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Abstract

The essay argues that human consciousness exists paradoxically as both unique and inextricably part of world consciousness. Amplification of the point references ideas from Christian Orthodoxy, Carl Jung, Alfred North Whitehead, eco-theology, Kabbalistic and Hindu thought. The essay suggests that the validity of the thesis may be felt as well as approached through argument. The tone leans in the direction of conversation rather than formal scholarship.

Keywords: *Trees, Consciousness, Christian Orthodoxy, Jung, Whitehead, Panpsychism*.

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I

"*The world of our modern conscious minds is the world of rationality and of discrimination: its instrument is the separation of pairs of opposites.*"

- Erich Neumann (*The Place of Creation)*

"*Remember the plants, trees, animal life who all have their*
tribes, their families, their histories too. Talk to them,
listen to them. They are alive poems.
Remember the wind. Remember her voice. She knows the
origin of the universe.
Remember you are all people and all people
are you.
Remember you are this universe and this
universe is you.
Remember all is in motion, is growing, is you."

- Joy Harjo from the poem "Remember," in *She Had Some Horses*

One spring day just before sunrise as I walked under oak trees on the way to my office on campus, I thought, "What if trees care about us?" Other questions followed. What if an interrelationship of caring exists through all earthly living things? What if human consciousness is part of the earthly consciousness? What if there were a paradoxical dualistic exclusionary

component in consciousness inhering with a unitary participatory component? What if all earthly consciousnesses lean into human consciousness for understanding, love, and creativity? How narrow, unhealthy, and destructive it would be for human consciousness to focus only on itself, as if continually staring into a mirror. What if human consciousness can only exist as part of earthly consciousness and no matter where in the universe humans might travel, their consciousness would remain inherently connected to earth? What if our task is to continue to understand, care for, learn from, interrelate with, all consciousnesses on earth and that wholeness of understanding and creativity is the great gift we might bring to any other structures of consciousness wherever in the universe they might be?

When I got to the university where I teach, I met my two morning coffee mates, a sociology professor who is also a member of a Serbian Orthodox congregation, and a psychology professor who is also a Methodist pastor. I mentioned to them that I was thinking about human consciousness. The pastor said, "That's right up your alley." I asked why and he said, "All the talk you do about Carl Jung and the ego's relationship to the unconscious." The sociology professor smiled and said he thought the natural world might be a topic in Orthodoxy. We drifted off into discussing campus issues and then headed off to teach our first classes of the day, mine about Ismene's values in the opening of *Antigone*.

On the way home, after a day of talking about *Antigone*, *The Stranger*, and *Notes from Underground*, I again walked under the oaks, but this time I touched each one and said hello as I passed.

II

At home, I decided to begin reading *Toward an Ecology of Transfiguration: Orthodox Christian Perspectives on Environment, Nature, and Creation*, which I had bought some time ago and never begun. The sociology professor's suggestion brought me to the book that evening. Within the first hundred pages I found ideas I thought interestingly engaged my questions about consciousness. In his essay, "Natural Contemplation in St. Maximus the Confessor and St. Isaac the Syrian," Metropolitan Jonah (Paffhausen) writes that we humans can develop a sense of presence regarding our relationship to the natural world "that transcends subject-object, even subject-subject" (55). He adds that this perception is "essentially non dual, nonconceptual, and participatory" (55). He identifies a spiritual discipline called "hypostatic *theoria*" (50) which

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"leads to what is called unitary knowledge, which in plain terms, is awestruck wonder at God" (50). Even in life after death "human nature never ceases from its awestruck wonder at God" (50). Here the idea of a non-dual, participatory consciousness showed up connected to seventh century Christian Orthodoxy. I wondered if awe and wonder could be the calling of human consciousness. I wondered if a consciousness rooted deepest in awe might be less self-absorbed and more capable of growth than one rooted in logic and reason.

