

Expressive Organicism: An Outline

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“Marmorslottet/Marble Castle Rock Formation, Norway,” by C. Brown (Wikimedia Commons, 2021)

1. Introduction

How to formulate a new philosophy? It can only be done piecemeal, exploring the terrain as it comes into view. One must walk, think, sketch, and puzzle the many threads together that hopefully one day will coalesce into a new image, holding the threads in suspension for the time being, involved in a state of searching. Some clear ideas start suddenly, others emerge over time, gradually working their way towards an intelligible form. Here, I set out some ideas for a philosophical position I called “Expressive Organicism” elsewhere (see Paans, 2020a, 2022a). These ideas form a comprehensive philosophical framework, encompassing metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy of mind, aesthetics, environmental philosophy, philosophical anthropology, existentialism, moral philosophy and philosophy of religion.

2. PART I

1. Organicism is an integral, philosophical response to three interlinked problems: (i) the inert matter problem, (ii) the part-whole problem and (iii) the imaginative leap problem (Paans, 2022b; Hanna and Paans, 2020).

2. Like a vicious circle, these three problems cause and aggravate each other: they cannot be thought apart, although they can be discussed separately, legitimizing the mistaken assumption to the idea that they are also separate and that their causes have little in common.

3. The first, fundamental question for making any headway is: what is the nature of reality? If we conceive of it as a *machine* or a mechanical contraption of some sort, we use an improper metaphor, although this metaphor can be useful in various ways or a limited domain of application. If we conceive of reality as being isomorphic (i.e., sharing structural features with) *organic processes*, we may be closer to the nature of the cosmos, because organic life arose from the structure of the universe itself. It seems to be one of its manifestations.

4. This is, of course, an assumption. As Klaus Krippendorf has pointed out, the very idea of *organization* stems from a biological metaphor to explain the structure of the universe (Krippendorf, 2008). That is, it provides a topological and processual template (i.e., a root metaphor) to conceptualize the structure of the cosmos. For the root metaphor to be isomorphic to its subject matter, it must share as many essential properties with it as possible. Mechanistic, anthropomorphic and network metaphors are all systematic abstractions from the underlying organic structure. As such, they usefully highlight certain limited domains of reality, or they provide useful conceptual lenses to temporarily view reality. They are “as-if” instruments. But since they are abstractions, they abstract away from their subject matter, leading sometimes to great clarity due to simplification, but leading to less isomorphy. In given cases, this is a good thing, as it allows for certain relationships to be pulled into the conceptual foreground, in much the same way that a subway diagram is not a map of the city, but a very useful navigational tool due to its simplification. But to use the subway map to learn about those aspects of the city that are not depicted on it would be a first-class mistake.

5. This does not mean that the continued unfolding of reality is an *organic process itself*, but instead merely that *metaphorically conceiving it as an organic—and indeed ontogenetic—process* gives us in certain respects a better moral and metaphysical grounding for thinking (Paans, 2019a, 2021, 2022c).

6. But what is the entry point for our train of thought then? It should start with what we can *observe* about the manifestly real world, but simultaneously with what we can *apprehend* about the manifestly real world. This point of departure is not entirely unknown in the West, but it gives rise to a kind of “crude empiricism,” as the German Idealists quickly realized.

7. If we constrain ourselves to brute or sheer empiricism, we run headlong into all the conceptual problems that have marked British Empiricism and later Utilitarianism and Consequentialism from the start. Notably, the domain of the *a priori* is overlooked almost by default. Moreover, one must resort to the breathless invention of concepts to explain a plethora of observations without ever be able to define an overarching theory because the foundations are not being developed.

8. But most importantly, it puts the observer in a detached mode of interacting with the world. The proverbial scientist-with-the-clipboard became the hallmark of 20th century science. It is prejudiced on the God’s Eye point of view (nowadays exacerbated by mass surveillance, CCTV and biometrics). The scientific mode of thought has become a mode of exerting surveillant power. The detached observer reinforces the subject-object distinction, trapping the subject in a viewpoint from which certain phenomena cannot be grasped or cannot be properly understood.

9. Conversely, this subject-object distinction traps the observed subject in the predicament of having to invent what Foucault called “practices of the self,” in which the body becomes the site of cultivating beneficial, that is, sanctioned, habits and behavioural patterns. Put differently: a process of full natural social responsivity devolves into a form of constrictive instead of generative thought-shaping.

