she-bears"<sup>36</sup>.

## VII.

Although both pantheism and panentheism seem intrinsically unable to encompass moral evaluation and ethical considerations, many thinkers have endeavored to reconcile ontological monism with independent agency, free will and personal ethics. Especially those who endorse the so called New Age movement tend to underpin the idea of ontological unity, considering it the touchstone of New Age ethics. Based upon unity, ethics can adopt a more ethical approach, since what is good and evil isn't the mandate of something outside of us, but just the result of the way we are all interconnected. Instead of being based on fear of divine punishment or hope of heavenly reward, in the framework of New Age philosophies ethics comes from a mutual respect for all things; the better Pantheistic ethical decisions come from an awareness of mutual interrelation, to wit the fact that any harm done to another is doing harm to oneself because

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33. "[His] is the most monstrous hypothesis that could be imagined, the most absurd, and the most diametrically opposed to the most evident notions of our mind", Pierre Bayle, *Historical and Critical Dictionary: Selections*, "Spinoza", Hackett Publishing Company 1991.

34. "We ordain that no one may communicate with him verbally or in writing, nor show him any favour, nor stay under the same roof with him, nor be within four cubits of him, nor read anything composed or written by him", Roger Scruton, *Spinoza*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1986, p. 10.

35. "Cursed be he by day, and cursed be he by night; cursed be he when he lieth down, and cursed be he when he riseth up; cursed be he when he goeth out and cursed be he when he cometh in; the Lord will not pardon him; the wrath and fury of the Lord will be kindled against this man, and bring down upon him all the curses which are written in the Book of the Law; and the Lord will destroy his name from under the heavens; and, to his undoing, the Lord will cut him off from all the tribes of Israel, with all the curses of the firmament which are written in the Book of the Law; but ye that cleave unto the Lord God live all of you this day!", *ibid.* p. 9.

36. Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy*, Touchstone 1967, p. 569.

what harms one harms all. Much like Socrates and Spinoza, New Age thinkers bind together knowledge and morality.

An influential New Age philosophical system that endeavors to reconcile monism with ethics is *Ecosophy T*, brainchild of the recently late Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess, one of the most prominent of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Ecosophy T is actually Naess' ontology, from which he attempts to derive moral maxims<sup>37</sup>.

According to Ecosophy T the whole universe constitutes an organic unity, which substantiates isolated entities. There exist transparent – though firm – bonds between individual beings, by which they are indissolubly interconnected. Those bonds are not at all *accidents*, attributes which may or may not belong to a subject, without affecting its essence. On the contrary, they constitute essential properties, since if they are fractured, the specific being abolishes its personal identity, its essence. Every individual exists as such only due to the bonds by which it is interrelated with other beings. Every fractured bond reduces the specific being's essence, and induces its transformation to something else. Entia actually derive their precise essence from omnipresent, imperceptible, innumerable bonds<sup>38</sup>. There can not exist distinct, isolated beings<sup>39</sup>, individuals *in vacuum*.

37. "By an ecosophy I mean a philosophy of ecological harmony or equilibrium. A philosophy as a kind of sofia (or) wisdom, is openly normative, it contains both norms, rules, postulates, value priority announcements and hypotheses concerning the state of affairs in our universe. Wisdom is policy wisdom, prescription, not only scientific description and prediction. The details of an ecosophy will show many variations due to significant differences concerning not only the 'facts' of pollution, resources, population, etc. but also value priorities", Arne Naess, "The Deep Ecological Movement: Some Philosophical Aspects", *Philosophical Inquiry* 8, 1986, p. 18.

38. "The deep ecology movement rejects the human-in-environment image in favor of the relational, total-field image: organisms as knots in the biospherical net or field of intrinsic relations. An intrinsic relation between two things A and B is such that the relation belongs to the definitions or basic constitutions of A and B, so that without the relation, A and B are no longer the same things. The total-field model dissolves not only the human-in-environment concept, but every compact thing-in-milieu concept— except when we speak at a superficial or preliminary level", Arne Naess, "The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement", *Inquiry* 16, 1973.

39. "We can make no firm ontological divide in the field of existence... there is no bifurcation in reality between the human and the non-human realms... to the extent that we perceive boundaries, we fall short of deep ecological consciousness" Fox Warwick, "Deep Ecology: A New Philosophy of Our Time?", *The Ecologist* 14, 1984.

