



Overcoming Anthropocentric Humanism and Radical Anti-Humanism: Contours of the Constructive Postmodernist Environmental Epistemology

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ABSTRACT: Drawing on eco-psychology's central problematic concerning the assumed conceptual bifurcation between the human self and the natural world, which is prevalent in contemporary modern culture, this paper explores the main contours of constructive postmodernist environmental epistemology, as exemplified by Alfred North Whitehead's process-relational thought. With reference to characterizations of the modern and deconstructive postmodern paradigms derived from Sartre's existentialism and Derrida's deconstructionism, it sets forth a novel demonstration of how Whitehead's process-relational way of thinking, as representative of a critical, non-anthropocentric organicism, overcomes both the anthropocentric humanist assumptions of the modern paradigm, which are at the root of the ecological crisis, as well as the anti-humanism common to both deconstructive postmodernism and radical ecologism. I show how process-relational environmental epistemology can contribute to the cultivation of a heightened awareness of the prehensive character of human experience in our culture, by which the human self is, in part, constituted, with a concern to limit the rate and extent of the appropriation, consumption, and destruction of "the natural" belonging to many forms of human creativity, thereby tempering the "attack on the environment" via reasoned self-limitation. At the same time, I point out that process-relational environmental epistemology seeks to allow for sustainable levels of development, human creativity, life-satisfaction, and self-enjoyment.

TOWARD AN OUTLINE OF THE CONTOURS OF “PROCESS-RELATIONAL” ENVIRONMENTAL EPISTEMOLOGY

In responding to the overwhelming scientific consensus that there is a causal connection between various human activities (e.g., the burning of fossil fuels) and environmental problems (e.g., climate change), the philosopher's task is to reflect on, to identify, and to take issue with ways of thinking which are at the root of such environmentally destructive activities. This philosophical stream of inquiry may be called *environmental epistemology*, the results of which lead logically into the domain of ethics, precisely, into considerations of what sorts of behavior and ways of life are authentically constitutive of environmentally ethical *praxis* and how they contrast with those which contribute to the worsening of such ecological dysfunctions. One major issue in environmental epistemology, which it is the purpose of this paper to examine from a process-relational standpoint, is to identify what is problematic with present assumptions concerning the way human beings think about the relationship (or lack thereof) between themselves and the natural world, in order to then move toward considering how human beings *ought* to conceive of it. Therefore, environmental epistemology is both descriptive as well as prescriptive.¹ That said, environmental epistemology does not subjectively “cater the truth” to the specific circumstance of the ecological crisis. Rather, the very fact that there is an ecological crisis, to begin with, exemplifies the dominance of false and problematic assumptions regarding the relationship between the human self and the natural world in contemporary culture.

Here, drawing on eco-psychology's problematic concerning the relationship between the human self and the natural world, Sartre's existentialism and Derrida's deconstructionism, the present essay serves, more generally, to outline some of the main contours of the environmental epistemology which emerges out of Whiteheadian, process-relational modes of thought, the latter representative of an alternative form of postmodernism, namely, a “constructive” or more accurately, “re-constructive postmodernism” (Griffin, “Introduction” xii). Specifically, I intend to set forth a novel demonstration of how Alfred North Whitehead's process-relational way of thinking, characterized as a critical, non-anthropocentric organicism, overcomes both the anthropocentric humanist assumptions of the modern paradigm, which are at the root of the ecological crisis, as well as

the anti-humanism common to both deconstructive postmodernism and radical ecogism. In order to carry out this task, it will first be necessary to provide a brief analysis of some of the main themes of eco-psychology in raising the epistemological problem of the conceptual bifurcation between the human self and the natural world. Second, I shall demonstrate how Sartre's characterization of the fundamental project of human-reality in *Being and Nothingness* illuminates the underlying meaning of substantialist conceptions of the human self and Nature, as well as of the anthropocentric humanism of the modern paradigm. Third, it will be imperative to provide a brief synopsis of Derrida's deconstructionism, with reference to his critique of anthropocentric humanism in the essay, "The Ends of Man" as well as of his allegations concerning Sartre's complicity with it. Fourth, it will be necessary to elaborate on some of the anti-humanist affinities between deconstructive postmodernism and radical ecogism. Fifth, I shall show how the Whiteheadian process-relational environmental epistemology presents a critical, non-anthropocentric organicism that overcomes the vicious dichotomy between the anthropocentric humanism of the "modern" paradigm and the extreme anti-humanism of both "deconstructive postmodernism" and radical ecogism.

ECO-PSYCHOLOGY'S CRITIQUE OF THE CONCEPTUAL BIFURCATION OF THE HUMAN SELF FROM THE NATURAL WORLD

Eco-psychology is one of several fairly recent ecological movements arising from within the social scientific discipline of psychology; although it is constituted by an attempt to critically reassess the latter's basic assumptions. Other critical environmentally engaged forms of psychology include ecological psychology, conservation psychology, psycho-ecology, and terrapsychology.² Coinciding with other environmental movements, such as deep ecology, ecozoicism, and eco-feminism, eco-psychology maintains that consciousness of the plight of the natural environment needs to be developed not solely on the basis of the notion that the ecological crisis is a threat to human survival, but in that the natural world has value-in-itself. Its main aim is to overcome the anthropocentrism which is at the root of the environmental crisis. Particularly, eco-psychologists, such as Andy Fisher, David Kidner, and Theodore Roszak, criticize the anthropocentric, "ego"-logical biases of modern culture as well as of modern psychology, which are allegedly complicit with the continuance of environmental problems. In this light, much of eco-psychology's subject matter is closely analogous

to that of environmental epistemology, although the latter's investigations are, of course, philosophical in character.

Eco-psychologists hold that the citizenry of contemporary modern society does not contemplate the rhythms and patterns of Nature. They paint the picture that most persons are so focused on the immediate tasks of their "daily grind," that Nature, if anything, is experienced as an irrelevant backdrop for everyday human dealings and business. Quite critically, eco-psychologists observe that in contemporary society, the human individual lives in a human- and self-centered illusory realm, entirely disconnected from the natural world. All too rarely do they stop to wonder what this (existence) all is and to think about their relationship with the natural world. According to eco-psychology, contemporary modern culture assumes that these questions are not relevant, resulting in an unreflective mindset that is simply not attuned to the natural world. In the everyday attitude, the natural, if anything, is considered to be a mere potentiality, a "stockpile" for fulfilling the instrumental ends of human beings. With the help of modern technology, the natural world is developed, appropriated, transformed, prepared, processed, placed into packaging, and consumed upon demand, all without recognition of the intrinsic value of "the natural" in this process. Nature is assumed to be something merely there for human purposes, regardless of the fact that the average person takes "the natural" for granted within the constitution of themselves *qua* "selves." In the everyday mindset, there is an assumed metaphysical bifurcation between the self and the natural world, which is at the root of the ecological crisis. To be sure, eco-psychology suggests that "the violence we do to ourselves and to the natural world results from our [posited] psychological and spiritual separation from nature" (Fisher 21), namely, "a 'dissociative split' between spirit and nature . . . [in which] spirit is not only separated from nature, but incompatible and opposed [to it]" (Metzner 65). This conceptual bifurcation is assumed not only in everyday life in contemporary society,³ but also reinforced by mainstream psychology.

Eco-psychologists differentiate their discipline from mainstream psychology in that the latter postulates that the human self is constituted by an ego which stands statically apart from, and over against, the natural world. Particularly, they claim that mainstream psychology is reductionistic in that it focuses on the mental health, the feelings, and the desires of human beings, both in abstraction from, and to the neglect of any

consideration of the interrelation between the natural world and the mind. For instance, psychology focuses on alleviating the trials and illnesses of the human ego, such as depression, fear, grief, and anxiety, by way of therapy or by way of prescription drugs. Eco-psychologists charge that in its assumption of the existence of the human ego, and its exclusively anthropocentric focus on it, mainstream psychology fails to consider the impact of human thought and action on the natural world. Psychology presupposes that the natural world and the organic entities helping to compose it are merely in service to the desires of the human self, there to be appropriated, consumed, and used up without reference to them in the constitution of ourselves as “selves.” In traditional psychology, it is generally presupposed that while healthy persons largely confront the world and are able to control and appropriate the elements in their surroundings for themselves, an unhealthy person is one who cannot or does not, instead experiencing depression, fear, grief, and anxiety, for example, which need to be treated, as though they were the diseases and not the symptoms of a greater problem. In this way, eco-psychologists claim that psychology does not consider that the well-being of the individual egos experiencing, grasping, and appropriating the natural world are in any way connected to the health of that world and to the collective health of the organisms composing it. Conversely, the natural world is not considered to be a part of the human self, let alone connected with it in any fundamental way. As such, Kidner states:

within experimental psychology, the separation of the person from the natural contexts is so complete that no recent theorist has argued for the necessity of this separation; rather the natural world is considered to be so far beyond the field of interest of experimental psychology that this issue is simply not addressed. (“Why” 365)

