

So is this a process theology? Perhaps the best answer, for now, is that it is ambiguously so—a counter-process theology. And so counter-process-apocalypse beckons us with a vision of what might be—what can be—what rightly should be the case.

**CORRINGTON, ROBERT S.,** *Nature and Spirit: An Essay in Ecstatic Naturalism*. New York: Fordham University Press, 1992: 207 pages; *Ecstatic Naturalism: Signs of the World*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994: 218 pages; *Nature's Self: Our Journey from Origin to Spirit*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996: 186 pages; *Nature's Religion*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997: 192 pages. [Reviewed by RANDY RAMAL, Center for Process Studies, Claremont, CA, 91711.]

In his 1987 *The Community of Interpreters: On the Hermeneutics of Nature and the Bible in the American Philosophical Tradition*, Corrington develops the concept of “horizontal hermeneutics,” the idea that human horizons can be used to interpret nature. Five years later he begins a highly original process of situating these horizons *within* nature, thus producing the above four books. Believing that human horizons are but one type of order among nature’s innumerable and human-independent orders of meaning, Corrington argues that nature needs to be rescued from its traditional representations in the linguistic and textual analyses that privilege human subjectivity. He states that “Philosophical methods must conform to their specific subject matters” (*Nature* 1), and follows those who have moved beyond phenomenology towards a comprehensive metaphysics. Although drawing on writings of other thinkers, most notably Buchler, Peirce, Dewey, Jaspers, Kristeva, and Hartshorne, he weaves their insights and methods within a new metaphysical approach that he calls “ecstatic naturalism.” Corrington believes that his original combination of a non-transcendental phenomenology, ordinal metaphysics, and postmodern psychoanalysis allows him to transcend the anti-metaphysical and relativistic tendencies of neo-pragmatism (*Ecstatic* 7), and to give a better categorial framework for previous forms of descriptive, eulogistic, and honorific naturalism.

By “ecstatic naturalism,” Corrington means a naturalistic perspective that acknowledges nature’s self-ordering potencies and its self-transcending orders of relevance. It recognizes the *spirit* as a naturalistic potency that enables nature’s communities to transcend their limitations of intelligibility and thus move beyond semiotic inertia (*Nature* 142; *Ecstatic* 39). Following Buchler, Spinoza, and some of the Scholastics, Corrington believes that at the heart of nature there is an “ontological difference” between *nature naturing* and *nature natured*. He contends that what is phenomenologically encountered in experience, nature natured, can be understood only metaphysically as that which is enabled by something beyond it, namely nature naturing. Using a method of *abduction* (Peirce) rather than induction or deduction (*Nature* 191-92), Corrington claims to move from the effect (nature natured) to the cause (nature naturing) via a form of logical analysis that does not privilege human semiosis. He concludes that the ontological difference is manifest in both nature and the human self, and that dreams, the “uncontaminated products” of the unconscious, are the means of communication between nature and the self (*Nature's Religion* 34; *Nature's Self* 98). Nature’s “self” becomes the human self and nature’s “religion” becomes the “religious stage” reached by the communities as they turn the mere “signs” of nature into “symbols” (*Ecstatic* 102; *Nature's Self* 134-35).

Process naturalism is one of the major themes critically, though not always fairly, discussed in the above books. Corrington acknowledges the advantages it has over other forms of naturalism, saying that it foreshadows ecstatic naturalism, yet he still finds its categorial scheme inadequate in expressing the “ontological difference” and the nature of God (*Ecstatic* 23). Process metaphysics is said not only to favor subjectivity and final causation over objectivity and efficient causation (*Ecstatic* 6), thus privileging panpsychism, but also to efface the “diremption” between creativity and the world of actual occasions by placing God as the continual supplier of goals for the world (*Nature’s Religion* 8). Whitehead’s focus on the continuities within the divine life is said to downplay the diremptions within its evolution (*Nature* 164). Hartshorne’s self-surpassability thesis of God, though an advance over traditional theism, is said to ignore the tension between the finite and nonfinite aspects of God. For Corrington, diremption is the source of evolution in both God and Nature. He characterizes Whitehead’s doctrine of internal relations and his emphasis on prehension as “romantic” notions that ignore the ontological chasm in both the self and nature.