Those thinkers who abide by that view maintain that the whole net of interrelations between entities is ontologically prior to the very specific entity, insofar as individualities are nothing but manifestations of those interrelations or, to be more precise, *loca* in which the above mentioned manifestation materializes<sup>40</sup>. If beings are viewed as such, and if the only way they may exist is just as co-existence and correlation, it is utterly misleading to refer to *beings* instead to a *sole, extended one*. A human being, for example, and the forest which surrounds it, are nothing but fractions of the very same essence. In matter of fact, they are so closely connected, so as they could not be perceived as separate from each other, since the person distinct from the forest and the forest distinct from the person cease to be what they formerly were, when viewed under the scope of the between them existing interconnection<sup>41</sup>.

If individuals – human as well as non human – exist in the way they exist due to a vast net of infinite relations, by which they are interconnected to other beings, it is evident that the diminishing of those relations would only lead to a deterioration of their very essence. In other words, the depilation of the nearby forest deprives *you* not only of the very forest, but at the same time shatters a group of formerly existing relations between you and the trees, the brooks, the birds and animals who used to dwell in it etc., relations who decisively used to *determined* your essence. Thus *you* are ineffably mutated to something else, definitely different from what *you* used to be, *you* are impoverished and reduced to an elemental state of being. Every species which vanishes reduces *your* capability and potential of forming relations, leading thus to ontological destitution, since not only a species is annihilated, but also those who remain are deprived of the ability of forming relations and bonds with the extinguished one. On that account *biodiversity* as well as *bioexuber-*

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40. Freya Matthews, "Relating to Nature: Deep Ecology or Ecofeminism", *The Trumpeter* 11 (4), 1994, p. 159.

41. "For some people however, this change of perspective follows from actions on behalf of Mother Earth. *I am protecting the rainforest* develops to *I am part of the rainforest protecting myself. I am that part of the rainforest recently emerged into thinking*. What a relief then! The thousands of years of imagined separation are over and we begin to recall our true nature. That is, the change is a spiritual one", John Seed, "Anthropocentrism", in B. Devall and G. Sessions (eds.), *Deep Ecology: Living as If Nature Mattered*, Gibbs Smith, Layton 2001, p. 199.



ance in the framework of Ecosophy T both obtain normative value<sup>42</sup>. They cease to be descriptive terms and become ideals, pursuits and aspirations for all beings, especially the moral ones, humans. The salvation of endangered species and the sustention of ecosystems become in the context of Ecosophy T an ethical imperatives<sup>43</sup>.

Naess recognizes that – besides humans – all other beings partake in that relational net rather passively, for they are unable to comprehend and affect the existing bonds between individuals. We, humans, on the contrary, are *vi naturae* apt to diminish or even extinguish species and, thus, relations between entities. One could easily jump to the conclusion that humans are considered to be moral agents exactly due to that, since we have not only the above mentioned ability, but also full consciousness of the fact that we possess it. According to Naess, though, this is not the case. The fact that humans destroy instead of protecting is not that much due to some kind of moral aberration; it is more due to a kind of cognitive fallacy, caused by ontological deficiency<sup>44</sup>. Abiding by the Socratic conception of morality, the Norwegian philosopher assigns moral vice to ignorance; human beings that do not respect and, consequently, do not protect the natural world, do so only because they fail to realize the density – or, even, the very existence – of the relational net, which correlates and thus substantiates separate entities.

The ontological relation between humans and their environment is actually one of direct dependence and intimate interconnection, so as a human being could not be taken for as such *in vacuum*, isolated from its environment<sup>45</sup>, unless we are theorizing while developing a thought experiment<sup>46</sup>. Humans are *da sein* or *in der Welt sein*, and exactly that is what

42. Arne Naess, "The Deep Ecological Movement: Some Philosophical Aspects", *Philosophical Inquiry* 8, 1986, pp. 11-31.

43. Arne Naess, *Ecology Community and Lifestyle*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1989, pp. 29-32.

44. Alan Drengson and Yuichi Inoue, *The Deep Ecology Movement: an Introductory Anthology*, North Atlantic Publishers, Berkeley 1995, p. 8.

45. "When we explore our own embodied, in place, ecological Self we discover our affinities with other beings as part of our humanity", Alan Drengson, "An Ecophilosophy Approach, the Deep Ecology Movement, and Diverse Ecosophies", *The Trumpeter* 14 (3), 1997, pp. 110-111.