For Fisher, Kidner, and Roszak, traditional psychology has postulated and reinforced the existence of a strict metaphysical barrier between the human ego and the natural world, where, in fact, there is none. Roszak claims that “psychologists concluded that if [the conception of] the self were to be expanded so as to include the natural world, then behavior leading to the destruction of it would be experienced as self-destruction” (“Nature” 3). And this standpoint would point directly to the necessity of limiting human appropriation and consumption of the things and resources of the natural world, namely, of repressing the ego, which would not only be conceived of as “anti-humanist,” but would be considered

unacceptable, especially in the deeply rooted Freudian tradition of psychology. Accordingly, for Kidner,

Freud regarded the separation of the self from the external world as an essential part of both individual development and the progress of civilization, arguing that the way forward required ‘combining with the rest of the human community and taking up the attack on nature, thus forcing it to obey human will, under the guidance of science.’ (“Why” 366)

“‘Nature,’ Freud dismally concluded, ‘is eternally remote. She destroys us—coldly, cruelly, relentlessly.’ Whatever else has been revised and rejected in Freud’s theories, this tragic sense of estrangement from nature continues to haunt psychology” (Roszak, “Nature” 2). Eco-psychologists further claim that the bifurcation of ego and natural world, common in mainstream psychology, is part and parcel of the continued dominance of Cartesian dualism. Precisely, Descartes postulated an anthropocentric, mechanistic-materialistic worldview in which reality was composed of two separate forms of substances: indivisible, thinking substances (*res cogitans*) and unthinking, extended, and divisible, material substances (*res extensa*), which propagates the conception that the ego is a substance that is disconnected from the material world. Eco-psychology seeks to heal the metaphysical split between “inner” and “outer,” as well as between consciousness and matter, these being the products of “the mature culmination of Cartesian dualism” (“Why” 367). As summed up by Kidner:

anthropocentric assumptions are intrinsic to the current Western ideology. While a religious world view necessarily locates humankind within the context of a greater spiritual scheme, in a mechanistic world view individuals, by means of rationality, are seen as masters—or at least potential masters—of a world that is at their disposal. The conception of a universe in which God is ultimately the controlling power is replaced by a viewpoint in which technology can enable humankind to control and utilize the world. (“Why” 366)

In contrast to mainstream psychology, eco-psychology is a holistic attempt to focus on the complete situation of the human self both within and compositional of the natural world. Avoiding the reductionism of the mainstream, it considers mental health from a collective and holistic perspective, rather than merely from a standpoint that is based on the assumptions that there exists an individual ego which stands over and against the world. For instance, eco-psychology considers that the mental health of one person is dependent upon the mental health of others as

well as the health of the natural environment. Furthermore, as defined by Fisher, eco-psychology has for its subject matter “neither the human nor the natural, but the lived experience of interrelationship between the two” (*Radical* 31) in a common identity. In other words, eco-psychology maintains that the diminishment of the human self and the natural world are reciprocal processes.

On the one hand, eco-psychologists attempt to investigate and locate reasons for ecological degradation in the most intimate conceptions and deeply rooted structures of the human psyche and through analysis of individuals’ understanding of themselves. For them, it is the questionable, anthropocentric conceptions of the ego, as postulated in traditional psychology, that create and allow for a lack of reflection leading to the over-consumption of natural resources. They claim that questionable conceptions of the ego which are found in psychology contribute to the excessively instrumental thinking in relation to the natural world that is dominant in contemporary culture, treating it simply as a means to human ends. As a result, a central concern of eco-psychologists is to take issue with “ego”-logical conceptions of the human self. Furthermore, unlike economic, “reform,” and “management” approaches to environmentalism, they view “the ecological crisis in existential and spiritual terms, not merely in technocratic or managerial ones” (Fisher, “Toward” 20).

On the other hand, eco-psychology concerns itself with the psychological effects of ecological degradation. It focuses on eco-therapy, namely, the treatment of mental ills occurring as a result of worsening environmental conditions. For example, eco-psychologists have also detected and investigated what they call environmental despair and “eco-anxiety,” as characterized by emotional stress, grief, intense worry, and panic attacks which are reactions against the increasing alienation of the modern individual from Nature, as well as rampant environmental destruction. Roszak and Fisher suggest that “no separation is more pervasive in this Age of Anxiety than our disconnection from the natural world” (“Nature” 3) and that “any practice that works to release us from the sense of being a separate, isolated ego set over against the [natural] world, helps to free us from death anxiety, which some see as a deep source of the human drive to control and dominate other humans and nature” (“Toward” 25). Eco-psychologists also investigate “alcoholism, drug abuse, sex addiction, consumerism, eating disorders, codependence . . . war-making” (Glendinning 54) as well as addictions to technology, rampant in Western society,

which, according to them, are unhealthy ways of coping with the cultural disassociation of the self from natural world.

Despite providing a more holistic vision for psychology, one critic of eco-psychology claims that it has, thus far, tended to focus too much on the human side of the split between self and natural world, and has not truly “offered a deeper way to understand the psychic-collective undercurrents of how we came to be at such destructive odds with the rest of the ecosphere” (Chalquist 21). In this direction, eco-psychology can only benefit from a dialogue with phenomenology, existentialism, and process-relational modes of thought in attempting to confront “the arbitrary and increasingly destructive separation of human consciousness from its ground and source” (Chalquist 26), namely, the natural world. As will be shown in the next section of this paper, the general themes surrounding eco-psychology’s critique of the anthropocentrism of modern society and of traditional psychology correspond directly with some important aspects of Jean-Paul Sartre’s view of the self in his existentialist phenomenology and psychoanalysis. This analysis of Sartre’s philosophy will also serve to identify the underlying meaning of the anthropocentric humanism at the root of modernity.

SARTRE’S CRITIQUE OF HUSSERL’S “EGO”-LOGICAL THEORY AND HIS ARTICULATIONS CONCERNING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE HUMAN SELF AND NATURE

In the mid-twentieth century, the arrival of existentialism shocked the intellectual establishment in many profound ways. While Sartre’s slogan that described his own existentialist philosophy was “existentialism is a humanism,” other figures, like Heidegger and Camus, who were branded “existentialists,” repudiated the term expressly and distanced themselves from the notion of humanism. For Sartre, while existentialism was “humanist,” it was not representative of a naïve humanism. It was nothing other than the attempt to provide “a coherent atheistic position” (*Existentialism* 51). With no given human nature or “self” in the mind of God to live up to, Sartre’s existentialism consisted in a claim that human beings are thrown into a world not of their own choosing and that it is the responsibility of each individual human being, through their choices and actions, to “nobly” define themselves, and, at the same time, to help define humanity as a whole. In other words, there is no self but what we make and there is no essence of humanity prior to its existence.⁴ In contrast to

previous humanistic philosophies, Sartre's existentialism also pointed out the limits of reason as well as provided a more "authentic" assessment of the human condition, confronting it head on with anxiety and despair. Existentialism took many of the initial intellectual steps toward the anti-humanism that is typically associated with the postmodernist thought that blossomed in the latter half of the twentieth century.

In setting out the main tenets of his existentialist philosophy, Jean-Paul Sartre examined the underlying meanings behind the conceptual bifurcation of the human self and the natural world. Sartre was not involved with environmentalism of any kind. But, although he distinguishes between empirical psychoanalysis and existentialist psychoanalysis in that while the former, "aims at reconstituting the life of the subject from birth to the moment of the cure," in order to "determine the complex," and the latter "seeks to determine the original choice [of being] . . . operating in the face of the world" (*Being* 727-28), his phenomenological investigations lend themselves well to the aims of eco-psychology.

In *Nausea*, Sartre discusses the existential anxiety and alienation modern man feels in relation to the natural world, as represented through the thoughts and feelings of his main character, Roquentin. Roquentin is a rare individual who contemplates his own existential situation as well as the place of "the human" in the natural world and he despairs, feeling that his life is meaningless and that existence is absurd. Over the course of the novel, Roquentin becomes increasingly neurotic and alienated from the humanistic aims of his vocation as a historian, largely as a result of his insights into the indifference of the natural world toward human aspirations and endeavors. In describing Roquentin's thoughts and feelings concerning Nature, Sartre writes,

I am afraid of cities. But you mustn't leave them. If you go too far you come up against the vegetation belt. Vegetation has crawled for miles toward the cities. It is waiting. Once the city is dead, the vegetation will cover it, will climb over the stones, grip them, search them, make them burst with its long black pincers; it will blind the holes and let its green paws hang over everything. You must stay in the cities as long as they are alive, you must never penetrate alone this great mass of hair waiting at the gates: you must let it undulate and crack all by itself. In the cities, if you know how to take care of yourself, and choose the times when all the beasts are sleeping in their holes and digesting, behind the heaps of organic debris, you

rarely come across anything more than minerals, the least frightening of all existents.

I am going back to Bouville. The vegetation has only surrounded three sides of it. (156)

In this passage, Roquentin's existential anxiety in relation to the impending doom of the city at the hands of "the vegetation and the beasts," represents a deeply held fear of the destructive powers of Nature. Nature is here conceived of not only as conditioning human life, but as determinate of the human condition. Nature is especially understood as a chaotic entity which is responsible for the temporality of human life and of human structures, namely, for the transience, finitude, decay, and perishing of all human life and endeavor.