In his essay, "Through Creation to the Creator," Metropolitan Kallistos (Ware) of Diokleia writes, "In thanksgiving we *become ourselves*" (99). Thankful relationship with the creator constitutes authentic selfhood. "As logical animals possessed with self-awareness and free choice—and at the same time as *Eucharistic* animals who are *being defined*—it is our supreme privilege, consciously and gratefully, to offer the created world back to God the creator" (99). That relationship also constitutes purpose. He quotes the Dalai Lama, "The universe has no voice, and the universe needs to speak. We are the voice of the universe" (101). If there is an earthly consciousness made of such things as trees caring for humans, an earthly consciousness of which human consciousness is a participatory part, it could be the role of human consciousness to honor awe and to create therefrom, creativity, which suggests the importance of art in all its forms. I thought of Alfred North Whitehead's ideas that beauty, satisfaction, and harmony were core values of God's creativity.

This brief excursion into some essays about Christian Orthodox thought interested me. However, an underlying assumption is that there is God. In my own values, having a seminary degree myself and having been a pastor, I accept that assumption, and thinking from that perspective, I considered the first chapters of Genesis. God creates through separating this from that, leading to man and woman, good and evil, in or out of the Garden of Eden. Adam names the animals, all of which are other than Adam, none of which is a helpmate. From the Genesis story, dualism and choice appear inherent in human consciousness. Dualism and choice inhere in human being. Whether or not one believes the Genesis story, it is incontrovertible that consciousness can be argued to be dualistic. The subject remains separate from the object. However, it can also be argued that consciousness can be discussed as unitary. Dualistic consciousness may be seen as exclusionary, and unitary consciousness as participatory. I suggest that human consciousness is both.

How might individual selfhood be understood in participatory consciousness. One might turn to indigenous cultures, mystics, shamans, to find understandings of individual selfhood within unitary consciousness. I was a Fulbright scholar in Finland and thought about the drumheads that Sámi shamans used and the movement of the shaman's individual consciousness into a participatory one through rhythmic drumming.

I mentioned some of these thoughts to my wife. She was reading Robin Wall Kimmerer's *Braiding Sweetgrass*, and she read a passage to me defining the term "the grammar of animacy": "Water, land, and even a day, the language a mirror for seeing the animacy of the world, the life that pulses through all things, through pines and nuthatches and mushrooms. *This* is the language I hear in the woods; this is the language that lets us speak of what wells up all around us" (55). A member of the Potawatomi Nation, Kimmerer writes, "In Potawatomi 101, rocks are animate, as are mountains and water and fire and places" (55). This perspective represents parallel thinking worldwide. Clearly, the presence of earth consciousness can be substantiated in the thought and communal rituals of indigenous peoples reaching into antiquity.

III

A few days later a philosophy professor colleague stopped by my office to chat. I said I was thinking about the possibility of human consciousness being embedded in an earth consciousness. He said he was not sure about earth consciousness. It might exist in animals, he said, but not rocks, and he thought human consciousness resulted from evolution. I wondered if evolutionarily-developed human consciousness therefore were its own closed off thing, and if so if it existed on its own, empty, or if it carried within it the evolutionary process of its becoming. I also wondered if in its own evolutionary-achieved form it could still relate to and interface with other consciousnesses. He sensed the seriousness of my interest in the idea of an earthly consciousness and said that he had read recently, but he could not remember where, the idea of "panpsychism," that there was a universal consciousness. I wondered if human consciousness could be part of that. Could human consciousness be part of earth consciousness from one direction and part of universal consciousness from another? The idea of a "Buddha nature" crossed my mind, but I thought the duality in human nature may remain as separation between God and humans, that a human finitude existed that delimited the possible understanding of universal consciousness, but which limitation, however, permitted awe and creativity, which

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drew me back to the possible calling of, goal of, human consciousness. I wondered if a universal consciousness, identified as "cosmopsychism," were also open like that, open to creativity and even awe?

My professor friend had to go teach his Ethics class, and we parted as we usually do, happy to have had the chance to chat.