It seems to me that Corrington has misrepresented Whitehead’s ontological principle in saying that it entails privileging subjectivity and actual occasions—thus final causation—over objectivity, the eternal objects, and efficient causation. Better understood as a cosmological principle, the ontological principle gives only causative, not metaphysical, priority to the actual entities over the eternal objects. Metaphysically, it gives equal importance to both final and efficient causation, indicating that novelty and evolution are impossible without the causative impact of the past. Corrington also ignores Hartshorne’s extremely important discussion of external relations, which is meant to supplement Whitehead’s doctrine of internal relations, and thus the fact that process naturalism acknowledges some discontinuity within nature’s orders. His depiction of process naturalism as a “generic-stipulative metaphysics” that consciously reduces the complexity of nature’s orders into one type of reality, namely experience, is correct as long as it is remembered that such reductionism is explanatory, not ontological.

Although attributing a major role to process *theism* in rethinking the traditional traits of the divine nature, Corrington says that a better understanding of God is possible within ecstatic naturalism. His naturalism, like that of process naturalism, is theistic, but it is said to represent God more truthfully by acknowledging the continuities and discontinuities both within its own nature and with non-divine orders. Instead of a panentheistic dual-natured God that is necessarily relevant to the world, Corrington speaks of “ordinal monotheism,” a non-supernaturalistic form of theism that sees God as strongly, weakly, or sheerly relevant to the world (*Nature’s Religion* 34-38; 155-56). Ultimately, Corrington speaks of four aspects to the divine nature: (1) God as the non-unified ground of the holy; (2) God as the lure for personal and communal transformation; (3) God as the energy that makes selfing possible; (4) God as the “not-yet” (*Nature* 165 ff.). The essence of these four natures is that God’s presence in the world is limited to some orders rather than others (*Nature* 160), that God’s call for justice is felt and recognized, (*Nature* 173), and that God becomes the unified ground of selving when the individual selves realize their eternal creative interaction with the spirit. Corrington also identifies a “not-yet” into which the divine life can grow (*Nature* 186).

Corrington's critique of process theism is partially justified but some of the specifics he discusses do not apply to the Whiteheadian-Hartshornean version of theism. For example, he is right to point out the impropriety of claiming that God is ontologically an all-inclusive actuality that permeates all levels of reality, whether that presence is consciously acknowledged or not. Hartshorne has explicitly rejected the logical possibility of atheism. It is important, then, that process theologians and philosophers pay more attention to this kind of critique and to the overly ignored ordinal metaphysics. Yet Corrington's rejection of the process method of using analogy from the self to God (and nature) does not seem to be given a better alternative. He claims to rely only on experience and ideation to arrive at the divine reality and its emergence from the potencies of nature naturing. He finds in experience "access structures" to God, the spirit, and nature naturing (*Nature's Self* 3-4), and he uses logical ideation to arrive at these sources. Temporality, spatiality, melancholy, and love are said to be some of the access structures indicating the existence of pre- and post-temporal and spatial realms influencing the self.

Yet, it seems to me that this way of argumentation, where abduction is substituted for analogy, proves that Corrington cannot escape privileging, at least hermeneutically, the human standpoint. For example, Corrington comes very close to the process doctrine of prehension, which he states as untenable, when he says that we *feel* the sustaining love of nature's sacred folds. Also, the experiential restlessness that shows the presence of a fourth dimension to God, which is a non-fragmentary goal (*Nature* 163; 180), shows that a logically-based experiential metaphysics is not a move beyond privileging the human perspective. Corrington's further rejection of the idea of telic actual entities that are self-determining for goals that emerge over time, supposedly to prevent the need for theodicy, is contradicted by his acknowledgment that Whitehead does not speak of linear teleology to nature as a whole (*Ecstatic* 22-25). In objecting to the idea that God remembers *all* perished occasions of experience eternally, Corrington mistakenly reads process naturalism as harboring an implicit need to put creative meaning in life as a whole despite the evils penetrating it (*Ecstatic* 50-51).

In sum, Corrington's project is something that process thinkers *must* take account of in order to sharpen their views concerning the God-world relation, yet his methodical conceptuality is not radically different from that of process thought. His books have a distinctive, flowing style, a depth not found much in our specialized age, and a rigor of argumentation that makes them worthwhile reading. They are certainly a major philosophical contribution to the fields of naturalism and metaphysics.