

# Evolution, Religion, and an Ecstatic Naturalism

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There are some intriguing and inviting complexities around the twin concepts of *nature* and *naturalism*. For too many evolutionary biologists, and even evolutionary psychologists, who should know better, Nature with a capital “N” is rarely analyzed and when done so it is with the crudest of instruments. And for those of us who do know better, we register with some vexation that the reigning concept of *naturalism* has been flattened into a dull-witted colorless perspective that veers toward some kind of materialism; a belief in the exhaustive correlation of chance and law, alas, with no help from Peirce; a tendency toward a mind/brain identity thesis; an emergentism vis-à-vis consciousness (and the corollary rejection of panpsychism); a one-dimensional instrumentalism about the purely pragmatic role of thought or reason, here, without Dewey’s staunch preservation of value, norms, and even beauty; a rejection of so-called supernaturalism; and a methodological monism that shies away from first person or internal reportage in favor of an event and behavior driven model for adaptationism, and this without the more sophisticated notions of the “event” that have emerged in French thought.

Clearly, for we among the cognoscenti, this so-called naturalism has but little to do with the capacious understanding of the term that we have almost grown up with. From “our” perspective, the world of Dawson and Dennett is truncated, polemical, norm driven, and starkly removed from nature in its fuller sense. As a preliminary, and by way of contrast, I will lay out some of the commitments of a more philosophically inclusive understanding of naturalism and the nature it serves and honors.

1. Nature is all that there is, i.e., there is no nonnatural realm.
2. The concept of the *supernatural* actually denotes events and complexes within nature that have a vagrant, perplexing, or unnerving quality. For muscular materialists these events can easily be condemned to the “realm” of nonbeing, thus bringing inquiry and even query to an abrupt halt. But what is wrong with saying, for example, that ghosts are “in” nature, for where else would they be? Rather, the task is to ascertain in which respects a ghost prevails vis-à-vis more accepted complexes, and in which respects are some of its traits novel or hard to locate, either causally or from the standpoints of time and space, or even vis-à-vis consciousness and self-consciousness. To me it makes sense to ask if

a ghost has self-consciousness and is aware of the time process in, say, two ways as opposed to our one (roughly stated). I've been warned that this is "spooky naturalism" yet even the occasional *frisson* in the face of nature's indefinite complexity and explorability seems anything but giving license to supernaturalism.

3. The very word *nature* has no referent. There is no such thing as *the* nature, but only natures.
4. Nature is orders, not exhaustively constituted *by* orders, not "something" defined *as* orders, just orders. But there is no order-of-orders, no über order. For good or ill, there is a perennial aesthetic longing that is almost impossible to resist; namely, the hunger to round the circle, to have beauty on credit with no intention to pay, to have *cosmos*, *logos*, and infinite-self-referentiality, and, more dramatically, to elevate the good and the beautiful, perhaps one and the same, above being—and here we may think of Jean-Luc's Marion's move to outflank Heidegger by putting the question of being in the one-down position. Perhaps the worst aesthetic manhandling of nature is found in process pantheism, seemingly a gentile cousin whom it is alright to invite for English-style tea and crumpets. Alas, this cousin, who never seems to lack a dancing partner, has a shadow side that has been so cleverly hidden that it takes a supreme effort to see it. Among the many imperialistic doctrines, that is, inflated concepts that ride roughshod over the humbler miniworlds of ordinality, we see creativity; the extensive continuum, panpsychism; the above-noted infinite self-reference, obviously dear to the middle-Royce, a wonderful divine mind that keeps feeding and recommending eternal entities, which do get better fed than Santayana's slim-line essences, with, alas, no Big Recommender to dangle them in just the right way in front of ever-hungry super-tiny customers; and the corollary notion of a universe-wide realm of unstoppable internal relations. Would that we humble noncosmological metaphysicians could ever know so much. All of these ideas are aesthetic want-to-bes, willful posits that polish and burnish the rough edges of a nature that does not have the resources to support these Napoleonic predications (again, to support one iota or jot of creativity requires a death-infused struggle to push some free momentum up and out of adaptive habit). One of the most important messages to come out of the relatively young field of evolutionary psychology is that creativity is exceeding rare in nature, and has a highly ambiguous value when it does occur. While mutations are not equivalent to creative happenings, they share their fate; namely, that almost all mutations spell disaster for the host. A few work, but only within a shifting niche or microniche—in some cases manifesting the Baldwin Effect that argues that one creative organism *may* have a valuable trait that *could* be learned by others—obviously, this is not a Lamarck "inheritance" but a simple