10. So, the starting point must be tangible and philosophically workable, however, without being confined to the limitation of the empiricism that formed the foundation of the Enlightenment, and that most unfortunately coincides with an obstinate Rationalism.

11. This is why the organicist approach must start with what can be *observed* and *apprehended*. By “observation,” I mean the array of methods inherited from classical empiricism, but equally insights that come to us after prolonged meditation, practical experience and careful consideration. For instance, the observation that everything in the world is in a state of perpetual change or becoming (Japanese: *mu*) seems to me equally a valid observation as the fact that ecosystems possess a certain carrying capacity. By “apprehension,” I do mean the sense of openness and vastness that permeates everything (Paans, 2020b). This feeling is often aesthetically but always non-conceptually experienced. It emerges through contemplative practice and aesthetic experiences, and it also permeates and fosters creative piety. It cannot be

reached in any other way than attuning our bodyminds to the cosmos at large, mostly through learning some practice or craft, or due to prolonged exercise.

12. This double approach is closely bound up with what I call “the ecological view.” This is the diametric opposite of Thomas Nagel’s “view from nowhere” coveted by mechanistic science. The ecological view regards reality on long timescales and departs from the transitoriness of the manifest reality. If everything is in flux, we only witness part of the transformation process. In the case of the one-day fly, we survive long enough to grasp the process completely. In the case of the *Sequoia* growing, we only witness a small part of it; the rest we must infer by reference to other examples, the application of *a priori* rules we devised and empirical evidence. So, the rule that water has an absolute zero point holds across this universe as far as we know. But water is always in a state of becoming here—it changes states from gaseous to solid via liquid. On Earth, it does not reach its absolute zero point. This simple insight applies to everything. We only observe “becomings,” i.e., transitions between one state and the other. Therefore, the appropriate view of thinking about reality is not by only setting fixed categories, but by thinking such taxonomies in terms of processes with an ecological (i.e. large-scale, long-term, interconnected) mindset.

13. This fully includes the apprehensive (aesthetic) mindset and the feeling of awe and finitude. However, this is not a plea for a false finitude that leads to defeatism or nihilism. That was the fault of the 20th century. Finitude is no reason for fatalism. And neither for nihilism, its destructive, life-denying counterpart (Paans, 2022d).

14. If anything, the finite is always cut out from the infinite; yet, it is not a dead specimen. It is a boundary that exists temporarily and that we call “individuality” or “self.” We are just so many self-aware points of finitude in an infinite universe—at least, for all intents and purposes. In any version of organicism, the universe spawned a kind of universal perspectivism. In that regard, the starting point of Berkeley’s subjective idealism was correct. Its conclusions, however, were deeply solipsistic – pointing towards and even exacerbating the problem, but not solving it.

15. But fully describing this infinite-finite dialectic in discursive terms is a task which is traumatic, and which leads easily into comforting Cartesian dualism (falling into misleading abstractions and mechanist optimism), Hegelian dialectics (historical-optimistic conceptualism of the Leibnizian kind), Schopenhauerian-Sartrean Existentialism, or postmodern relativism. The universe opens up to us, but also away from us, stretching out in all directions from under the conceptual cupola that we erected for ourselves (Paans, 2019b). The objects and situations we encounter are open-ended (2020c), or they can be said to possess “infinite inwardness” (Paans, 2020d).

16. This, in turn, makes us quite rare and above all singular entities. I possess my inalienable, unique perspective on the world, one that I can express and articulate. But this expression proceeds through language, but equally – and primarily – through agency. We are, in the Nishidean sense, “expressive monads” (Paans, 2022e). But not only human beings are such monads expressing themselves. The pine tree who sheds his needles and extracts water from the ground, and creates pinecones embodies this his expressive, processual agency as well. The same applies for every ant in the anthill, and every carrion beetle. Also, it applies to the dead oak leaves that increase the soil’s acidity levels, or chemical substances that offset genetic methylation. Every form of agency that causes a change, I shall call an *expression* of that particular agency.

17. By “expression” I do not merely mean to designate our linguistic utterances or bodily gestures—in short, all those things that we customarily designate with the term “expressive,” like artworks, or performances, or turns of speech that fall within the realm of expression as they are within our fully embodied and extended agency.