Since human beings can do nothing to preserve themselves and their constructions against the ravages of Nature, Roquentin characterizes it as something to be feared. Roquentin's anxiety is, in part, the result of contemplating the threats and challenges that the natural environment poses to human survival, such as harsh climates, cold, heat, disease, hunger, thirst, decay, predatory animals, pestilence, floods, droughts, earthquakes, avalanches, hurricanes, tornadoes, and eruptions of volcanoes, which human beings attempt to overcome using their reasoning faculties, in order to preserve the conditions for survival. However, underlying this list of natural challenges to human beings, Roquentin's existential anxiety issues from the recognition that the human condition is comprised by "having to exist" as a "prisoner" tied into the finitude of his own existence. This is the meaning of the existentialist notion that human beings are thrown into a world not of their own choosing, but which is determinate of the limits and the contours of human experience, life, and existence. One may speculate that the facts that Nature continuously confronts human beings with such challenges to its survival, that the natural world determines the limits and contours of human life, and that the human response is such that to control and transcend Nature is the only way to attain freedom, constitute some of the major reasons for why humanity has attempted to construct both physical and conceptual barriers between the itself and the natural world. Similarly, these are reasons why the human species has evolved chiefly through the advance of its technical-rational capacities which enable it to increasingly control and "master" Nature. To be sure, throughout its evolution, the human species has been engaged not only in

a fight for survival against Nature, wherein reason, employed in the “technical-rational interest” (Habermas 191), is the main “battle weapon.”

In a similar manner to some of the main tenets of eco-psychology’s investigation of the relationship between the human self and the natural world, although without a concern for the environment as the chief impetus, Sartre also took issue with metaphysical conceptions of the self, which describe it as entirely disconnected from the (natural) world. In *The Transcendence of the Ego* (1936), a seminal work from which his existentialist philosophy was sprung, Sartre provides a critique of Husserl’s “ego”-logical transcendental idealism that was set out in the latter’s *Cartesian Meditations* and elsewhere. While Sartre’s own existentialist phenomenology is thoroughly indebted to Husserl’s phenomenological investigations and to its findings, he takes particular issue with Husserl’s positing of the existence of a transcendental ego at the root of consciousness, responsible for its unity as the “thing” which thinks.

In *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, Husserl outlined some of the connections, as well as the distinctions, between psychology and phenomenology, which may, for the purposes of this paper, serve analogously to illuminate the relationship between eco-psychology and more philosophical modes of investigation. Husserl claimed that a purely descriptive psychology of consciousness parallels transcendental phenomenology, in that they may correspond in what they sought to describe. Husserl thought that psychology was “the truly decisive field” in bridging the gap between “subjectivism and objectivism” and that it paralleled phenomenology in that “its subject matter is universal subjectivity” (*Crisis* 208). But, he was critically adamant regarding the distinction between them. Husserl charges that psychology “like every objective science, is [naïvely] bound to the realm of what is prescientifically pregiven, i.e., bound to what can be named, asserted, described in common language” (209), and is fraught with dualistic and physicalistic assumptions. As such, for him, while psychology operated from “a different attitude and is under the guidance of a different task” (208) and holds that data belonging to the world are “presupposed as existing” and “taken as psychic components of a man,” in phenomenological investigation, the data “are not taken in this manner, because the whole world, when one is in the phenomenological attitude, is not accepted as actuality, but only as an actuality-phenomenon” (*Cartesian* 32). Husserl further pointed out that phenomenology avoids the anthropological tendencies

of empirical psychology. He also sought to reorient psychology toward the transcendental phenomenological attitude. Interestingly enough, in a similar manner to eco-psychology's criticism of mainstream psychology for not investigating the relationship of the human self and the natural world, Husserl asked "why has the experience of the bodily thing in the life-world, as the experience of something 'merely subjective,' not previously been included in the subject matter of psychology?" (*Crisis* 219).

One of Husserl's fundamental projects, in relation to his phenomenology, was to attempt to return to the type of meditation that is found in Descartes' philosophy, in order to provide a renewed grounding for the sciences, while avoiding the latter's dualistic presuppositions. Parallel with Descartes' meditations, Husserl maintained that the findings of his transcendental phenomenology were universal, and he both clarified and deepened the meaning of Descartes' methodic doubt. Consistent with Descartes' postulation of the existence of an *ego cogito*, through his own transcendental meditations, Husserl "discovered" a transcendental ego, or "I," at the core of subjectivity. The transcendental ego was a main object of investigation for his phenomenology. But, according to Sartre's critique, regardless of questions pertaining to phenomenological methods, the postulation of the existence of a transcendental ego at the root of consciousness is an unfounded assumption that is left over from Descartes' "discovery" of the *ego cogito* and the resulting bifurcation of thinking substances (*res cogitans*) from extended substances (*res extensa*). For Husserl, the transcendental ego was universally accessible to consciousness through the mental procedure of phenomenological reduction (*epoché*), or in other words, through the "bracketing-off" of the "naïve consciousness" of the objective world, and more precisely, of "all positions taken toward the already-given objective world" (*Cartesian* 20). With the employment of phenomenological reduction, which is also a major point of distinction between his phenomenology and psychology, Husserl attempted to show that the transcendental ego can be experienced as a solitary entity, which is responsible for maintaining the unity of consciousness. It was, for him, the "ego who comes to the fore only with the transcendental-phenomenological *epoché*" (25) or this meditative process of bracketing of the world. Through the phenomenological reduction to the transcendental ego, Husserl maintained that "the world is for me absolutely nothing else but the world existing for and accepted by me in such a conscious *cogito*" (21). And, for him, in the phenomenological

attitude “natural being is a realm whose existential status is secondary; it continually presupposes the realm of transcendental being” (21). While Husserl himself recognized that his postulation of the transcendental ego led to the problem of solipsism, and in his fifth meditation, he attempted to resolve the resulting solipsism through a phenomenological analysis of the inter-subjectivity of transcendental egos within a common life-world, Sartre’s critique exploits this lacuna.

Against Husserl’s postulation of the existence of the transcendental ego, Sartre argues that there is no ego “formally, nor materially in consciousness” (*Transcendence* 31) and that “consciousness . . . is never alone, is never isolated from the existing world” (24). In his criticism, Sartre agrees with Husserl’s notion of *intentionality*, a central concept which was first introduced by Brentano, and which enables the phenomenologist to provide a description of acts of consciousness. However, Sartre shows how, if taken to its logical conclusion in phenomenological analysis, it is inconsistent with the postulation of the existence of a transcendental ego at the root of consciousness. For Sartre, as for Husserl, the notion of intentionality means that “all consciousness is consciousness of something” (44), and suggests that there are two “sides” or “poles” to any intentional act. There is the “subjective” or the “noetic pole,” which is the “constituting” dimension of consciousness, and there is the objective or the “noematic pole,” which encompasses that which is “constituted” in consciousness. Sartre suggests that there is only intentionality working toward the synthesis that is consciousness, but there is no pure, essential “I,” or transcendental ego at its root. He charges that “the ‘I’ of the (Cartesian) ‘I think’ is an object grasped with neither apodictic nor adequate evidence” (51) and argues, in a parallel manner, that Descartes’ “I am” presupposes some understanding of the meaning of being, which he neglected to express or justify. Instead, Sartre claims that the ego is an illusory construct. He explains that it may appear to exist, but it is really just reflective consciousness, namely, it is consciousness intending consciousness and falsely taking it as an ego. Specifically, the “something” being intended is merely consciousness being taken as an object by consciousness; it is not a substantial ego. Furthermore, whereas Husserl argued that the transcendental ego is the continual “synthesizer” of its past and present experiences, Sartre makes the case that although “consciousness must be perpetual syntheses of past and present consciousness . . . it is consciousness which unifies itself, by a play of transversal intentionalities” (39). As such, for him, the ego is only

the product of reflective consciousness' false habit of taking consciousness as an object, and in turn, taking it as an "I," a distinct transcendental subject, namely, a Cartesian substance existing independently from the world. In this way, Sartre makes the case that the postulation of a transcendental ego is inconsistent with the notion of intentionality and that Husserl's phenomenological analysis is self-contradictory if it is "occupied with a consciousness shut off or separable from the world" (25). Rather, for Sartre, if there is a self, then "it is something that exists *in the world*" (31), namely, being comprised by a person's facticity as a phenomenon for others. And, he writes that this

conception of the ego [as *in the world*, rather than as transcendent or separate from it] seems to us the only possible refutation of solipsism. The refutation that Husserl presents in . . . *Cartesian Meditations* does not seem to us capable of unsettling a determined and intelligent solipsist. As long as the 'I' remains a structure of consciousness, it will always remain possible to oppose consciousness, with its 'I', to all other existents. (103, my addition)

Since the strong counter-claims to Sartre's criticisms stemming from a Husserlian transcendental phenomenological stance are not mentioned here, for example, his aims to "disclose the 'worldliness' of consciousness" (Zaner 387), to elaborate upon phenomenological descriptions of the embodiment of the human person as well as inter-subjectivity within the "life-world," we must conclude that Husserl is certainly not the "straw man" that Sartre intends in this passage. Nevertheless, in the above passage, Sartre is alluding to some of the tendencies which are entailed by "ego"-logical theories. First, "ego"-logical theories may hold that the self is synonymous with consciousness and the mind, to the exclusion of the body, as in the Cartesian disconnection between thinking substances and material substances. Second, they may conceive that the ego is conceived of as a static, Cartesian thinking substance, defined as that which is dependent on itself for its own existence. Third, "ego-logical" theories may presuppose that the self is something that transcends the world, and/or stands apart and over and against other beings, and not to be a part of, or compositional of the world. Fourth, they may hold that self-identity is to be defined on the basis of identifying what it is not (i.e., the world or other entities within it), and negating or differentiating itself from what it is not.⁵ Regarding this last ramification, such "negations" might be interpreted by eco-psychology not only in logical terms, but

also in environmental ones, precisely, in terms of human beings achieving some understanding of their own self-identity via the destruction of the natural world.