habit that is there for however long it helps pay the bills. As for beauty, it is very, very expensive in nature, especially in the brutal realm of sexual selection and its oftentimes corollary, infanticide.

5. There is no one single trait found in each and every complex “in” nature. It is as absurd to say that nature is (only) matter as it would be to say that nature is only: actual occasions, monads, symbolic forms, *Geist*, substance, indivisibles in the void/vortex, or nonrelational noun-denoted objects. James, who had a genius for getting metaphysical mileage out of colloquial expressions, averred that nature was basically *stuff*. And that seems just right.
6. The divine prevails as an order *within* nature—the question always is, in what respects, in what ways, and in which modalities? Every discipline, should it have an interest, gets a crack at god. That being so, we can let go of Napoleonic ideas like: only cognitive psychology can get at the *real* so-called god; or only the self-disclosive history of religions can trace the (evolving?) contour of god; or only spirit-filled group ecstasies can, in a way, *be* god; or only an existential analytic can disclose the thrown-clearing of the anxious self as it passes from the shock of non-being into the elusive light of Being; or only a psychoanalytic analysis of primary and secondary narcissism, the childhood omnipotence of thought (Freud’s “explanation” for telepathy), and the oceanic feeling of the maternal (Freud via Kristeva but both surpassed by Otto Rank), or only a publicly verified born-again experience (James’s twice born) has any chance at getting at the majesty of god. Actually, there is nothing wrong with this tower of Babel, for how else could nature and the “divine” complex even “hope” to be rendered available to personal and communal query?

Is religion adaptive, maladaptive, a social virus, a mere byproduct, a mere spandrel, or a sad business caught, like an insect in amber, in the (real or alleged) evolutionary time lag? I should note that all of these discussions are purely subject driven. That is, the object pole barely exists, all reference is muted, and there is no sense that humans could be responding to something that comes *to* the human process from outside of projections, desires, and absurd utopian fantasies.

Let me try out the following: religion (insofar as we comfortable with such an indefinitely explorable term) is both adaptive (attachment, false-signal detection, cooperation, and meaning bestowing) and maladaptive (militancy, intergroup violence, intragroup policing, e.g., the “necessary” scapegoat, and the endless creation of false utopias, quickly becoming dystopias for all). Perhaps the maladaptive aspects are taking over in our globalizing world. Utopias (eschatologies or apocalypses) are both tribal and violent. Sadistic fantasy

material permeates all fundamentalist utopias. And even the more gentle versions, such as the liberal social gospel tradition, or the process pantheistic movement, find multiple *teloi* all glistening and pointing toward *the* grand telos that will bring the lion and the lamb together, thus ending the war of all against all that so vexed Hobbes. But we sane people (brights) know that this will never happen. Extinction is the only thing that could even remotely serve as a supertelos.

Yet if even Darwin failed to purge his universe of *all* purposes, how do the rest of us hope to do much better? Of all the metaphysical systems I know, Schopenhauer's, in *The World as Will and Presentation* (a more recent translation of *Vorstellung*),<sup>1</sup> comes the closest to destroying the concept of purpose in nature and in the human process. He is made of much sterner stuff than some of the current pantheists, who assert that god is both somehow equivalent to nature yet cognitively beyond nature in different modalities, a conception that both gives panpsychism some running room *and* sprinkles sugar discretely over Darwin so as to hide the overwhelming secondness and entropic violence pushing ever madly toward extinction after extinction.<sup>2</sup> One becomes an evo-

1. See Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Presentation*, vol. 1, trans. Richard E. Aquila and David Carus (New York: Pearson/Longman, 2008). The translation "presentation" seems to me to make the world(s) of space, time, and causality, much closer and more richly insistent.