IV

Thinking of my philosopher colleague's reference to a universal consciousness, I dimly recalled something in Edward Edinger's *The Creation of Consciousness* that resonated with the idea. Edinger, from his Jungian perspective, discusses the ego's relationship to the Self. The Self encompasses the ego and the unconscious. The ego develops (individuation proceeds) and consciousness develops inasmuch as the ego understands itself as both knower and known and receives perspectives from the unconscious. Understanding that there is no true correlation, but if the human consciousness were seen as an ego, planetary consciousness seen as the unconscious, and the universal conscious seen as a Self, I might learn something by revisiting Edinger.

Although the unconscious in Jungian thought is not identified as planetary consciousness, I find the idea of mutual modification interesting in this statement by Jung from *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, as quoted by Edinger in *The Creation of Consciousness*:

> Man's task is…to become conscious of the contents that press upward from the unconscious. Neither should he persist in his unconsciousness nor remain identical with the unconscious elements of his being, thus evading his destiny, which is to create more and more consciousness. As far as we can discern, the whole purpose of human existence is to kindle a light in the darkness of mere being. It may even be assumed that just as the unconscious affects us, so the increase in our consciousness affects the unconscious (16).

In *The Creation of Consciousness,* Edinger says that in dreams the Self becomes visible to the ego, but he wonders if the reverse is true and identifies the Self with God. He writes,

"Perhaps our conscious lives are symbolic dramas by which God becomes aware of Himself" (56). He quotes Jung, "It may be assumed that just as the unconscious affects us, so the increase of our consciousness affects the unconscious" (57). Edinger writes in all italics as an indication of significance, "The *purpose of human life is the creation of consciousness*" (57).

I am left with my philosopher friend's thought as a possibility—human consciousness may connect to and serve a universal consciousness. Just as human consciousness is part of earth consciousness, so human consciousness is also part of universal consciousness, all enmeshed in mutual modification. I wondered if the trees cared, as I walked under them before dawn, about the night sky as well as about me and where I fit into all of that if I felt it was a beautiful night.

V

Reading Edinger again edged me toward revisiting Erich Neumann's *The Place of Creation*, in which he discusses the place of human creativity within a unitary reality. He wrote in German and my copy is the English translation by Hildegard Nagel, Eugene Rolfe, Jan van Heurck, and Krishna Winston. Neumann writes, "Every one of us knows and has had the experience: valley and bush mist and moon—these are realities; the release they bring flows from our contact with them. Are they without or are they within? They are neither the one nor the other—something unitary which is beyond them both and contains them both becomes real and actual" (107). Human consciousness exists in itself and yet, paradoxically, as part of a unitary consciousness. To move increasingly into deeper sophistication and awareness, it must not withdraw into relentless self-referentiality. To do so would result in empty isolation and stasis, no matter how nuanced and engaging the self-referentiality may be.

Neumann views creativity, art, as antidotal and transcendent to the ego's self-referentiality. He writes, "Modern ego-centered man, in the partial reality that is shaped and structured solely by his conscious mind, never loses his feeling of 'cutoffness' from reality and of the basic insignificance of his existence" (135). He sees art as the means by which transformative re-engagement with reality can occur. He writes, "When we are overcome by 'great art' or by any form of creativity which really moves us we pass into a zone of calm and arrive at a center that is not really of this world" (114). I wonder if human consciousness is, in fact, called to creativity, perhaps analogous to earth consciousness from which it developed and

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with which it participates as a dynamic component. I also thought of Whitehead's Primordial and Consequent natures of God and the place of creativity in Process Theology.

VI

Although I have published articles referencing Whiteheadian thought, including one article in *The Journal of Process Studies*, I do not claim strong understanding of his thought. I approach Whitehead through the channel of Process Theology, which I first encountered in seminary. However, I remembered the importance of creativity therein, especially as it is described in the last chapter of *Process and Reality*, a chapter I find deeply moving, thoughtful, and sincere.