18. “Expression” also includes our gene expression and our ecological and social footprint, as well as our agentive actions. A person with certain religious ideas might for instance leave a lasting expression that reverberates through the centuries. The person who passed the mutated gene for developing blue eyes on some 10, 000 years ago left a lasting physical expression in thousands of individuals that still pass it on. One’s ecological footprint is a form of expression that narrows down or opens up the possibilities of future organisms, the Aristotelian *potentia* that lie dormant in the structure of the cosmos.

19. So, the cloud of expressions effectuated by all those individuated “expressive monads” in the cosmos influence and freely determine the developmental trajectory of the planet and eventually even the cosmos itself. Certain potential options are foreclosed, while others are opened up by actions that can start small, but that reverberate over (sometime enormous) timescales. A small mutation in a bacterium may have enormous consequences once set off over geological time scales and across entire populations.

20. On the ecological view, there is no sharp biological difference between oneself and others. Even the notion of an organism itself is a problem. Yet, on the experiential level there is a clear moral and psychological difference. These things exist side by side, and do not rule each other out. Instead of thinking along the lines of Platonism, which seeks definition or the constitutive terms of oppositions, we best think along the lines of Taoism to do justice to the fluidity of reality. Instead of trying to circumscribe terms too neatly, we might as well see them as temporal reference points, or multidimensional discursive points.

21. We must drive this claim to its end: we are conglomerates of unicellular organisms. Even within a single specimen of *Homo sapiens* do we find a differentiation that obliterates the lines between the one and the many. The two basic categories of Greek thought simply revert into one another in organismic life, leading often to a mistaken type of part-whole thinking when this is not detected in time. Our immune systems respond to the proximity of other individuals and even potential hazards in the environments; all these expressions and interactions make us continuous with the cosmos in the most literal sense imaginable. Our skins can absorb water—a fact that many people don't know, but this very ignorance posits the digestive tract as a kind of fuel pipe through which our inner motor processes fuel—a machine metaphor again.

22. The “moral” domain is not concerned with what one *ought* to do, or at least not directly. Its significance according to the ecological view derives completely from the fact that one leaves something for others to work with as all manifestations of Life are dependent on the biosphere. With this basic and fundamentally altruistic fact in mind, we must rethink and revalue the edicts of traditional morality. Notions like dignity, duty, obligation, and justice all just derive from this single fundamental altruistic attitude. They are not primary, but secondary. The main mistake of Western metaphysics was to regard the secondary notions as being primary, from the very first Platonic dialogues onwards.

23. In that sense, the Socrates as presented by Plato was too complacent: he did not investigate the primary notions that his predecessors, the pre-Socratics, were so busy with. He sought to isolate morality from the world in which we are moral. Christianity took this mistake even further, by relegating the ideal world to the afterlife.

24. Given all this, what we can say about the nature of reality? **First**, that we grasp it merely incompletely because (a) our vocabulary is always restricted to what we bodily, gesturally, mentally, emotively, and linguistically understand, and (b) we live only to witness a small part of it (c) we always grasp it from a monadic, irreducibly perspectivist position. **Second**, that the parts that elude us can be often apprehended more accurately than framed discursively. **Third**, that there is a degree of order inherent in the universe that mechanist thinking cannot grasp accurately. **Fourth**, that the universe tends to produce differentiation, as can be clearly observed in biological evolution and its unfolding. And **fifth**, that we grasp continuously, giving rise to dead ends, the accumulation of experience, attunement and cultural formation. Culture is not thinkable outside evolution, and not thinkable without continuous striving.

3. PART II

25. Metaphysically, I see no reason to go beyond monism. Once we grasp the inner nature of matter, we grasp the emergence (if it is a form of emergence at all!) of matter to mind, and the relation of part to whole—or where these abstractions are incorrect—as well as the strange appearance of the subjective gap. Any dualism in this regard is just a missing puzzle piece which is explained away by invoking a new category. Already the idea of emergence implies surprise: how did this or that phenomenon arise from this substrate? Well, it is no wonder if one knows what to expect. The surprise stems from ignorance: to ignorant eyes only, emergence looks like a wondrous thing that is unexplainable. The knowing mind, however, expects it as being fully possible and even implied within the potential of matter. The potential of matter unfolds continuously.