2. I have laid out some of these critiques in "Toward a Transformation of Neo-Classical Theism," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 27 (Winter 1987): 391–406; "Naturalism, Measure, and the Ontological Difference," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 23 (Spring 1985): 19–32; "Being and Faith: *Sein und Zeit* and Luther," *Anglican Theological Review* 70, no. 1 (1988): 16–31, "Ordinality and the Divine Natures," *Nature's Perspectives: Prospects for Ordinal Metaphysics*, ed. Kathleen Wallace, Armen Marsoobian, and Robert S. Corrington, (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991), 347–66; "Ecstatic Naturalism and the Transfiguration of the Good," *Empirical Theology: A Handbook*, ed. Randolph C. Miller (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1992), 203–21; "Nature's God and the Return of the Material Maternal," *The American Journal of Semiotics* 10, nos. 1–2 (1993): 115–32; "Beyond Experience: Pragmatism and Nature's God," *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy* 14 (May 1993): 147–60; "A Unitarian Universalist Theology for the Twenty-first Century: Toward an Ecstatic naturalism," *Unitarian Universalist Voice* 3 (Fall 1997): 1–9; "Empirical Theology and its Difference from Process Thought," *Introduction to Christian Theology*, ed. Roger A. Badham (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 166–79; "My Passage from Pantheism to Pantheism," *The American Journal of Theology and Philosophy* 23 (May 2002): 129–53; "Ecstatic Naturalism," *Research News and Opportunities in Science and Theology* 3 (June 2003): 1–6; "An Appraisal and Critique of Alfred North Whitehead's *Process and Reality—Corrected Edition (1929 & 1978)* with Justus Buchler's *Metaphysics of Natural Complexes—second expanded edition (1966 & 1990)*, on my university home page, [www.users.drew.edu/rcorrington/publications](http://www.users.drew.edu/rcorrington/publications). Pertinent book reviews: *Alfred North Whitehead: The Man and His Works, Volume 1: 1861–1910*, by Victor Lowe, *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 25 (July 1987): 460–61; *Process in Context: Essays in Post-Whiteheadian Perspectives*, ed. Ernest Wolf-Gazo, *Transactions of the C.S. Peirce Society* 26, no. 4 (1990): 550–57; Hawthorne,

lutionary philosopher when the mass delusions of divine initial aims and their utopian modes of enfleshment, fade away and become seen as strange, but perennial, impieties against sovereign “nature.”

Some potentially exciting work lies ahead in the process of trying to deepen and expand the concept of the *meme*. On first glance the concept seems flat-footed and entirely too narrow to apply to the infinite unfolding and enfolding of the endless explorable symbolic forms of global cultures. Any lingering commitments to the model of information can only short-circuit detailed inquiry into the “tangled bank” of culture. If I said, for example, that German Expressionist painting in the tottering Weimer Republic is a meme, what exactly have I brought to the table? I fear that the dish may be empty. I want to say that that movement, so dear to the theologian Paul Tillich, is in some senses greater than me, greater and more fecund than my assimilative powers, even over time. And here I come out of and leave behind the religious closet. I have come to believe, as a number of us do, that religion has now become a pathogen, driven by what the great psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich called the *emotional plague*.

Both Tillich and his doctoral student at the Frankfurt School, Theodore Adorno, argued that art can now come to stand duty for meaning in a postreligious era—be it noted that Tillich died a Christian while Adorno eschewed all religious traditions. Their triadic formula: art conveys *gehalt* (ultimate import) through *inhalt* (content), as shaped by *Form* (form). Out of this dynamic and vibrating triad emerged what Tillich called a *gestalt of grace*. Note that this *gestalt* does not entail any kind of supernatural meaning. Rather, it comes from chthonic depths related to a depth unconscious that links the human process to what Spinoza called *natura naturans*, which I translate as “nature perennially creating itself out of itself alone.” No god, just *nature naturing*.