In that chapter, "God and the World," Whitehead describes God as "dipolar," having two natures, primordial and consequent. In the primordial nature, God is "the unlimited conceptual realization of the absolute wealth of potentiality" (343). God's "feelings" are "only conceptual" (343). The consequent nature of God is "the realization of the actual world in the unity of his nature" (345). The primordial side of God's nature is "free, complete, primordial, eternal, actually deficient, and unconscious" (345). The consequent side "originates with physical experience derived from the temporal world and then requires integration with the primordial side. It is determined, incomplete, consequent, 'ever-lasting,' fully actual, and conscious" (345).

The conceptual moves to the actual, the actual being invited moment by moment to realize and manifest the conceptual. Existence in the actual consists of self-realization, drawing as fully as possible from the values of the conceptual, although capable of self-realizing along the lines of some other value. God's primordial nature continually offers to the world the best values possible, but the consequent nature's self-realization decisions structure its actuality.

What are the primary values held in the primordial nature? Whitehead identifies them as harmony and intensity. Intensity depends on complexity. Whitehead uses the term "beauty" to describe intense harmony. God wants the world to be always more harmonious, more beautiful. In "God and the World," Whitehead writes, God "does not create the world, he saves it, or, more accurately, he is the poet of the world, with tender patience leading it by his vision of truth, beauty, and goodness" (346). He adds, "The image—and it is but an image— under which this operative growth of God's nature is best conceived, is that of a tender care that nothing be lost" (346).

This brings the focus to the question of creativity. The consequent world and the primordial world may be opposites in values, but "God and the World are contrasted opposites in terms of which Creativity achieves its supreme task of transforming disjointed multiplicity, with its diversities in opposition, into concrescent unity, with its diversities in contrast" (348). In fact, Whitehead writes, God is inescapably guided by creativity: "Neither God nor the World reaches static completion. Both are in the grip of the ultimate metaphysical ground, the creative advance into novelty" (349).

Here is what I see: reality is in process, driven by creative transformation toward intense harmony, which means ever more sophisticated, more complex and nuanced beauty. Human choices matter. I wonder, if creativity is infinite do human choices matter in terms of matter itself. I wonder also if I choose to believe trees care about me, am I intensifying harmony in the consequent nature? If I realize they do, does that further intensify the harmony? Does the world become more complex in that way? If any reader of these words wonders if trees care about people, does that offer more complexity to the world? If God is the poet of the world, what reality can be created through poems, through art?

In considering the creative power of poetry and art, I am drawn to Jung's idea of art of the conscious mind and art of the unconscious mind. He says that art of the unconscious mind challenges, even frightens, the conscious mind, but it offers "symbols" (for which he has his own definition) to move the conscious perspective to process through a "transcendent function" to a heretofore unavailable and more inclusive understanding. What had seemed in diametrical opposition may be seen through the transcendent function to be in creative synthesis.

VII

In *Two Great Truths: A New Synthesis of Scientific Naturalism and Christian Faith*, the Whiteheadian scholar David Ray Griffin writes, "Consciousness is a very high-level form of experience, enjoyed (on this planet) only by humans and other animals" (78). However, in his discussion of "panexperientialism" "the idea that "all things have experience," he adds this paragraph:

> Even with these qualifications, of course, most people upon hearing of panexperientialism assume it to be self-evidently absurd. That it is not really self-evidently absurd, however, is

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> suggested by the fact that it has been affirmed not only by several leading philosophers, including William James, Charles Peirce, and Henri Bergson, as well as Whitehead and the other major process philosopher, Charles Hartshorne, but also several leading physicists. For example, evolutionary biologist C. H. Waddington endorsed Whitehead's view that all things are composed of 'occasions of experience,' and physicists David Bohm and B. J. Hiley say that their view implies that 'in some sense a rudimentary mind-like quality is present even at the level of particle physics'" (78).

Griffin quotes Hartshorne, from *The Logic of Perfection and Other Essays in Neoclassical Metaphysics*, "Cells can influence our human experience because they have feelings that we can feel. To deal with the influences of human experience upon cells, one turns this around. We have feelings that cells can feel" (79).