While it must be reiterated that Sartre was not involved with environmentalism during his life, and while elsewhere, in “Existentialism is a Humanism,” Sartre explains that the Cartesian *cogito* and human subjectivity are the “starting point” of existentialism, his critique of “ego”-logical theories and his situating of the human self as *in the world* can be said to serve the aims of eco-psychology. Precisely, it serves to undo the fallacious notion that human self-identity can be defined by way of the conception that an ego exists as transcending or as standing over and against the natural world. Rather, the illusion of a substantial ego existing within or behind consciousness and transcending the natural world, may be part and parcel of the total situation of the lived tension of the human organism in relation to its conditioning by the environment. From an eco-psychological perspective, if a “self” does indeed exist, it may be said that it is to be found in the complex interrelationship between the human organism and the natural world, and not one-sidedly to be associated with human consciousness or mind. I turn now to an examination of Sartre’s notion of “the fundamental project of human reality” as descriptive of the anthropocentric humanism of modernity and an underlying reason for the human postulation of the existence of a substantial, static ego standing over and against the natural world.

SARTRE’S ARTICULATION OF “THE FUNDAMENTAL PROJECT OF HUMAN REALITY” AS DESCRIPTIVE OF THE MEANING OF THE ANTHROPOCENTRIC HUMANISM OF MODERNITY

Sartre’s phenomenological analysis of how the ego, conceived of as a substance entirely separate from the world, is an illusionary construct closely relates to his conceptualization of what he calls the “fundamental project of human reality” (*Existentialism* 63). In *Existentialism and Human Emotions*, Sartre writes,

the best way to conceive of the fundamental project of human reality is to say that man is the being whose project is to be God. Whatever may be the myths and rites of the religion considered, God is first ‘sensible to the heart’ of man as the one who identifies and defines him in his ultimate and fundamental project. If man possesses a pre-ontological comprehension of the being of God, it is not the great wonders of nature, nor the power of society which have conferred it

upon him. God, value and supreme end of transcendence, represents the permanent limit in terms of which man makes known himself what he is. To be man means to reach toward being God. Or if you prefer, man fundamentally is the desire to be God. (63)

Sartre's claim that the fundamental project of human-reality is the desire to be God can be interpreted as an underlying meaning of anthropocentric humanism of modernity, or of the human-centered attitude which many ethicists have pointed to as the chief cause of the ecological crisis. It must be pointed out that there are many different religious, cultural, theological, and philosophical conceptions of God, God's power, God's nature, and divine attributes and qualities, such that one may conclude that Sartre's notion of the desire to be God is open to various interpretations. However, if "God" is here defined according to traditional philosophical definitions, for example as the Prime Mover, namely, as the ultimate cause of the world, an eminently rational Supreme Intelligence, an omniscient, self-caused (*causa sui*) substance, unaffected by anything else, then Sartre's notion of the desire to be God is very much analogous to the assumption that the human self is a Cartesian substance, namely, an "I," or ego, conceived as an unconditioned, static unity, self-caused, entirely self-sufficient, transcendent of the world, not subject to flux, and dependent only upon itself for its existence. To be sure, inspired by, and coinciding with his analysis of Hegelian dialectic and the phenomenological notion of intentionality, Sartre writes, "the human goal is 'the in-itself-for-itself', consciousness become substance, substance become the cause of itself" (*Being* 575). By the pursuit of the "in-itself-for-itself" he means that human individuals, lacking Being and hence desiring Being, are constantly engaged in the project of escaping contingency and determining themselves *qua* "selves," or their own facticity as they would have it, ultimately in an attempt to becoming a self-caused (*causa sui*) substance, akin to traditional conceptions of God. And, Sartre claims that "what [ultimately] presides over this project . . . is the ideal of a consciousness which would be the foundation for its own being-in-itself by the pure consciousness which it would have of itself" (723-24, my addition).

In further investigating what he means by the fundamental project of human reality, in *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre alludes to the notion that the "desire to be" is made manifest largely through the activity of appropriation.⁶ Here, Sartre's phenomenological analysis is of interest to

eco-psychological investigations of desire and consumption. He claims that desire is comprised of a perceived or conceived “lack of being” and is “a relation with a contingent and concrete in-itself which it has the project of appropriating” (*Being* 725, 747-48). Desire is a drive to possess, to use, and further, to consume something out of a perceived lack of being, where “the word ‘consume’ holds the double meaning of an appropriative destruction and an alimentary enjoyment. To consume is to annihilate and it is to eat; it is to destroy by incorporating into oneself” (757). As such, for Sartre, to appropriate something in satisfying desire is, essentially, to destroy it. He argues that “destruction realizes appropriation” (756-57), by pointing out that one possesses something by taking over and assuming sole responsibility for what had, beforehand, existed on its own and was empirically observable to all. Destroying a thing exemplifies such a taking over of its being in-itself, negating its being in-itself, and negating the possibility of its being accessed by others. In appropriating a thing through destroying it, one “apprehend[s] that ideally I am the foundation of its being in so far as it is a part of myself and on the other hand to apprehend that empirically the appropriated object is never valid in itself alone nor for its [own] individual use” (760, my addition).

According to Sartre, in relation specifically to the desire to be God, what we really desire to appropriate in an object is the totality of the entities within the world, so that we can posit ourselves as the foundation of the world. He writes, “to possess is to wish to possess the world across a particular object. And, as possession is defined as the effort to apprehend ourselves as the foundation of a being in so far as it is ourselves ideally” (*Being* 762). In expressing this desire, Sartre points to the analogy of smoking. He states that

to smoke is an appropriative, destructive action. Tobacco is a symbol of ‘appropriated’ being, since it is destroyed in the rhythm of my breathing, in a mode of ‘continuous destruction’, since it passes into me and its change in myself is manifested symbolically by the transformation of the consumed solid into smoke. . . . The act of destructively appropriating the tobacco was the symbolic equivalent of destructively appropriating the entire world. (761)

However, Sartre argues that the desire to be God involves the appropriation of the totality of entities in the world, in order to posit ourselves *qua* selves as the foundation of the world, the project “of being my own foundation for myself can never be satisfied through [such] appropriation”

(*Being* 755), leading to a continuous sequence of desire, conceived of as a lack of being, which is never satisfied.

While the psychological and phenomenological meanings of the myriad of human desires, appropriative activities, and actions are, for Sartre, comprised by the desire to be God, he does not provide a concrete list of examples which may be said to correspond to this fundamental project. He states, “while the meaning of the desire is ultimately the project of being God, the desire is never constituted by this meaning; on the contrary, it always represents a particular discovery of its ends” (*Being* 724). That is to say, Sartre is convinced that “all [human] acts, all [human] projects translate this choice [of desiring to become God] and reflect it in a thousand and one ways” (764, my additions), although they may not exhibit evidence of this desire explicitly, namely, as may be demonstrated via empirical psychological analysis. The desire to be God may also be characterized as the human mimicry of God so as to live up to the Judeo-Christian idea that humanity is made in the image of an all-powerful God.

From these considerations, however, it may be hypothesized that the notion of the desire to be God coincides with many of the underlying human assumptions which are responsible for the environmental crisis. Particularly, Sartre’s notion of the fundamental project of human-reality as the desire to be God can be said to offer a grounding, unified description of humanity’s “manifest destiny” to limitlessly develop and transform the natural world, to attain economic self-maximization, to engage in excessive consumerism, to foster ever-increasing levels of economic growth, to aim at unlimited technological progress, and to master Nature by way of the instrumental-rational sciences. The notion of the pursuit of the in-itself-for-itself, as explained by Sartre, is the project to avoid contingency and to found one’s own Being, and can be said to underlie all of these endeavors.

Humanity’s endeavor to become dependent only on itself for its existence, or to liberate itself from the “shackles” of its dependency on, and determination by the natural world is also part and parcel of the desire to be God. In this light, Sartre’s notion of the desire to be God is descriptive of the general sense of the anthropocentric humanism of modernity. Our arrogant, self-centred ways of thinking in everyday life, which lead to the systematic appropriation of the natural world, and the valuation of human goals, interests, inclinations, and preferences as over

both non-human life and the natural world, is comprised by the desire to be God. Sartre writes that

man makes himself man in order to be God, and selfness considered from this point of view can appear to be an egoism; but precisely because there is no common measure between human reality and the self-cause which it wants to be, one could just as well say that man loses himself in order that the self-cause may exist. (*Being* 796)

That is to say, for Sartre, the “passion” of human beings *qua* “human” is to reject, to “nihilate their being,” or to “lose” themselves, attempting instead to fully transcend the finitude and contingency of their genuine humanity in order to posit themselves as fully “self-caused,” as in traditional conceptions of God. In ecological terms, one might speculate that this rejection involves the rejection of the reality that the natural world both sustains and supports human life, biologically, mentally, and spiritually. The desire to be God, rather than being the product of simple “faith,” may also be interpreted as a psychological attachment to God (or to the concept of God, conceived of as an infinite substance), in a similar manner as adolescents being attached to a celebrity, desiring not only to imitate them, but *be* them.