### *The Superiority of Art to the Religious Pathogen*

1. Art is nontribal. I can be transformed by Matisse and deepen my sense of color intensities yet also learn of the radiance of nothingness in Chinese landscape painting. Neither art form is exclusivist nor does either “demand” from me any ersatz truth claims. Art exhibits, it does not assert. Preferences are nonlethal.
2. Like mathematics and science (at their best) art is universal, and in a much richer sense than the type/token distinction would suggest. As thinkers we seem prone to privilege either the generic or the particular. Such biases

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*Process Philosophy, and Theology*, ed. Kane & Phillips, *SAAP Newsletter* 56 (June 1990): 31–33; and *The Philosophy of Charles Hartshorne*, Library of Living Philosophers, vol. 20, ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn, *SAAP Newsletter* 62 (June 1992): 14–21.

can have some tactical advantage for a while, but a healthy metaphysics must carefully coordinate the polarities over and over again. Phenomenologically, art gives itself to us as a richly essentializing momentum that brings us into what I call “the rhythms of the real.” Quick definition: Heidegger said it well (to paraphrase his *Sein und Zeit*)—phenomenology involves letting the given show itself from out of itself for itself. Yes, this sounds convoluted, but a little patient reflection shows that this is, or ought to be, what happens. Another quick and familiar definition: John Dewey referred to metaphysics as the enterprise that seeks “the generic traits of existence.” While Buchler was critical of Dewey’s definition for being too narrow, I think it serves well enough for everyday speech. In any case, to use language is to have a metaphysics—not much news for us, but shocking still to many.

3. Unlike religion, art does not unleash the will-to-power; that is, the drive to overpower rebellious “insiders” and smash the “idols” of “outsiders.” Cromwell can smash Anglo-Catholic church art, Taliban fundamentalists can blow up ancient statues of the Buddha, iconoclasts can reek havoc across Russia, and religious zealots can picket art museums for exhibiting dung on the Virgin, but the arts themselves actually still the beast of manic will by gathering their interlocutors into a depth-momentum that conveys a radiant emptiness strangely entwined with fullness. As philosophers we tend to shy away from getting too close to living archetypes that can both dazzle and engulf. But were we to become less reticent, I suspect that *Orpheus* would be our most congenial partner in the realm where the religious *sublates* itself into art—note, however, that this Hegelian term may be too metaphysically aggressive insofar as it is a fog-shrouded harbor for hiding the movements of religious triumphalism.
4. Finally, art is radical in its very nature. Adorno, who privileged the Modernism of *fin-de-siècle* Vienna, especially as embodied in the atonal and serial music of his friend and teacher Schonberg, insisted that great art breaks through the armoring of bourgeois culture and conveys, often unconsciously, a meaning that both judges us and grounds our own narcissism in something greater than self-important subjectivity. Art can lift us beyond tribe, beyond the tragic dialectic of inside/outside, and beyond the manic posturing of willful yet lethal utopias. Adorno was able to purge his radical Neo-Marxism of all Marxist utopias and revolutionary delusions by unfolding a *negative* dialectics that punctured all triumphalist views of the “inevitable” progress of History. Note well: Adorno reserved his highest opinion for two thinkers—his Doktor Vater, Paul Tillich, and his most important social/political corollary, John Dewey.

For decades now I have been committed to the view that a self-reflective Darwinism is, or should be, one of the foundational architectures of any hon-

est analysis/description of the human process, the orders of organic nature, and, perchance, the sacred (by innumerable names). Like many, I have watched with some appreciation as this paradigm slowly feels its way into new territory, sometimes being a little cocky and sometimes greatly puzzled—all as it should be.