Griffin was writing in 2004. In 2006, *Consciousness and Its Place in Nature: Does Physicalism Entail Panpsychism* was published. It contains the essay "Realistic Monism: Why Physicalism Entails Panpsychism," by Professor of Philosophy at University of Texas, Galen Strawson, which is followed by 17 essays by distinguished philosophers in response to Strawson's essay, and then Strawson's 100 page response to the responses. Strawson's essay drew deep thought from deep thinkers. Not being as deep a thinker as those philosophers, my shallower reading of the original essay saw its core issue to be the question of how consciousness could arise from non-consciousness. If consciousness could not spring from non-consciousness, wherever it came from must have contained it in the first place.

In 2024 an expanded edition of *Consciousness and Its Place in Nature* was published which included postscripts by six of the original responders and a final response by Strawson. One of the postscript essays, "On the Present and Future of Panpsychism," by David Skrbina, includes this paragraph:

> People in many disciplines seem increasingly open to animal minds, even the so-called "lower" forms of animal life. Insects are viewed by some now as intelligent and conscious (e.g.

> Barron and Klein, 2016). Researchers are moving beyond animal life, finding strong evidence of intelligence in plants (e.g. Trawavas, 2017; Calvo et. al., 2020). Viruses are now seen as exhibiting a "sociology" (Diaz-Munoz et. al. 2017). Normally staid social scientists are finding evidence of collective mind and intelligence in human social groups (e.g. Wendt, 2015). Mathematicians have resurrected the old idea that atoms may possess something like free will (e.g. Conway and Kochen, 2009). Giulio Tononi's quasi-panpsychist IIT theory continues to draw considerable attention. Mind, it seems, is popping up everywhere (434).

Skrbina points to the significance of these facts.

> With the planetary environmental crisis looming in many people's minds, eco-philosophers and environmentalists are seeking evidence of intrinsic value in nature and in the planet Earth. If the basis for human intrinsic value is our awareness, sentience, and ability to suffer, and then if animals, plants, and perhaps all of nature possess similar characteristics, then we have a new ground for seeing all things in nature as inherently valuable—and thus deserving of moral consideration (434).

In 2025, Maria Strømme, professor of nanotechnology at Uppsala University and member of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences and the Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters, published a study in *AIP Advances* entitled, "Universal Consciousness as Foundational Field: A Theoretical Bridge Between Quantum Physics and Non-dual Philosophy." The study immediately received enthusiastic and far-reaching positive and negative response. Consequential to the negative reviews by physicists in the newspaper *Dagen Nyheter*, the study was reconsidered and then within a year retracted by the journal's editors who concluded the theory could not be verified or falsified through empirical tests and therefore did not meet their standards for publication. Even as retracted, however, the study continued to have significant following. According to Anders Bolling, in "Daring Consciousness Paper Retracted After

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Newspaper Raises Questions," published on the Frontier Journalists' Network website in May, 2026, Strømme's study is "still the most read on the AIP Advances site" (Bolling). He also points to the fact that the study was the focus of an article in the April, 2026, issue of *Popular Mechanics* magazine. It may be that Strømme's theory finds more comfortable and receptive lodging in the houses of religion, spirituality, philosophy, even popular thought, houses not blueprinted with empiricism, than it finds as a study in the halls of science. It would not be the first time such a thing had happened regarding a theory of significance.

I am not a scientist, so the nuanced argument of Strømme's study is over my head, but sentences in the abstract and conclusion hold potentially profound significance. From the abstract: "Building upon insights from quantum field theory and non-dual philosophy, a model based on the three principles of universal mind, universal consciousness, and universal thought is introduced, These principles describe an underlying, formless intelligence (mind), the capacity for awareness (consciousness), and the dynamic mechanism through which experience and differentiation arise (thought)" (Strømme).

In the "conclusion" section, she writes that consciousness "is not an emergent by-product of neural activity but a fundamental and irreducible aspect of reality" (Strømme). Her concluding words are, "Ultimately, this study challenges entrenched assumptions and invites a shift in perspective: rather than viewing consciousness as an epiphenomenon of matter, it places it at the very foundation of existence. By synthesizing insights from physics, metaphysics, and philosophy, this model offers a path toward an integrated understanding that unites scientific rigor with ancient philosophical insight" (Strømme).