26. So, the monism we require is one that demonstrates a tremendous depth, alongside its width. We may imagine it as a metaphysical picture in which the phenomena give way to the *noumenon* to emerge and to be apprehended. If anything, its well is a Kantian *noumenon*, the depths of which are constituted by potentials. Given certain pressures, these potentials develop to give rise to universes. Yet, the depth of the *noumena* can be non-conceptually apprehended before they can be conceptually understood. The non-conceptual precedes and interacts with the conceptual (Paans, 2020e). As usual, we started at the wrong end, thinking of concepts as instruments of knowledge. But in reality, we knew long before we had concepts. Evolutionary speaking, concepts and language are late. Hence knowledge is not impossible outside them.

27. Departing from this *deep monism*, we can construct an account of the universe as an essentially processual and dynamic *topos*—that is, a plane on which various manifestations appear and make themselves felt. There is an elective affinity with Meister Eckhart here: when Eckhart states that “God is a place,” he means to indicate the very continuity between cosmos and human lived experience. The idea that “God is omnipresent” has everything to do with the fact that the creativity of the universe manifests itself inside us and around us, as well as through us (Hanna and Paans, 2022). Eckhart does not invoke an external deity, nor an immanent one: he simply calls the structure of the universe “god,” like Spinoza would also later do. We should take that as a way of saying that nature gives rise to feelings of awe, granting us a way into the domain we habitually describe as *divine* or *numinous*. This sense of wonder leads right into what Rudolf Otto called “the idea of the Holy” (Otto, 1924). This sense of awe and wonder is empathically *not* an attempt to sneak in some form of dubious mysticism. Instead, it is an attempt to rid ourselves of the type of mysticism that has been used as the ultimate “God-of-the-gaps” argument, by which all that is (currently)

inexplicable is relegated to the realm of Divine power. This is shallow mysticism at best and outright superstition at worst.

28. Instead, the sense of awe opens up a fully natural numinous dimension that provides meaning into our lives and that deepens out our anthropological place in the world. It enriches our being-in-the-world. Experiencing the numinous re-orient our being-towards-the-world. Both stances—being-in (*bevinden*) and being-towards (*verhouden*)—are complementary. They are stages of a single process that we can call *dispositioning*. In one sense, to disposition oneself is to position oneself in a certain way and through a certain attitude. But is also the creation of a disposition or *dispositif* in the Foucauldian sense of the term. But unlike Foucault, who analyzed the influences on power and institutions on individuals, we should reclaim the right to shape our own lives, forming so many *dispositifs* to jointly re-orient our being-towards-the-world.

29. But, looking at the natural universe, we must conclude that it constitutes an *infra-environment* or *interworld* (the Merleau-Pontyan *l'entremonde* or the “flesh of the world”), only a small section of which is inhabitable (Merleau-Ponty, 1968). We experience cosmic radiation, diffuse effects of solar bodies, the influence of sunspots. If anything, the universe is a place of extremes, some of which we can comprehend, but some of which we can't even begin to comprehend. An infra-environment is the notion that is inspired by, but significantly extends Timothy Morton's provocative concept of the *hyperobject* (Morton, 2013). However, the notion of infra-environment applies the lessons of Morton's account to our living environment as such, to overcome fragmented ways of thinking about it and its effects on us. Most importantly, we must unlearn the habit of thinking of ourselves as standing back from the universe. As living organisms, we do indeed maintain a temporal boundary to our environment (indeed, this is the premise of organismic life itself), but this boundary is porous. The biosphere is another boundary in which we are embedded, but which is also porous.

30. Nature does not know *one*. It knows only a *unity* which is not a number, but which is shot through on all sides with porosity and potentiality—a dynamic One, close to what the Neoplatonists envisioned. To think of this unity with the *numerical* concept “One” is a first-class mistake, giving rise to the classical problem of the “One and the Many.” The One is not a class of objects of which only one instance exists. It is a unifying principle organically connecting all scales of the cosmos. To ask why one can lead to many is to misunderstand its nature. In the One, all qualities and attributes are present as potentials—that is, as belonging to what Aristotle calls the category of *potentia*. Not all of these potentials will be realized. Some of them will never actualize, because earlier events have determined conditions in such a way that they will not arise. From the viewpoint of expressive organicism, this mistake is to be expected, but could have been avoided if we had paid heed to the porosity inhering in Nature – as

all cosmic, biological and minded structures form an interconnected unity, the use a number to designate their metaphysical character or relations is a mistake. The numerical “One” is itself an abstraction, leading unwittingly into the idea of a simple unit that can be isolated and that is impervious. So many debates on the nature of the Soul have hinged exactly on this point.