Yet unlike evolutionary psychology, a “naturalism of a higher order,” to paraphrase Schleiermacher on piety, asks a different set of questions: how does individuation in nature become transformed in the human process (i.e., is there a distinctive *selving* process unique to humans?),<sup>3</sup> how do we trace identities across the innumerable orders that humans occupy (many of them never consciously known), or what are the many ways in which time and temporality correlate to identity, or can we gain any access to a nontemporal self-causing (Plato) order traditionally called the soul, or are there nonarbitrary normative values for personal and communal life? One of the things that Darwin can give us is a sense of what *can't* be done by most humans, and then, in a narrower circle, what maneuvering room we might have with our limited finite freedom. Schopenhauer argued in 1839 in his *On the Basis of Morality*, that consciousness is built in such a way that upon introspection it must see itself as free when, in fact, it is not. I have not read anything that can overturn his subtle arguments even though I would see some stirrings of freedom in humans with an unusual amount of surplus (i.e., not instrumentally committed) energy. For Schopenhauer this would be the case in the artistic genius.

Schopenhauer's thing-in-itself has no principle of individuation, no antecedent principle of sufficient reason/ground (the term is *Grunde* not *Vernunft*), absolutely no teleology of any kind, and nothing quite like Freud's death drive although death was a key *product* of the Will's willing. Earlier translators gave us “the will to *live*,” whereas it is now more helpful to think of “the will to *life*,” that is, the noumenal Will as the life force (*Lebenskraft*). This is sheer Darwinian fecundity, topsey turvy, with no grand plan and very little patience for microplans. One could say that the Will is sheer unconscious providingness (to use Buchler's key term). I have of late come to the conclusion that the two most important

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3. See my *Nature & Spirit: An Essay in Ecstatic Naturalism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1992), wherein I give an ordinal phenomenological description of the human process, the signs of community, Worldhood, and the four divine natures. This analysis of the divine inaugurates my attempt to move away from pantheism toward ecstatic naturalism and what I then called “ordinal monotheism,” but no longer do, instead, shifting to a description of sacred folds, especially in my *A Semiotic Theory of Theology and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). A Korean translation of this work by Iljoon Park, was published in 2007.

philosophers for helping us get past cotton candy Darwinism are Schopenhauer and Dewey. Jerome A. Popp's recent book on Dewey makes, it seems to me, a very strong case for Dewey's role as a key theorist of the philosophical foundations of evolution.<sup>4</sup> While he calls Dewey evolution's "first" philosopher, I would gently change the term to "second," but only in the temporal sense, not in the order of rank.

Schopenhauer took Kant's ethics in directions that for many auger some very important dialogue with evolutionary psychology and its patient exploration of the modes of altruism running from kinship (selfish genes?), to reciprocal (I will gladly repay you Tuesday), to some hoped-for mode of compassion for its own sake. Religion became an adaptive strategy for making sure that all altruism chains were properly monitored to detect and remove cheaters. But the problem of altruism outside of even the not-necessarily-genetic tribal alliance remains acute, especially under Pleistocene conditions of scarcity. What Schopenhauer labored so well to show us is that, in a way, Father Kant was right. Nothing in the realms of means can make the self become compassionate, especially when it hurts that self's survival and reproductive chances. The answer: burrow down into the "I think" and keep going through the schematism into the place where the noumenal, contrary to all the stipulated "regulations," can emerge. Kant brings us to what he knew was an abyss, and his *Second Critique* is concerned with giving us a push over the crest and into the realm prior to the twelve categories handed down to us from antiquity.

Like a good Paleo-pragmatist, Schopenhauer reenacted Kant's downward journey into the selving process by stressing the dramatic turn that comes when the mind, perhaps overly eulogized by Kant, gives way, often quite abruptly, to the flesh, the soma, the body that is an "objectification (*Objektivierung*) of the Will." While the concept of "objectification" remains elusive, it provides a strong (pragmatic) metaphysical model for the transit from empirical causality (ubiquitous for Kant and Schopenhauer—it takes no prisoners) to the underside of both body and brain—and loosely, I can add mind. Now we are at a tipping point where the depth notion of self, in its selving, can emerge within the conceptual matrix of religion, art, evolution, and my ecstatic naturalism.