46. Arne Naess, "The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement", *Inquiry* 16, 1973, p. 95.

renders them humans<sup>47</sup>. In order to fully develop itself, a human being needs to understand that, what it actually is and whatever it can become depends on the bonds it forms and sustains with other beings. That kind of understanding is enough for man to achieve what Naess calls *Self-realization!*, which, as Naess puts it, is not a descriptive, but rather a normative – that means, ethical – term. The normative function of the notion is underpinned by the exclamatory mark (!) which is used next to it<sup>48</sup>. *Self-realization!* for humans comes through thorough comprehension of their very essence. The depth and the degree of this comprehension is based on the understanding of the relational net that constitutes reality, as well as of the bonds between beings which are formed inside this net, since if it were not for them, no being would be what it is. Facing and accepting that indisputable reality the human being turns to a different form of existence; it opens itself to the world that surrounds it, breaks the bounds of its limited, restricted subsistence and achieves actual existence. According to Naess, a person is thus endowed by a broader, *extended Self* (whom Naess signifies with capitalized “S”, so as to underpin its essential difference to the former self), a self who supersedes the existential boundaries defined by its skin, a self who extends for as far as its ontological relations impose<sup>49</sup>. The new, *extended Self* constitutes a being, some parts – or members – of which actually lay beyond its physical body<sup>50</sup>. The realization of that fact on behalf of a human being unavoidably leads it to identify with the other beings of creation and, eventually, with the wholeness of creation<sup>51</sup>. Identification generates *compassion*, which is a natural human tendency towards every being we happen to identify with. By virtue of compassion the distinction between *me* and the *environment* vanishes, and it’s now clear that what I used to refer to as *myself* actu-

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47. “Our human self in the deepest sense cannot be separated from the earth from which we have grown”, Alan Drengson, “An Ecophilosophy Approach, the Deep Ecology Movement, and Diverse Ecosophies”, *The Trumpeter* 14 (3), 1997, pp. 110-111.

48. Alan Drengson, “Shifting Paradigms: From the Technocratic to the Person-Planetary”, *Environmental Ethics* 2 (3), 1980, pp. 221-240.

49. Paul Shepard, “Ecology and Man—A Viewpoint”, *The Subversive Science*, Houghton Mifflin Co., New York 1969, p. 3.

50. Arne Naess, “Self-Realization: An Ecological Approach to Being in the World”, *The Trumpeter* 4 (3), 1987, p. 36.

51. Alan Drengson, “An Ecophilosophy Approach, the Deep Ecology Movement, and Diverse Ecosophies”, *The Trumpeter* 14 (3), 1997, p. 111.

ally encompasses its *environment*, animate or inanimate<sup>52</sup>. Embracing that view Arne Naess discharges Ecosophy T from the obligation to ascribe moral rights or intrinsic moral values to the natural world, a task which for other moral systems has proven to be disastrous. Unlike other philosophical approaches, the monistic system of Ecosophy T holds that moral agents are not moved to their deeds concerning their environment by some kind of moral obligation, but due to deep understanding of the actual nature of the reality that surrounds them; having already realized that their very essence is nothing more than an intersection in the net of existence, moral agents act instinctively out of spontaneity; they vindicate the “interests” of the natural world not because they abide by some vague and obscure moral principle, but because they impulsively desire to do so. According to Naess’ Ecosophy T the prescriptive imperative – by virtue of which the will of moral agents is regulated – is solely the comprehension of the whole universe as a *unity in process*<sup>53</sup>. Hence moral agents care for and defend the best interests of all beings for the same reason parents hasten to care about their children: not because abstract meditation reveals to them that their offspring are conveyors of intrinsic moral value, but because they simply identify and sympathize with them<sup>54</sup>.

### VIII.

It is evident that Naess, like many New Age thinkers, opts for ontological holism in his effort to construe reality. Individual essence is not the *locus* where properties or attributes reside or manifest themselves, but it

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52. “When I realize that I don’t have any independent existence, that I am part of a food chain, for instance, then at a certain point Me-first and Earth-first become inseparable. I feel that’s the best position to be coming from—to realize one’s identity with the Earth. “Myself” now includes the rainforest, it includes clean air and water”, John Seed, “Deep Ecology Down Under,” in Christopher Plant and Judith Plant (ed.), *Turtle Talk: Voices for a Sustainable Future*, New Society Publishers, Philadelphia 1990, p. 199.