31. The universe is on this account not only non-deterministic from the very beginning, but also *aleatoric*. It determines development corridors that allow some leeway and bounded flexibility. Non-determinism is not the same as indeterminism. It is not that there are no mechanisms that determine subsequent events. These mechanisms cannot be constructed as chains of necessary events that can be constructed forward in time. Hard determinism is a no-go from the very start, just like indeterminism. Both options conceptualize no ways in which freedom and purposive action could arise. Non-determinism simply holds that for each event, there a multitude of options that could follow. The cases where we have identified exceptions to this rule do not prove universal determinism. Instead, in the overwhelming number of cases where a degree of possibility is involved, we would better say that the chance that we accurately predict an outcome, or a cause is very slim and may be best probabilistically approached.

Each event determines the “depth” and “width” of the corridor of possibilities that follows it. It determines it to *some degree*. If we look backward, there is no direct causation, but direct possibilisation. The Aristotelian model of causality only holds locally, but to be sure, it was only ever intended to be a common-sense theory of causality generalized over the entire cosmos. A staff moves a stone and is moved by a hand—yes, but that falls under a local model of causality.

32. This vision of temporary unity and ceaseless change leads necessarily to an auxiliary foundation for morality: our *existential fragility*. The snowflake is beautiful but disappears at a whim. The coral reefs disappear already when the water temperature increases. Everything exists in a dynamic balance that is at the same time resilient and fragile. If we transpose this insight to the human realm, we find that the realization of this fragility is a source of anxiety and altruism alike, as well as that of the arts, in both their fleeting and permanent forms.

33. Continuing with the arts and its focus on objects, we can see that this type of thinking valorises the *singularizing potential* of expression. If an object is singularized, it is made to stand out—so to speak, to express itself. We access it and it entangles with us; it wrests itself loose from its context, while remaining a part of it, yet never being reducible to it—it is caught up in a reciprocity which Merleau-Ponty call *schiasma*, but that we might also conceptualize as Alfonso Lingis’s “ecological zones” (Lingis, 2001). This is then a *mereological aesthetics*. And it can’t be otherwise, since we deal with the infra-environment only obliquely and incompletely. We never perceive

an object as fully separate; we only represent it as such (Paans, 2021b). Yet, there is Schellingian “indivisible remainder” that is inferred and apprehended rather than directly encountered (Paans, 2024).

34. The notion of an *infra-environment* is deeply conflicted and paradoxical. On one hand, even a primeval forest is an infra-environment that confronts us with our finitude. On the other hand, our built environment constitutes an ecological habitat of its own. We survive in it, yet it makes us ill, warps our agential capacities through “instructive spaces” and enables our greatest economic, industrial, cultural and artistic expressions. Its extreme achievement comes at a price of extreme health deterioration, fragmentation, rootlessness and alienation. This is why “Arcadia”, “Paradise” or the “wilderness” is set up as against the *polis*. Or, alternatively, “landscape” fulfils this role—a mediated, tamed wildness in which our aesthetic continuity with the cosmos can be grasped. This is what gives all landscape poetry its poetic force.

35. Such poetic force provides what our organic systems require most – stimulating symbols, leading even to complete cosmologies, from Heaven/Hell schemas to models like Chaos/Order. We had symbols without referents long before we had spoken language. And this is why we can still apprehend. Apprehension is the earliest form of (essentially embodied) cognition, albeit non-conceptual and raw, discursively inarticulate and emotive. But it is in the interplay of organic process, symbol, and signifier that *thought-shapers* and *action-shapers* exert their influence, either in their destructive or generative sense (Hanna and Paans, 2021; Paans and Ehlen, 2022).

36. However, this still-existent core has evolved within us, and gives rise to our artistry, aesthetic feeling, and our capacity of appreciation and immersion, and thereby to our access to the numinous. The “Idea of the Holy” can at least be partially explained in anthropologic and evolutionary terms, without in any way being reducible to it. If only because our language fails us, and its domain of application is limited. In the sense, Wittgensteinian pessimism or reluctance about the confines of language is entirely justified.

37. Nihilism is the inevitable upshot of any modernistic, mechanistic worldview. It is the despair of a bleak, meaningless world ruled by goals, aims, targets and the immanent possibility of being outcast. That we are alone in the universe is not our burden, but that we are stuck on a planet with the morally most depraved is. If one would be alone on the planet, succumbing to nature would be the existential threat. But our *existential fragility* is unfortunately punctuated by events like wars, conflicts and deceit—all caused by our fellow creatures.