I am increasingly persuaded that the great thought in Kant's entire life work is the one he expressed in the Conclusion to his *Critique of Practical Reason*: "Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and reverence, the more often and steadily one reflects on them: *the starry heavens above*

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4. See, *Evolution's First Philosopher: John Dewey and the Continuity of Nature* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007).



*me and the moral within me.*"<sup>5</sup> While Heidegger is not wrong to give pride of place to the darkling layers of the schematism vis-à-vis temporality and the transcendental imagination in Kant's *First Critique* (first edition only), nor is Cassirer wrong to tease out models for complex symbolization in a sophisticated "as-if" strategy, my sense is that Kant was actually thunderstruck by his discovery, however delusional, of a nontemporal, non-causally implicated, transtribal machinery for making valid moral judgments.

As Tillich-friendly thinkers would put it: Kant was almost deathly afraid of heteronomy, of the imposition of alien law (*nomos*) from the outside, and equally obsessive about securing autonomy against those same alien powers. On Kant's list for heteronomous agencies: any sacred text not fully subject to the judgment of reason; any belief in miracles; any belief in superrefined vibratory beings; any forced obedience to secular powers in religious matters (Kant's texts on this are perhaps overly subtle); and any outside revelation, especially if it insisted on a religious grounding for human morality. Thus Kant's system is dyadic at this point, but not at all points. Autonomy, that is, the freedom to legislate universalizable morality to myself, struggles to pull itself up out of the death-grip of heteronomy. It is a long hard road, and Kant relents somewhat in allowing the pilgrim to have some strong "as-ifs" to light the way; namely, a belief in a god who rewards the good will, a sense that the moral equation of the universe comes out even on the last day, a belief in a simple Platonic-style soul that is self-caused, and a strong belief in the noumenal freedom of the good will. However, any empirical or a posteriori images of these transnatural realities are means only for a demanding pilgrimage that is only fully consummated when these images dissolve into the bright light of *Aufklärung*.

I am neither the first, nor shall I be the last to suggest that Kant is at least slightly aware of the numinosity of the good moral will as having a dimension of theonomy (the law rooted in the sacred which simultaneously protects autonomy). While he would find the term "theonomy" distasteful, it doesn't follow that he couldn't become open to what the term denotes; namely, that theonomy is the depth-dimension that pours power, life, and meaning into fragile autonomy, but without imposing anything "religious" upon it. What, then, *is* our tipping point?

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5. From *Practical Philosophy: The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*, introduction by Allen Wood, trans. and ed. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 269. The *Second Critique* was published in 1787. Kant was in his early sixties when he wrote these lines.

Kant's moral law within is itself the (now) open gateway to Kant's own notion/experience of the Sublime, while this notion of the Sublime is (perhaps) the best gateway to Schopenhauer's notion of the Will to Life—fecund, strong, combative (usually tragically), sometimes cooperative (but often to increase the kill rate and lower the toll of predation), and filled with rich sexual displays that both vex and intoxicate the contenders.

My suspicion is that evolutionary psychology, no matter how capacious its methods and models become, is unlikely to find evidence (a Kantian “intuition?”) for a nontemporal, yet temporally located; nonspatial, yet spatially located; and perennially self-universalizing moral law within our species/*umwelt* constitution. But the Sublime, mathematical and dynamical for Kant, is found in each human process and in every human community, in however minimal a form. But two things must be said: the sublime is not confined to subjectivity, as, alas, Kant assumed, nor is its ontology in any way supernatural. But Kant does link, if in a gingerly way, moral feeling with the feeling of the sublime: “In fact, a feeling for the sublime in nature cannot be conceived without connecting it to a disposition of the mind that is similar to the moral disposition . . . ”<sup>6</sup> If evolutionary psychologists must stress the modalities of a nascent and always vulnerable subjectivity, philosophers can push through that sphere into a stronger nature ←→ self transactional perspective that will probe into the whence and the whither of the sublime. I believe that Kant is partly right when he avers that we can never bring a “real” whence or whither to the a posteriori table, but I also believe that Schopenhauer is right when he says that a different way of looking and, perhaps, a very different kind of fishing hole, can release flashes of light and color from the upper reaches of the unconscious of nature.