Scientific rigor and ancient philosophical insight are here brought together to argue that consciousness is a foundation of existence. In the "Discussion" section of the paper, she references supporting ideas from the rigorous thinkers David Bohm, Max Planck, Schrodinger, Heisenberg, and Wheeler, but also references Hindu and Buddhist thought.

Strømme says, "Consciousness is a fundamental aspect of reality." I wonder, is all of reality built out of consciousness? Is it all imbued with consciousness? Are stones in some way made of consciousness? Is consciousness the essence of matter, of everything? I thought of Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*, and the sense of consciousness Santiago gives the sea and feels he is part of when he is alone in his boat far from shore.

VIII

In *With Roots and Wings*, Jay B. McDaniel refers to the river Ganges being seen as divine in the Hindu religion: "Ganga is not only the river. She is also a living goddess. Even as she lives in the currents of the largest river in India, she also lives beyond these currents, both visibly and invisibly" (184). He quotes Lina Gupta from an essay entitled, "Ganga: Purity Pollution, and Hinduism," from *Ecofeminism and the Sacred*: "Whether it is the water of a lake, stream, pond, river, or ocean, touched with her holy name, ordinary water takes on her sacred nature. Therefore I am not without her. She is the energy, the life that permeates all of nature, By naming her I identify her divine essence in all things" (185). He writes about the Gudalupe River in south Texas: "Along with my grandmother, the Guadalupe has been a spiritual guide in my life" (173). He adds, "She is not an 'it,' but rather a living presence imbued with strong creative energy" (173). I lived in a house on the banks of the Guadalupe and knew her calm and angry selves, something like her range of feelings.. It would be difficult to imagine the selfhood of the human community along that river, not only economically, but also in terms of awareness of one's being, without the river's existence. My question here, of course, is whether or not the Guadalupe is aware of the community of humans who admire her, fear her in flood, use her respectfully and misuse her.

I did not grow up by the Gudalupe River, but by the Pequannock River in northern New Jersey. I swam in, fished, waded in, sat by, walked by that river most of my childhood. I do not remember thinking she cared for me, but I did think she held a consciousness. Walking to my favorite pool, I passed under a large beech tree that had over the years received many carved hearts with initials placed there by someone in love. That tree did seem to me to be aware of my presence. I remember climbing it to see which heart was highest. Sitting up in the branches I felt a sense of a community of people who had cut into the bark of the tree, asking it to record their feelings. I felt that some of my aunts and uncles were there with me; my parents were there. I found the heart I had carved years before. I felt the tree was aware of the people.

There were sassafras bushes near the river and my father used different parts of them for medicines, including tea. When I drank that tea, did my body, coming from the same planetary consciousness, in some sense share consciousness with the sassafras bush. If Strømme is right and consciousness is a fundamental aspect of reality, and Strawson shows that consciousness

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cannot just emerge on its own, and it can be argued that even atoms have something like free will, as Skrbina points out, perhaps my consciousness is part of some larger consciousness, maybe a consequent element of some primordial set of values. Perhaps planetary consciousness and human consciousness could exist at best in mutual modification and growth. Might that be a creative calling to human consciousness?

IX

Here is what I have gotten to, and I cannot prove any of it. Planetary consciousness exists in living things, organic things, relationships. Planetary conscious is primarily unitary, not dualistic, participative rather than exclusionary; it is a flow of relationships governed by life force transformation. Although human consciousness exists as part of planetary consciousness, human consciousness's self-awareness, self-referentiality, self-absorption perhaps, permits denial of participation in planetary consciousness, even though individual human consciousness coinheres inextricably with planetary consciousness. The feeling of awe opens the heart of human consciousness to creativity as its calling.