For Sartre, however, the constitution of the human self is largely an existential choice, a desire to determine oneself *qua* “self” as this or that. Sartre’s slogan that “existence precedes essence” involves the notion that we have been thrown into a world not of our own choosing and that we are radically responsible for who we are and what we become. The idea that existence precedes essence means that “there is no [given] human nature” (“Existentialism” 349), namely, there is no such thing as an essential, or substantial self that is somehow predetermined in the mind of God. Instead, for Sartre, it is only through the decisions that we make and the actions that we perform in our lives and experience, that our Being or essence is determined. It is for this reason that Sartre emphasizes humanity’s finite freedom in the face of its existential condition, and it is in this more “sober” sense that he makes the claim that “existentialism is a humanism.” Therefore, even though Sartre claims that the best way to conceive of human-reality is as the desire to be God, if this notion is to remain consistent with the rest of Sartre’s overall critique of essentialism, then the notion of the desire to be God should not be considered to provide a definition of the essence of humankind. Rather, for Sartre, our decisions as individuals in relation to the environment,

for example, are choices which serve to define “the human” as a whole, such that the essence of humanity is not fixed in any particular way. Sartre himself realizes this as he states, “it appears here that the initial project of being God, which ‘defines’ man, comes close to be the same as a human ‘nature’ or an ‘essence’” (*Being* 724). However, the desire to be God is representative of an existential choice by which human beings attempt to define themselves chiefly by the mimicry of selected aspects of God’s nature, powers, attributes, and qualities, and since he labels the desire to be God here as an “initial choice,” one can speculate that Sartre himself would want to maintain that human beings are “nothing but what they make of themselves” (“Existentialism” 349), namely, they are the entities “by whom values exist” (*Being* 797) and thus, he would be open to the widest possibilities for freedom in relation to determinations of human reality. As will be described in the next sections of this paper, later in the twentieth century, deconstructive postmodernism provided an anti-humanist reaction against modern humanity’s desire to be God and sought to dismantle any conception of an enduring self. In turn, deconstructive postmodernism opened up a new possibility with which to define the character of “the human.”

DERRIDA’S NOTION OF DECONSTRUCTION

Jacques Derrida’s critique of modernity and of humanistic metaphysics was more radical than that of the existentialists. As Derrida describes, within the post-war French intellectual scene, the postmodernist paradigm that followed from Sartre’s existentialism was constituted by an “anti-humanist and anti-anthropologic ebb” (“Ends” 134) that was largely a reaction against the latter’s left-over humanism and anthropologism. While, like Sartre, Derrida was not explicitly involved with environmentalism, a major theme within his critique was the influence of the use of language in the origination of anthropocentric selfhood. Advancing beyond Sartre’s critique of “ego”-logical theory, for Derrida, the postulation of the existence of an ego with similar qualities as traditional conceptions of God, stems from the metaphysical presuppositions inherent to language, for example, subject/substance and predicate/accident, which do violence to the way the world actually is. Derrida charges that the postulation of the existence of an essential “I” or a substantial, sovereign ego, conceived as entirely separate from the rest of the world is, in part, the unfortunate by-product of our reliance on the tool of

conventional language to represent the world. For Derrida, it is through the habitual use of language that we start to essentialize the metaphysical abstractions inherent in it, for example, the Aristotelian assumptions of subject/substance and predicate/accident, wrongly attributing them to the way the natural world, and to the things in it, such as the self, actually are. To be sure, in "Eating Well," Derrida suggests that "there has never been The Subject for anyone . . . The subject is a fable . . . but to concentrate on the elements of speech and *conventional* fiction that such a fable presupposes is not to stop taking it seriously" (Peters 313-14). However, Derrida aims at providing a "critique of consciousness, of the subject, of self-identity and of self-proximity or self-possession" (314). As such, while Derrida himself rejected being labeled a "postmodernist," as Jean-François Lyotard would define it, namely, by the notion that "postmodernism is incredulity toward metanarratives" ("Postmodern" 74), Derrida endeavors to employ the notion of deconstruction in order to subvert the metaphysical assumptions and false essentializations made through the use of language and employed in human reasoning, especially the notion of the subject or human self. As one commentator suggests, deconstructionism is characterized by an anti-humanist "repudiation of referentiality; the denial of the substantial self and the dissolution of evaluative discourse, both aesthetic and moral" (Freadmann 115).

In coining the notion of deconstruction, Derrida appropriated Heidegger's move to carry out a "Destruction" (*Zerstörung*) of the history of ontology at the beginning of *Being and Time*, for the purpose of "loosen[ing] up and dissolv[ing] the concealments" (23) present in traditional ways of determining the nature of Being, in order to prepare the way for re-asking the question of the meaning of Being. As Derrida points out, Heidegger's destruction was also "directed against humanism" ("Ends" 34) itself. Derrida fused Heidegger's concept of Destruction with the word, "Abbau," meaning to "take apart an edifice in order to see how it is constituted" (*Ear* 87). With these two notions the term "deconstruction" was born. As Derrida explains, the intent of deconstruction is to proliferate diverse interpretations of texts on the basis of "the indeterminacy and undecideability of meanings" ("Ends" 120), as a result of the absence of a transcendental signified grounding it.

For Derrida, not only does the human need for meaning-making through language do violence to the world, but all texts whatsoever, be they literary, philosophical, or scientific, are left "abandoned," such that

interpreters can make whatever they want of them. In other words, for him, language has no intrinsic, transcendent, authorized, or objective meaning that needs to be respected. In short, for Derrida, “there is nothing outside the text” (*Grammatology* 158), and readers have no duty to uphold an “intention” by an author, nor any final, univocal, privileged meaning or transcendental signified behind any text. Rather, all texts are to be deconstructed, and in fact, for him, all texts are always already deconstructed, deconstruction being the “active accomplice” (Freadman 117) of any articulation of meaning, either written or spoken. For Derrida, it can be demonstrated that any text is, of itself, internally self-reflexive and contradictory. It is by way of various deconstructive strategies, chief among them, *différance*, that Derrida seeks to uncover the inherent contradictions in any given textual narrative and to prove that it is “complicit . . . with what [it] denounces[s]” (Norris 48). *Différance*, meaning simultaneously *to differ* and *to defer*, marks the temporal juxtaposition of meanings in language, thereby undercutting the notion that a text has a fixed, essential meaning. For him, there is no discourse or proposition “which has not already slipped into the form, the logic, and the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contest” (Wood 286). Even deconstructive texts may be subject to further deconstruction, resulting in the “whirlpool” by which language is rendered empty of meaning.

By employing deconstructive techniques, such as *différance*, Derrida is not simply interested in discarding truth claims as in ordinary criticism. Rather, his deconstructive tactics work to undo the notion that “reason can dispense with [the tool of] language in its quest to arrive at a pure, self-authenticating truth or method” (Norris 21). Consequently, deconstruction is focused on the dismantling of reason, Derrida recognizing that “the scandal of Reason is that nothing seems more natural than [the] destruction of Nature” (*Grammatology* 151). For the ultimate aim of deconstruction is the use of the critical “tools” of philosophy against reason, and then to throw away those “tools,” leaving behind all metaphysics and ontology. Without language and reason holding sway, undoubtedly, human beings would not have a metaphysical, rational, or conceptual apparatus to cling to, and for that matter, they would not be able to make arbitrary separations between self and world. In this case, for Derrida, the possibility of defining “the human” as the *animale rationale*, would be brought to an end, thereby unshackling “the human” not only from the common notion that the rational faculties of human beings

comprise their essence, but also from metaphysics itself. Corresponding with this deconstructive enterprise, Derrida quotes from Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, where the Overman completes the project of active forgetting, and "without turning back to what he leaves behind him . . . burns his text and erases the traces of his steps" ("Ends" 152). In the next section, I will provide an account of Derrida's employment of deconstruction against Sartre's apparent complicity with anthropocentric humanism in "The Ends of Man," from which a paradigmatic characterization of deconstructionism will emerge.