I remain reticent to get too muscular about imposing one term onto nature and its chthonic depths in/as *nature naturing*. But I will say that Schopenhauer's term the “Will” is the least worst. But one is somewhat in the position of Plotinus when pressed to talk about the One without using the term “emanation.” The One emanates and the Will strives, but beyond that predication is impertinent (to use a nice drawing-room term).

For Kant, beauty comes at us neat and well packaged, giving harmonic tonality to the ruffled soul, whereas the sublime is a great soul-shaking cataract (his own image) that threatens beauty's gentler reign. Well, and thus it often is,

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6. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. Paul Guyer, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews, The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 151.

but the nexus where the selving process, beauty, the Sublime, art, religion, and powerful adaptive strategies and pressures all come together is where an ecstatic naturalism feels most compelled to build its Aquatecture—more secure than the fluid avenues of Paris but less rigid than the neo-Gothic spires of Ox-Bridge.<sup>7</sup>

If human biological evolution is no longer possible, because it requires genetically closed populations, what then of “spiritual” evolution? I am deeply suspicious of grand schemes like that of Teilhard de Chardin where biological divergence makes a kind of phase transition into a converging *Noosphere* that is supposed to be the *telos* of the Earth. This Aristotelian *Mind* seems to have the ability to leave behind the dirty and nasty insults of blind efficient causality. A number of my students want to buy tickets to ride on this train. Who can blame them? Again Hobbes—it *is* often nasty, brutish, and short. But Beauty, as noted, that is another chapter. Hartshorne once told me that birds seem to enjoy singing beyond the immediacies of territory or sexual selection. For some, opening that door might invite animism back in after it has been beaten back by those who like it crisp and clean. For others, Beauty could partake of orders of relevance that are truly inexhaustible, and here, even after his pummeling by Schopenhauer, Kant can help us nontranscendental idealists with a vision of the Sublime (*das Erhabene*).

An ecstatic naturalism moves toward an aesthetic phenomenology of the sacred folds that emerge from the fierce self-othering of *nature naturing* as “it” moves ecstatically to eject semiotically dense momenta of meaning as it configures itself at discrete and distinctive loci throughout *nature natured*. These sacred folds are strikingly antientropic, seeming to regenerate metaphorical heat and order from the inexhaustible well of the underconscious of nature in its not-yet-in-time mode of preordinal expression. But this “expression” of nature’s depth dimension is not one with any specific whatness nor with any notion of *the* sacred history, whether of being or the divine. Note that the aesthetic and postreligious aspect of ecstatic naturalism has nothing to do with process-style aesthetic projections that mold and shape “nature” into pleasing shapes, while, strangely, denying that it is doing so.

Uncountable histories emerge, but there is no sense in which they have a cumulative direction or a single contour. For the ecstatic form of naturalism, and surely for others, History has long been a bloated category and that underneath it all reside the demonic would-bes that arch out over the rabble of “mere” histories to bring them into a tension-filled convergence that can only

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7. See my “American Transcendentalism’s Erotic Aquatecture,” in *Towards a Theology of Eros*, ed. Virginia Burrus and Catherine Keller, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 221–33.

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be the promised land. As gentle and guileless as process views of history seem, replete with creativity and congenial forms of novelty, their underlying imperialism won't escape notice forever. A more genuine evolutionary perspective knows full well that creativity, like purposes, is very expensive, and the costs are borne by other orders and complexes than the creator itself. Alas, predation can't be watered down by panpsychist fantasies and some kind of ontological creativity *an sich* that pays its own bills automatically.

The ecstasies of nature are not going anywhere, are not a unity, are not good or evil (until we encounter them and initiate a moral struggle), do not contain information or a blueprint for anything or anyone, and are not tribal in themselves because they live on the cusp between the prespatial and the spatial. Sadly, of course, sacred folds are quickly hijacked for tribal purposes. But in the power, shock, and magma of these deep semiotic folds, religious tribalism, deep in our evolutionary bones, can begin to loosen its grip.