38. To live in the endless now (not the Buddhist present) is to practice creative piety. It is the art of “living the living presence,” a true *Lebensphilosophie* based on the

ecological view, the full awareness of our existential fragility and the anti-purposive mindset of organicism.

39. The endless now is the place beyond the end: the realm where aesthetics and eschatology fully coincide to give us the momentary view of a world without humanity, in its full *thisness* (*sūnyata*). It is the aesthetic world of Caspar David Friedrich's Nietzschean "Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog," of the wandering music of Valentin Silvestrov, the desert, the full impact of our place in the world by stepping outside it (see, e.g., Paans, 2020b). It is the space beyond time.

40. As such, the most intimate experience of Life (with a capital L) is the *chiasma*: the reciprocal proximation and distancing to behold Life itself. To grasp Life fully, we cannot rely just on knowing through *logos* or *doxa* but should include also aesthetically apprehending it in a moment of *metanoia*. In aesthetic experience, two movements unfold simultaneously, an implicate and explicate order. The first is one of immersion in the work: being pulled into the now. The second is one of observing the feeling of being immersed and appreciating that particular feeling as an event or experience.

41. Overlaid on this double movement of immersion-distancing is the imaginative experience of disintegration-integration. For Kant, this constitutes *the sublime*: being immersed to such a degree in a work that the imagination first breaks down, only to restructure the contents it encounters. Thus, we have the inscape, the positive disintegration and the creative synthesis as steps in an organic process of appreciation.

42. Coming-to-grips or integrating mundane and sublime experiences, then, becomes an art – the art of living. It is a "searching grasping" or cognitive tactility or hapticity exercised on objects of cognition – it is the overcoming of the subject-object split through immersive subjective experience. However, it is a continuous and sharply disjointed process. Synthesis is not a moment, but a sequence of superimposed steps.

43. This can only be done from a first-person viewpoint. Despite the fact that it can be communicated, my philosophy is *adjectival* (Paans, 2022f). It is arguable that it can be imitated, but one must become convinced not only by the strength of its arguments, but equally by its coherence as a whole, and its applicability across a variety of domains. Philosophy, in the end, is practical. It is Life itself in practice, or auto-affectivity.

44. The *chiasma*, or productive reciprocity between subject and object is nothing else than the operation of creative piety, the moment we experience eternity in a raindrop, or regard the world as if we have already passed on. It is—in Buddhist terms—the "eye that does not see itself," and therefore acquires a kind of experiential freedom. Especially free from hasty judgments or instrumental reason. What is called "Enlightenment" is the propensity for moral action by growing up and assuming

one's responsibility. But to assume such responsibility demands a revolution of the heart, which cannot come about without a feeling of humility.

45. This is why *metanoia* is such an important concept. It is not just a moment of prostrating oneself, but of consciously taking up a new role, position and attitude in the world. It derives from the Greek *μετάνοια* (Latinized: *metanoia*, literally "transforming one's mind"). In positive psychology, it represents the process of breaking down and building up. In rhetoric, it implies a moment of qualifying a prior statement, amplifying, or diminishing its intensity. As such, it plays with the fact of *the limit-experience*, in the transcendental sense of the term. As Hajime Tanabe has worked out in one of his major philosophical work *Philosophy as Metanoetics*, the practice of *metanoetics* or the viewpoint of repentance is a necessary condition for practicing philosophy (Tanabe, 2016).

"Repentance" does not mean that one must feel guilty or repent for a prior sin. It is simply the viewpoint of epistemic humility, accepting that the place where we are now is the consequence of prior choices that can be reversed if we wish to do so. The fact that this has not happened is the tragic human condition. It is the tension between the worst and the best of human instincts that makes a repentance or *tristesse* necessary, in order to avoid playing god and relapsing into passive fatalism.

46. Put in Kantian terms: we can rationally self-legislate. We can devise laws and voluntarily decide to adhere to them. But the attitude that informs these laws (and customs or habits, and thus the shape of our thoughts and ultimately our brains) determines what kind of laws comes into existence. Moral laws emerge under certain transcendent conditions. Whereas Kant originally intended his transcendental idealism as a theory of experience and its limits, he realized quickly its import for morality. The categorical imperative, the doctrines of virtue and right, and the *Religion within the Bounds of Mere Reason* are all pre-occupied with this question: which boundary conditions set norms for the moral laws that appear?