DERRIDA'S DECONSTRUCTION OF ANTHROPOCENTRIC HUMANISM

Derrida's "The Ends of Man" is a key essay which was heavily influenced by Heidegger's *Letter on Humanism*, in which the latter took issue with Sartre's slogan, "existentialism is a humanism." In it, Derrida attempts to decenter the notion of a transcendental subject, as well as the anthropocentric conception that the essence of "the human" is comprised by teleological purposes through which human projects, endeavors, and practices acquire their meaning and significance. Particularly, he attacks the common, essentialist determinations of "the human" as the *animale rationale*, which, in his view, perpetuate the notion that any definition of the nature of humankind must involve a recourse to the "unfolding of teleological reason" (138). Derrida's specific focus in the essay, is to deconstruct the humanistic and "anthropological" (132) interpretations of the writings of Hegel, Husserl, and Heidegger which had held sway over the intellectual scene in postwar France, doing so on the basis that these philosophers understood their own projects to be critical of "anthropologism" and "metaphysical humanism" (122). While Derrida criticizes Hegel, Husserl, and Heidegger for their own inability to overcome humanism, detecting in each of them "a humanism or an anthropocentrism which necessarily places them, too, among the last, great metaphysicians" (Zaner 385), he singles out Sartre, especially, as chiefly responsible for a "mistak[en]" ("Ends" 132) humanistic reading of the intent of their projects. Specifically, in advancing Heidegger's critique of Sartre in the *Letter on Humanism*, which demonstrated that every humanism remains metaphysical, Derrida calls into question Sartre's "humanistic anthropologism." He claims that the latter's slogan "existentialism is a humanism," affirming the "nobility" of human life, choices, and action, as well as his central analysis of the human project of being-in-itself-for-itself comprising the structure of human freedom constituted "nothing

other than metaphysical unity of man and God, the project of becoming God as the project constituting human-reality" ("Ends" 131). Derrida charges that Sartre's existentialist philosophy, while presenting humanism in a different, and perhaps more neutral light, did not challenge or overcome the desire to be God as the fundamental project of human-reality. Rather, according to Derrida, Sartre's phenomenological descriptions of human-reality led him "all too quickly" to proclaim the essence of man, but also perpetuated and aligned existentialism with this project. To be sure, Sartre claimed that existentialist psychoanalysis would help to "reveal to man the real goal of his pursuit, which is being as a synthetic fusion of the in-itself with the for-itself" (*Being* 797), and in so doing, pointed in the direction of becoming self-caused (*causa sui*) as in the desire to be God. Therefore, for Derrida, Sartre's phenomenology and existentialism are not only descriptively anthropological, but even more strongly, they are prescriptively anthropocentric.

In challenging the "anthropological" reading of the German philosophers in postwar France, Derrida points to Sartre's "monstrous" translation of Heidegger's *Dasein*, namely, that being for whom Being is an issue for it, as "human-reality." While he notes that in Sartre's *Nausea*, Roquentin states, "I will not be fool enough to call myself 'anti-humanist' . . . I am not a humanist, that's all there is to it" ("Ends" 153), Derrida writes that while

certainly [Sartre's] notion of 'human-reality' translated the project of thinking the meaning of man, the humanity of man, on a new basis, [but] . . . the unity of man [was] never examined in and of itself. Not only is existentialism a humanism, but the ground and horizon of what Sartre calls his 'phenomenological ontology' remains the unity of human-reality. To the extent that it describes the structures of human-reality, [his] phenomenological ontology is a philosophical anthropology. ("Ends" 130-31)

In so doing, Derrida claims that by articulating that the fundamental project of human reality is the desire to be God, Sartre did not follow through with his own existentialist principle, namely, that existence precedes essence, and that he unwittingly affirmed a definition of the essence of humanity. But, Derrida works to deconstruct the essentialization of "the human" by philosophical anthropologies, including that of Sartre. He argues that if the desire to be God is indeed the essence of humanity in our contemporary epoch, then there is a need to overcome

“the human” and its false metaphysical constructions, in a similar manner as the proclamation that “man is something to be overcome” (*Portable* 124) in Nietzsche’s *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. Lastly, Derrida takes issue with Sartre’s atheism, charging that regardless of whether or not existentialism calls itself Christian or atheistic, it remains a metaphysical humanism. He states that Sartre’s atheism, while seemingly opposed to metaphysical humanism, “change[s] nothing in the fundamental structure” (“Ends” 131) of human-reality, conceived in terms of the project of becoming God. Rather, for Derrida, a deconstruction of the whole notion of the “sovereign” and “self-caused” subject is required in order to challenge it.

Conclusively, then, for Derrida, every philosophical determination of the essence of “the human” chains persons to it and does violence to *human* reality. Hence, ultimately, from Derrida’s point of view, freedom from such determinations requires a complete disbanding of language and reason. However, in relation to Derrida’s notion of deconstruction and, in particular, his deconstruction of Sartre’s articulation of the fundamental project of human reality as the desire to be God, it can be argued that it opens up a new, competing possibility for defining the character of “the human.” In that it empties reason, language, metaphysics, ontology, and the notion of “the human” (notions which have traditionally served to distinguish man from Nature) of meaning, deconstruction can be characterized as the mimicry of Nature. Nature is here being characterized especially in the sense which Sartre elucidates in *Nausea*, as that which is responsible for the transience, temporality, finitude, decay, and perishing of all human structures.

Analogously, deconstruction may be said to be constituted by a methodic anti-humanist desire to be Nature, dismantling any linguistic, metaphysical, and ontological barriers erected between *humanity* and Nature, be they past, present, or future. From this perspective, deconstruction is a method of divesting oneself of metaphysics, of “human selfness,” and of “human projects” in general, namely, of demonstrating them in their finitude and nullity, metaphorically mimicking the destructive forces of Nature. In this way, the methodic deconstruction of human constructions, as in the desire to be Nature, assumes that *humanity* is on the way to being Nature, and that the process of assimilating the *human* to Nature is one that is still ongoing; deconstruction here being a means to the end of becoming Nature.

While Derrida would definitely repudiate the metaphysical presuppositions that underlie the concept of Nature, as a direct precursor to Derrida, Nietzsche, in *Human, All Too Human*, went so far as to say, “we speak of Nature, and in doing so, forget ourselves: we ourselves are Nature” (Stack 82). Elsewhere, in *Homer’s Contest*, corresponding to his mantra of “being faithful to the earth,” Nietzsche similarly stated,

when one speaks of humanity, the idea is fundamental that this is something which separates and distinguishes man from nature. In reality, however, there is no such separation: ‘natural’ qualities and those called truly ‘human’ are inseparably grown together. Man, in his highest and noblest capacities, *is wholly nature*, and embodies its uncanny dual character. (*Portable* 32, my emphasis)

The difference between Nietzsche and Derrida here seems to consist in that for the former, there is an assumption that humanity *is* Nature, whereas for the latter, the deconstruction of human constructions is in the “teleological pursuit” of becoming Nature, respectively. The distinction is between Zarathustra fully “liberated” in the postmodern sense, namely, completely divested of human constructions and Zarathustra still in the processes of burning his text and of overcoming humanity. Essentially, it is a distinction between an “is” and an “ought” or a “desire to be,” where the basic end seems to be the same, deconstruction being an instrumental means to that end. In the next section, I will highlight some of the implicit affinities between radical ecologism and deconstructionism in their joint critique of anthropocentric humanism.

THE ANTI-HUMANIST AFFINITY BETWEEN DECONSTRUCTIVE POSTMODERNISM AND RADICAL ECOLOGISM

There is a fundamental illusion in the world that somehow people are separate from Nature when the reality is that we are a part of Nature, in fact, we are Nature. And that is probably the most fundamental misunderstanding that is causing all of this havoc.

~Kenny Ausubel, Founder of the Bionner Movement. (*Eleventh*)

Environmental thought in general, including the eco-psychological movement, has long been criticized and maligned as “anti-humanist” because of its tendency to put Nature before “the human,” and to limit human desires, aims, goals, endeavors, such as scientific and technological progress, development, industrialization, and economic growth in its attempt to overcome anthropocentrism. It is true that some strands of

environmentalism ally themselves with deconstructionism in order to accomplish these tasks. For instance, in describing some of the commonalities and affinities between deconstructionism and environmentalism in respect to the critique of anthropocentric humanism, Arne Naess agreed with Michael Zimmerman to the effect that “deep ecologists agree with Derrida’s deconstruction of anthropocentrism, however, they resist [any] deconstruction of nature, wilderness and ecosphere” (“Heidegger” 1). For them, the deconstruction of human constructions would seem to be an ongoing method for ecological thought to close the gap between humanity and Nature, eliminating their metaphysical separation. Especially, as John Seed points out, for ecologism, “‘anthropocentrism’ or ‘homocentrism’ means human chauvinism [or egotism] . . . the idea that humans are the crown of creation, the source of all value, the measure of all things [notions which are] deeply embedded in our culture and consciousness” (*Devall, et al.* 243, my additions). And, in so far as deconstruction deconstructs anthropocentric discourses, it is a “useful tool” of radical ecologism. In this way, deconstruction and radical ecologism are joined “at the hip.”

Deconstruction, as the desire to be Nature, is a tool which radical ecologism employs in defending the notion that human beings are on the way to *return to* Nature or to a “non-modern” and/or a non-technological way of life, which are more aligned with “the natural.” While it may be charged that human beings never “left Nature in the first place” nor could they ever do so, radical ecologism entails a systematic deconstruction of all human structures and developments which are deemed to be “modern,” such as scientific and technological progress, the meta-narratives of modernity, as well as all philosophical reflection.⁷ Furthermore, in deconstruction, as the desire to be Nature, humanity is something to be overcome. It means that a person is a libidinal animal. In relation to the latter possibility, Derrida criticizes the residues of humanism in Heidegger’s *Letter on Humanism*, where the latter insists on maintaining the dignity of man through a distinction between human and animal. And, playing on the Cartesian proposition, *ego cogito ergo sum*, in his later essay, “The Animal That Therefore I Am,” Derrida refuses to recognize any human independence from animality, and flirts with deconstructing the distinction between the human self and the wild animal. The project to situate “the human” in “the wild animal” is also a common vein in radical anti-humanist ecologism, in part constituting the meaning of its anti-humanism.