I have come to no proof, nor did I expect to, that the oak trees I walk under every day care about me, however much I feel they do. To me, the trees are not ideas or items existing through definition, but presences sharing consciousness with me on the planet and for that reason I pay close attention to Skrbina's words that all things in nature deserve moral consideration, and I take, perhaps, a step beyond. Considering shared consciousness to be true, we might deepen human consciousness by turning away from Narcissistic staring into the mirror of shallow (albeit exciting and brilliantly conceived) selfhood. If there is a participatory engagement between human and planetary consciousness, and if creativity and harmony are the driving goals of life itself, ought we not seek respectful, even sisterly/brotherly/familial relationship to the earth consciousness and trust the possibility of growth in the earth connected to awe-filled growth in ourselves?

I think trees and humans exist in shared consciousness and if we hurt them, we hurt our selfhood. They are part of our consciousness and we theirs. I am reminded of a conversation mentioned in "The Greening of the Self," an essay by Joanna Macy in *Spiritual Ecology: The Cry of the Earth*. Macy is talking with John Sneed, the director of the Rain Forest Information Center in Australia. Macy asks Sneed if he despairs over lumber companies and politicians who

want to cut down the forests. Sneed replies, "I try to remember that it is not me, John Sneed, trying to protect the rain forest. Rather, I am part of the rain forest protecting itself. I am that part of the rain forest recently emerged into human thinking" (155). Individual human consciousness, embedded in all earthly consciousnesses, is dualistic and unitary. It is self-other, self-self, and self-Self. Its health and development consist of more sophisticated relationships with other, self, and Self, relationships inherently rooted in awestruck wonder, and in creatively responding to meanings within that developing sophistication.

The aesthetic governing growth, creative transformation, is beauty and harmony. The inextricability of individual human consciousness from earth consciousness demands loving relational engagement with the earth in which individual human consciousness sinks its roots, lives, and from which it has its being and seeks creative transformation.

One of the great professors I had in graduate school, and my dissertation director, said to me one day that whenever anyone holds an opinion about a deep issue, in order to clarify ones vision and to create the strongest argument, that person needs to believe that the opposite is also true. Here the opposite would be that trees do not care about us. If I engage that perspective, I nevertheless wonder if they at least are aware of us. Even the possibility of their awareness opens for me all those questions I had before dawn that morning.

The focus here has not been how human consciousness manifests in the brain, but the possibility that it exists as part of the consciousness of the earth. Can there be an earth consciousness? I am a professor of English and a poet. I often think in images. I think of astronauts looking back at earth from far away and being awestruck by its beauty. It appears a living thing. This beautiful place is not only the home of our bodies, but also the home of our consciousnesses. To miss that is to miss reaching into the wholeness of earth itself. Human consciousness is uniquely and participatively part of the living earth.

Students of consciousness theory may find this essay to be asking the reader to open wide the door of panpsychism, or even cosmopsychism, but I am not schooled or adept enough in those perspectives to begin to offer a nuanced stance regarding them. Neither am I able to significantly engage in discussion of higher-order theories, global workplace theories, integrated information theory, re-entry and predictive processing theories, attention schema theory, or any other cutting-edge theories regarding consciousness study for which I hold deep respect. I honor

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nuanced thinking, sincerity, and scientific rigor. However, my approach in this short writing has been personal and subjective rather than scientific and objective, but I hope it makes its point. I began by asking, "I wonder if these trees care about me?" If I go there, if I feel that they do, I immediately feel the presence of a consciousness beyond mine within which mine exists. That is the point. Try it for yourself and see. Think of those space travelers who look back at earth and feel overwhelmed with awe and loving relationship. This planet is home; it is also who we are. For me, that morning as I walked under those oak trees, it was as if a door opened into the abiding meaning of consciousness which I had been too self-referential to feel, let alone understand—not that understanding should ever replace awe.