53. Fox Warwick, “Post-Skolimowski Reflections on Deep Ecology”, *The Trumpeter* 3 (4), 1986, p. 16.

54. “Someone endowed with ecological consciousness would care for nonhuman beings for the same reason that parents care for their child: not because moral reflection reveals that the child has intrinsic value, but rather because the parents *identify* with the child”, Kevin Doak, *Dreams of Difference: The Japan Romantic School and the Crisis of Modernity*, The University of California Press, California 1994, p. 21.

is mostly an *emergent*, the sum of infinite relations. Naess rejects the idea of a static and stable – though inaccessible – essence. Instead he prefers the dynamic holistic view, according to which the essence of a being is in constant modification and reformation, due to the relations it annexes with other beings. In the bottom line, these relations actually constitute the very essence of all beings. Therefore, *milieu* is ontologically prior to the individual, relations prior to essence, the whole prior to the part. In fact Naess presumes that individual entities are just the opportune and fortuitous forms of that whole at a given time. One could rightfully infer that Naess' ontological view is not a long cry from Spinoza's conception. Spinoza's God in Naess' Ecosophy T is now called *relational net*, but remains all-encompassing and all-substantiating. Both systems view individual beings as the sheer manifestation of a universal wholeness, a vague supernatural will, who arts mysteriously and in secrecy<sup>55</sup>. Spinoza's naturalistic pantheism – or, better, panentheism – is utilized<sup>56</sup> in the context of Ecosophy T to create a cosmic Self that includes “not only men, an individual human, but all humans, grizzly bears, whole rainforest ecosystems, mountains and rivers, the tiniest microbes in the soil and so on”<sup>57</sup>.

Nevertheless, such a cosmic self is thus broad, impersonal and transparent, so as it could not be seen as the self of a moral agent. No *deeds* can emanate from such a self, only *events* can take place around him<sup>58</sup>. Furthermore, what seems to be deliberate action is only an *emergent*, the outcome generated by the intersection of infinite translucent relations

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55. “Humanity surfaces in a vague and unearthly form to embrace everyone in a realm of universal guilt... that verges on the supernatural”, Murray Bookchin, “Social Ecology versus Deep Ecology: A Challenge for the Ecology Movement”, *Socialist Review* 8 (3), 1988, pp. 9-29.

56. Naess recognizes his debt to Spinoza: “he already felt a strong identification with Spinoza's *Ethics*. Already he had decided that he wanted to be a philosopher. He deeply trusted Spinoza and felt that Spinoza's account of his worldview and life's philosophy had shown the way to deep inquiry and practical action that leads to community, friendship, and joy.” Allan Drengrson, “The life and work of Arne Naess: an appreciative overview”, *The Trumpeter* 21 (1), 2005, p. 9, and “...he appreciated more fully how well his encounters with the mature philosophy of Spinoza had taught him how to have a sense for the whole of the world and life. This sense for a total view, which can only be spelled out in a fragmentary way”, *ibid.* p. 16.

57. Murray Bookchin, “Social Ecology versus Deep Ecology: A Challenge for the Ecology Movement”, *Socialist Review* 8 (3), 1988, pp. 9-29.

58. T. N. Pelegrinis, *Humans, Animals, Machines*, Ellinika Grammata, Athens 1987, p. 13.

which constitute the vast net of organic unity. Naess endeavored to relieve his New Age ontological approach from what has been the Achilles' heel for pantheism: the abolishment of personal ethics. He adopted the holistic view in order to justify spontaneous, intuitive and impulsive action on behalf of the moral agent. What he achieved, however, was to entirely cast away moral blame or praise, even the very existence of moral agents. If the borderline between me and the beings that surround me vanishes, then there remains no one for me to harm or benefit. Even if there were separate selves, and even if they could deliberately interact, in the context of a deterministic universe they could bear no moral responsibility<sup>59</sup>. For every moral choice, action or attitude would only be imposed by the relations formed in the framework of the vast net of organic unity. Hence an evil deed, a sin or a vice would only be an aftermath of a random intersection of ontological relations, one which nobody could disdain or demerit, since its existence would serve the elaboration of that relational net, rendering thus beings richer and broader. In other words, a world without evil would be a much indigent one, and the beings that constitute it would be impoverished. Furthermore, according to Naess' view what seems to be morally blameworthy, *sub species aeternitatis* – or, under the scope of *organic unity* – can only be necessary and inevitable<sup>60</sup>.

Holistic ethics are in fact no ethics at all. Every effort to found ethics on ontology or metaphysics has proven to be extremely unsuccessful, and quite risky a task. Ethics needs neither ontology nor metaphysics, for it is just a human convention, a social one. Ethics should only be an adequate and functional convention; there is no need that they are founded on unshakable, firm metaphysical or ontological ground.

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59. "So-called pantheistic systems have often been characterised and challenged in the assertion that they abrogate the distinction between good and evil, and destroy freedom. Perhaps one would express oneself quite as definitely, if one said that every such system fantastically dissipates the concept of existence", Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. D.F. Swenson and W. Lowrie, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1944, p. 111.

60. Russell Bertrand, *A History of Western Philosophy*, Touchstone 1967, p. 588.

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