Deconstructionism and radical ecology also couple themselves in that the notion that humanity is Nature ties in with Deep Ecology's principles for intervening in, and counteracting, anthropocentric activities, such as slash-and-burning a rainforest so as to develop the land. Deep Ecologists employ the term "ecological resisting" in which one, for example, does what is necessary to protect the ecosystem. Ecological resisting implies that in protecting the rainforest, one is protecting oneself. There is an implicit identification of oneself with Nature, namely, an erasure of the metaphysical separation between Nature and the human. As Seed suggests, the idea that "I am protecting the rainforest . . . develops into 'I am part of the rainforest protecting myself'" (Devall et al. 199). He continues, "what a relief then! The thousands of years of imagined separation are over and we begin to recall our true nature . . . the change is a spiritual one" (243). Certainly, an identification of oneself as a part of Nature is a positive step in defending the environment. However, it is a fallacious and dangerous idea to identify oneself with the collective totality of all organisms composing Nature, as though one's own interests are completely at one with the single living and self-regulating system that is Nature. To think that one speaks for, or acts on behalf of the totality of the organisms which also help to compose Nature, or to want to do so, is the height of dogmatism.

While Deep Ecologists emphasize non-violence in ecological resisting, it is easy to see how the principle of ecological resistance can be taken to a radical extreme, implying violence. For example, Derrida's deconstruction, interpreted as the desire to be Nature, can be said to accompany the strict anti-humanism and biocentrism of a radical ecological standpoint. In light of the ecological crisis, some strands of radical ecology postulate the very existence of human beings *qua* "human" as the central "problem" and therefore we ought to fully erase the human and become one with the destructive powers of Nature. As made infamous by the Earth Liberation Front (E.L.F.), some streams of radically anti-humanist ecology attempt to mimic the destructive powers of Nature, as against human structures, engaging in acts of vandalism, arson, and terrorism. For example, the E.L.F. has allegedly spiked trees in order to prevent logging, sabotaged biotechnology industry buildings, and set fire to hotel and ski resort structures (Pierce 77-81). Radical anti-humanist ecology would perhaps applaud the devastation that occurred in New Orleans as a result of Hurricane Katrina, holding that it serves the human

species right for their ecologically destructive activities. Ironically, one is reminded here of the claims of some New Orleans citizens that Hurricane Katrina was God's punishment for their sinful way of life. Also, for example, radical anti-humanist ecologism may treat human life as "parasitical" on the natural world.

In *Earth in the Balance*, Al Gore claims that radical ecological views essentially commit a "deep mistake of defining our relationship to the earth using the metaphor of disease" (216-17), precisely that the human species is an "evil," unnatural alien species; an invading virus or plague that is parasitical on the health and equilibrium of an otherwise pristine, unique, noble, and integral planet, thereby perpetuating a new metaphysical split between "the human" and "the natural." Radical ecologism's anti-humanism may be characterized by an over-emphasis on the Nature-side of the human-Nature relationship, and a denigration of "the human." But, by doing so, the biocentric mimicry of Nature via deconstruction and/or on the part of radical ecologism fails to recognize the generative and "creative" aspects of Nature. Instead, they emphasize its destructive side in relation to human beings and their endeavors.

While it is the case that human beings are a *part* of Nature, it does not follow that human beings *are* Nature or could ever *be* Nature. Human beings exist entirely within Nature, help to compose it, and are dependent on it. They partake of, or have "natural" or "wild" aspects within themselves, ideas which most environmentally-oriented modes of thought, including eco-psychology, seek to promote. From this perspective, there is no strict ontological division that could be erected between man and the rest of the natural world. At the same time, this does not necessarily mean that humanity *is* Nature.

In general, environmental thought, in general, tends to emphasize that human beings do not exist in a vacuum and that they are a part of Nature. Human beings are organisms who are physically, mentally, and spiritually dependent on Nature. Biologically, without the oxygen from plants and trees, water from lakes and rivers, and food from plants and animals, human beings cannot survive. Similarly, what we call "our" breath is the air around us that is inhaled, appropriated into our lungs and exhaled, or pumped out; it is not explicitly "ours." The human body does not create the air that is "our" breath, nor does it contribute to creating the oxygen that the organism needs to survive. Mentally, human beings cannot survive in a vacuum, without the stimuli from the natural environment

on the planet Earth. One can imagine that even the fittest cosmonauts traveling out in the empty nothingness of space for extended periods of time would experience feelings of existential anxiety and possible mental break-down.⁸ It may be concluded, therefore, that Nature provides objective and aesthetic experience necessary for mental health. Our emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being is dependent on feeling the diversity of organisms and the surroundings provided by life on Earth. In consideration of our spiritual dependence on Nature, the etymological meaning of the word "Spirit" (Latin *spiritus*), is "breath." As mentioned previously, what we call "our breath" is the air around us, namely, the product of the biosphere that is inhaled; it is not explicitly "ours." This fact points viscerally to the connection between the human creature and Nature. Analogously, the *content* of Spirit is only what the human organism has experienced in the past, "inhaled" so to speak, or appropriated from the natural world, and "exhaled," such that the meaning of the notion that human beings are Nature may reside in the notion that the Being of any human being is comprised by "the natural." Similarly, "the natural" is not explicitly "ours." In particular, the objects, organisms, events, and creatures that we experience are selectively appropriated and provide for the symbolic content of what we conventionally call "Spirit." It is impossible to imagine any content that is not derived either explicitly from, or is a composite of the entities and occasions of the natural world. It is along these lines that the human self can be situated among the entities of the natural world, rather than completely transcendent of them, an observation coinciding with the findings of eco-psychology, and also somewhat similar to a Humean empiricist stance on the origins of "the spiritual." Because human beings are dependent on the rest of the natural world in these many ways, to use earth, air, and sky essentially as "open sewers," as we do, is to do severe damage to ourselves. Certainly, if the environmental crisis is to be addressed seriously, one of the most important notions to realize is that the human self, from its biological, mental, and spiritual dimensions, is a part of Nature, rather than opposed to it. However, logically speaking, to reduce Nature to being a predicate/accident of the subject/substance, "human beings," as in the proposition, "human beings are Nature," or to affirm a one-to-one correspondence between them, does real violence to both entities. Furthermore, human beings cannot legitimately presume to think themselves and their own interests are simply synonymous with the totality of organisms which help to compose Nature, as if to assume that they *are* it.

What has been intimated through the preceding analysis is that a dialectic has emerged regarding the ultimate ends and essence of “the human,” which is descriptive of the current “crossroads” surrounding environmentalism. Particularly, this dialectic concerns the eco-psychological investigation of the assumed separation of the human self from the natural world, as well as issues of sustainability and development. I have highlighted the tension between the desire to be God which may be associated with the goals of modernism and its overall worldview, and the desire to be Nature, which may be associated with the ultimate ends of deconstructive postmodernism and radical ecogism. Certainly, in light of the environmental crisis, constituted by modern man’s desire for unlimited development, economic growth, and for technological mastery over the Earth, the anthropocentric desire to be God must be curtailed. And deconstruction may offer a means to detach oneself from God or from the concept of God. However, while a great deal of movement must be made in the direction of the criticism of the anthropocentric humanism of modernity, we ought not to revert to the opposite position of radical deconstructionism. There is need to recognize “the human” as a part of Nature, to situate the “human self” amidst the natural world, and to recognize “the natural” within the human self. However, deconstructive postmodernism’s and radical ecogism’s anti-humanist desire to be Nature, constituted by a methodic emptying of metaphysics, language, and reason, as well as any conception of an enduring self, which arguably have allowed the human species to survive, must also be curtailed. Both the desire to be God and the desire to be Nature, taken to their ultimate conclusions, lead inevitably to the extinction not only of the human species, but also of the majority of other life-forms and species on the planet. While one consists in the complete outstripping of the Earth’s life-support system through over-development, over-consumption, and the will to technological mastery, the other consists in the project to dismantle humanity’s rational capacities which have secured its survival. However, in overcoming these competing drives, it may be claimed that human beings contain what one may call “divine” and “natural” aspects within themselves, each distinct yet thoroughly interpenetrating, where neither can be said one-sidedly to offer a genuine definition of their essence. To be sure, near the end of his life, Sartre, even after emphasizing the nullity and absurdity of human existence throughout his life, when questioned by Simone de Beauvoir about the staunch atheism he had held throughout

his life, admitted that “even if one does not believe in God, there are elements of the idea of God that remain in us and that cause us to see the world with some divine aspects” (de Beauvoir 436-43). In this light, in the last section of this paper, I will endeavor to express how the process-relational standpoint overcomes the anthropocentrism of modernism and the extreme anti-humanism of deconstructive postmodernism and radical ecologism, as characterized above.