X

I have been a university teacher of English literature for sixty years, and I am a poet. When I discussed this essay, as it existed up to this point, with my wife, who is also a professor and poet, she said, "Ideas also have consciousness; words do." The idea of words being life forms reminded me of Charles Poncé's text, *Kabbalah: An Introduction and Illumination for the World Today,* which I had read years before and now returned to. In it, I found his discussion of Kabbalistic speculation about the magical structure of the Torah. Poncé writes:

> But the most striking statement about the creation of the written *Torah* is to be found in a statement made by the founder of the Hasidic movement in Poland and Russia, Baal-Shem Tov. He proposed that the Torah existed originally as an incoherent jumble of letters & that phrases, sentences, words, sections and chapters which now exist came into existence at the time that the events described took place. For example, the written passage describing the creation of Adam automatically arranged itself into its present form as his creation took place. If any of the events which took place in the creation of Adam had been different, the written account would have been different as well. Historical events, in other words, were not predetermined by God. What was predetermined, however, were the number of coordinates or letters contained in the Torah. Because not so

> much as a vowel point can be added or subtracted from the Torah, and because it is thought of as a living organism reflective of the secret life of God himself, what we have is a receptacle for divine energy. (27-28)

A huge jumble of letters and vowel signs from the Hebrew alphabet, exactly those making up all the words of the Torah form themselves as descriptions of events as the events take place, which is the action of a "living organism" (28). In this interpretation, consciousness exists paradoxically both as inextricably participatory in events and yet resultantly distinct from them enough to hold its own form. This is not limitless abstract potential but meaning unfolding nearly as life itself in a boundary, which Poncé calls a "quantum of spirit" (28).

At this point I realized that as I journeyed through this inquiry about trees caring about me, some interfaces of ideas teased me. For example, here, one might think of the unarranged letters as something like the primordial nature of God in relationship to the consequent nature. I also wonder if in addition to consciousness being the fundamental aspect of reality, as Strømme suggests, if creativity might be the inescapable nature of, the ground of, consciousness, if, as Whitehead says, the creative advance into novelty is as well a fundamental aspect of reality. Are consciousness and creativity inextricably interrelated? I suspect they are.

I suspect that my consciousness is part of a planetary consciousness, of which trees are a part as well. In addition, after this brief journey into pondering possibilities, I also suspect these three things:

1-Everything exists inside consciousness,

2-Everything is made of consciousness,

3-Consciousness is creative.

In my excursion into theories of consciousness, it looks like these three things align me somewhat with Bernardo Kastrup's idea of "analytic idealism" (11). However, the channels I came through, having run through Jung and Whitehead, foreground creativity as inextricably and compositionally present in universal consciousness.

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Closure

Being a professor of literature, I thought of comparisons from literary criticism to my unschooled discussion in this essay. One student might say of Hamlet, "It is a play about a young man in Denmark." Another might say, "It is a play about a young man in Denmark who thinks his uncle killed his father and he does not know what to do about it." A third might say, "It is a play about a young man in Denmark who thinks his uncle killed his father and he does not know what to do about it; it is about that young man's self-definition." None approaches the play in nuanced, careful, depth, but I hope in this paper to have approached the writings mentioned at least with the third student's kind of grasp, generalized resonance with a sound reading.

This essay began with reference to a poem by Joy Harjo. Still thinking of my wife's notion that words hold consciousness, I want to close with a poem from a recent book of mine. It is also the final poem in that book. I think it concerns in some way consciousness of presence and the calling therewithin. If so, perhaps it can be related to consciousness in which one might immerse oneself. In *With Roots and Wings,* McDaniel quotes Diana Eck writing in *Encountering God: A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Banaras*:

> A Hindu friend, a professor in a woman's university in Delhi, once told me what it meant to her to bathe in the Ganges at Hardwar at the time she brought her father's ashes there for immersion. "I felt as if an electric shock had passed through my body. I felt completely transformed," she said. "When I came up out of the water, I felt as if I could now bear the death of anyone, even those people I loved most, even my own". (184-185)

Denying any comparison between this poem and the Ganges River, and please believe me absolutely on that, my hope nonetheless is that this small poem be a bit of consciousness within which your consciousness might find immersion, if only briefly.

About Love

Every feather of every bird
is one more word in the language of life.

It all speaks into the center—which is
this moment—and here we are alive in it.
Let's listen, give thanks, create beauty,
and learn how to love for real.

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