47. Even before that question is answered, an assertion is made: laws are made by individuals and collectives that are embodied, embedded and extended. They function in an anthropological place or situation. Whether we call this embeddedness Life, Process, or Reality does not matter; what should be recognized is that any form of Divine Command theory cannot constitute a functioning morality. It is abstract, disembodied, and since it is not from this world, it has nothing to say here. The pernicious idea that a Deity gives out commands serves to cover up the fact that we ourselves make laws, relegating our moral responsibility to a divine agent in order not to be confronted with its consequences.

48. *Metanoia* transforms the mind. But we should not just understand it as the brain or the spirit, but frame it, following the latest cognitive-scientific insights as enactive,

embodied, embedded and extended—a 4E conception. In so doing, the world becomes a part of the individual. Or, as Karl Jaspers put it: the landscape, culture, customs, arts, and traditions become the ground of our being in the world (*Dasein*), or our way of inhabiting it (*bevinden*). Consequently, if we transform our minds by adopting and cultivating new attitudes (creative piety—see, e.g., Hanna and Paans, 2022), then we can build a new world that reflects these values. The tragic note is that this is always a live possibility, but the collective choice is usually not made to act on this agency.

49. Metanoia and prostration imply deliberately adopting an attitude, changing one's relation to the world through the body: opting for a different being-towards-the-world and actively changing one's *dispositif* or *verhouding*. There is a positioning implied in changing the lived, first-person experience. One changes one's living in the world, one's place in the world, and thereby alters one's perspective, over against reality or a deity or divine and/or cosmic order. The depth of one's anthropological place can be unlocked and accessed or tapped-into by positioning oneself differently. This implies a new range of emotional, affective and imaginative attitudes. Possibilities that were formerly unimaginable or inconceivable become in fact conceivable. In turn, this progression (the Kantian *progressus* through reflection) is a process driven by moral imagination, of finding, exploring, and inhabiting one's place in the world.

50. Voluntarily to self-legislate implies the practice of *metanoia* (or its Japanese counterpart: *zange*). It demands that we follow through on our commitments. However, this leads into a conflict with regard to our desires: sometimes we would like to cut a corner or are sabotaged by our own bodies. This is a double tragedy, as we are trapped in our embodiment and its accompanying drives. There is agency which rises above this predicament (what Max Scheler aptly called "spirit"), but this requires accepting pain, pulling away from our demand for instant gratification, and overcoming our worst instincts.

51. Language evolves to describe the new moral space in which we find ourselves. This is why a *new existentialism* is needed. Opposed to existentialist and relativist nihilism, this neo-existentialism needs to conceptualize the human being and his existence into account, but this time from a radically entangled and ecological viewpoint. If we are continuous with the cosmos, then the frame of reference that we use to situate ourselves and take stock of our position should reflect the attitudes fostered by metanoia and creative piety. All this implies a renewed relation to our existential fragility. We must come to terms with it in a changing world. The question of inhabiting, or of Being in a brave new world—a world beyond the end, perhaps?

52. Coming to terms with fragility is to come to terms with finitude. Indeed, the experience of fragility is one form of experiencing finitude. However, we must distinguish between finitude as *finality* (i.e. the loss of the subjective viewpoint) and finitude as *processualism*. The individual viewpoint vanishes upon death, but the

transcendental subject (whether human or not) endures. This is a fundamental point that Schopenhauer touches on in his work. The Will endures, the individual vanishes. The premise of all religions is to reverse the order, and make the individual endure by obliterating the Will (under the form of individual desires), and to merge with a Deity.

53. But this amounts to a refusal to accept what we truly are, even while new and fulfilling attitudes might be cultivated through spiritual practices. To inhabit the cosmos first and foremost means to experience our place in it. By striving for individual immortality, we make a first-class mistake, and by seeking to govern even beyond the grave, we exacerbate our suffering in the present. It is also a misunderstanding of our place in the cosmos: we cannot escape the natural order, for we are radically entangled in it. Shuffling off this mortal coil is an impossibility, and to desire it a misunderstanding of Life. Immortality, not mortality is the problem in subjective experience. To live Life fully, on the other hand, is the core philosophical issue.

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