OVERCOMING THE DICHOTOMY BETWEEN ANTHROPOCENTRIC HUMANISM AND RADICAL ANTI-HUMANISM VIA THE “CRITICAL, NON-ANTHROPOCENTRIC ORGANICISM” OF “PROCESS-RELATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL EPISTEMOLOGY

In the “Introduction to the SUNY Series in Constructive Postmodern Thought,” David Ray Griffin contrasts what he calls “constructive” or “reconstructive” postmodernism, of which process-relational modes of thought are the chief example, with “deconstructive” or “eliminative” postmodernism. He claims that the latter

overcomes the modern worldview through an anti-worldview, deconstructing or even entirely eliminating various concepts that have generally been thought necessary for a worldview, such as self, purpose, meaning, a real world, givenness, reason, truth as correspondence, universally valid norms, and divinity. . . . [However] the postmodernism [derived from process-relational modes of thought] can, by contrast, be called revisionary, constructive, or—perhaps best—reconstructive. It seeks to overcome the modern worldview not by eliminating the possibility of worldviews (or metanarratives) as such, but by constructing a postmodern worldview through a revision of modern premises and traditional concepts. . . . That is, it agrees with deconstructive postmodernists that a massive deconstruction of many received concepts is needed. But its deconstructive moment, carried out for the sake of the presuppositions of practice, does not result in self-referential inconsistency. It also is not so totalizing as to prevent reconstruction. . . . Going beyond the modern world will involve transcending its individualism, anthropocentrism, patriarchy, economism, consumerism, nationalism, and militarism. (xii-xiii, my additions)

As a “constructive” or “reconstructive” form of postmodernism, the process-relational standpoint that is inspired by the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead deviates from the postmodernism of the “deconstructionist” variety. It is highly critical of the anthropocentric humanism that

is characteristic of modernity, the pretense to unlimited development, and the domination of the global marketplace and instrumental reason, yet, at the same time, it does not aim to provide a totalizing deconstruction of all that might be associated with “modernity” or with “the human.” Whitehead notes that one of the main differences between the human beings who lived in previous societies and those living in modern societies is that in the former “nature controlled them, while we now see our way to the control of nature” (*ESP* 25). And, recognizing the precarious ecological situation humanity finds itself in today, in its overemphasis on controlling Nature, Griffin asserts that constructive postmodernism is “based on the awareness that the continuation of modernity threatens the very survival of life on our planet” (Allan ix). However, process-relational thought, exemplifying the meaning of “constructive” postmodernism, neither gives in to despair, nor does it accept the jettisoning of reason by way of deconstructive postmodernism in favor of undecideability. Rather, in response to the ecological crisis, it remains critically committed to generating and exploring creative alternatives for human thought and action, rather than pursuing an anti-humanist course of relentless deconstruction which is not accompanied by any positive proposals for reconstruction. While exceptionally critical of the pretense to unlimited technological progress, of instrumental reason, and of the modernist assumption that the solution to the problem of climate change is to be found solely in the development of a “technological fix,” the process-relational perspective does not, for example, rule out innovations toward “green” technologies, such as wind and solar power.

Whitehead’s epistemology and cosmology provides a description of how human beings are intrinsically connected with the natural world. He states that the “first principle of epistemology should be that the changeable, shifting aspects of our relations to nature are the primary topics for conscious observation” (*MT* 29). Epistemology, for him, should include an examination of “our whole experience [as] composed out of our relationships to the rest of things [including ‘intimate vague experiences’, not just of distinct sense-data], and of the formation of new relationships constitutive of things to come” (*MT* 31, my additions). Hence, in Whitehead’s epistemology, there is a consideration of the widest variety of occasions of experience, not just those of the conscious variety which most other philosophers privilege in their investigations. For him, the more obscure and “lower-level” forms of experience (e.g., physical feelings) tell

us more about our condition as organisms and our connection to Nature than “high-level” conscious experience. In fact, Whitehead holds that the former are the basis for the latter.

Whitehead defines Nature as a felt “complex of related entities [wherein] the ‘complex’ is fact as an entity for thought, to whose bare individuality is ascribed the property of embracing in its complexity the natural entities” (*CN* 13). From this perspective, the notion that human beings are a part of Nature means that they are one type of entity among “the many” natural entities which in their interconnection compose “the one” relational complex that is Nature. While human beings are a part of Nature, they are not themselves identical to the total complex of entities that is Nature. Whitehead’s cosmology is based in the notion that the natural “world is not made up of independent things, each determinate in abstraction from all the rest” (*ESP* 157). Rather, Nature is comprised by an extensive continuum which is conceptually “divisible, but not in fact divided” (*PR* 62). From a Whiteheadian perspective, the Cartesian postulation that the world is composed of thinking and material substances, dependent only upon themselves for their existence and entirely separate from the natural world, is a fallacious abstraction based on such a conceptual division. For Whitehead, Nature is an “organic extensive community” (*PR* 289) which is thoroughly *in process* and composed of living organisms, or what he calls “actual entities” or “actual occasions.” Actual entities are finite “creatures which become” (*PR* 35), each of which is engaged in its own creative life-process, and each partly constituted by its various relations with other actual entities. A person, at a given moment, is but one example of an actual entity and, as such, a person, as helping to compose Nature, is not a site where Nature may be said to “end.” According to Whitehead, “the demarcation [of the human body] from the rest of nature is vague in the extreme . . . There is no definite boundary to determine where the body begins and external nature ends” (*MT* 161). But, as a finite, yet enduring part of the relational complex of entities that is Nature (at least in the context of the present evolutionary epoch), “the human” cannot be said to have its identity in terms of the totality of Nature.

In relation to its environmental epistemological standpoint, process-relational modes of thought overcome the vicious dichotomy between the anthropocentric humanism of modernity, which is exemplified by the Sartrean articulation that human reality is constituted by the desire to be God,

and the extreme anti-humanism of deconstructive postmodernism and radical ecologism, which have been characterized in this paper as advancing the desire to be Nature by attempting to divorce humans from “the human,” that is, all past, present, and future modes of human being and experience as well as all determinations of the nature of “the human.” The process-relational stance may be termed a “critical, non-anthropocentric organicism,” pointing to the contrast between the extremes of the desire to be God and the desire to be Nature in relation to the ultimate ends of humanity, rejecting both of these extremes. From a process-relational perspective, human beings *qua* “human” are neither God, nor Nature; neither everything, nor nothing, in their “purified” senses, nor could they presume to be. Rather, process-relational modes of thought hold that human beings are finite parts of Nature, helping to compose its complex relationality, yet possessing “spiritual” qualities within themselves as well, Nature and mind being inseparably intertwined together.

The process-relational standpoint, in part, agrees with Sartre’s existentialism in the sense that organisms determine their own character by way of the facticity of their own lives and experience, i.e. through their creative life-processes and the “objective immortality” of their pasts. However, process-relational philosophy adds that in the lives of organisms, the objectively immortal past also helps to determine the content and course at which subsequent creativity aims, and that determinations of the character of an organism must take into account the fact that the entity in question is partly, yet not wholly, constituted by its various relations to other entities. As such, going deeper than existentialism’s notion that “existence precedes essence,” the process-relational perspective asserts that neither existence nor essence can be said to “be prior to” the other, thus postulating that the enduring character of organisms, including that of human beings, is in the process of being determined through their lives and experience, even if momentary experience is perpetually perishing through time. In this sense, in its emphasis on flux and “process,” the Whiteheadian perspective agrees with the existentialist emphasis that temporality and finitude are what “finalize” the natures of entities. Furthermore, from a process-relational perspective, answers to the question of what the nature of humanity is, are to be considered speculative approximations and descriptions of an “enduring character,” rather than an essence or a necessary pre-given nature, which is dependent on the evolutionary epoch within which it arises as well as its concrete

relations to other entities. Whitehead's notion of an "enduring character" is meant to supplant the misplaced concreteness of determinations of the "essence" or the "nature" of things, or of humanity for instance. Against such essentialist tendencies, from the process-relational perspective, the enduring character of humanity is continually *in flux*, and without "privileged moments," wherein any determination of it is never fixed and final, but rather open to revision, corresponding with the notion that human beings, like all other actual entities, are not static substances. However, in contrast to deconstructive postmodernism, with its massive critical attack on essentialism, from the process-relational standpoint, we can still entertain such discussions regarding the "enduring character of 'the human'."

To a certain extent, Whitehead shares in the postmodernist criticism of language. He states that it is "hopelessly ambiguous" and inadequate to express actuality and he criticizes "the habit of thinking of words as fixed things with specific meanings . . . [because in actuality] the meanings of language are in violent fluctuation" (*Dialogues* 296-97). Whitehead further suggests that the abstractions of linguistic expression "lead . . . away from the realities of the immediate world" (*MT* 39). But, Whitehead does not take the deconstructionist turn. From the process philosophical stance, all characterizations of the enduring character of "the human" are to be interpreted as speculative approximations from within the confines of conventional language. In recognizing these limitations, philosophy may continue to express "the character of the human," without the essentializations and/or the misplaced concretenesses which do violence to its actuality.

If one insists on having "a determination of the nature of the human" from the process-relational standpoint, then it can be affirmed that, according to Whitehead, the enduring character of the human in our contemporary epoch involves recourse to the notion of *creativity*. Human beings are *creative organisms*, creativity, for Whitehead, being their "grandeur" and "dignity" (*Dialogues* 371). For him, human beings are finite "co-creators" in conjunction with God, Nature, and all other organisms in the natural world. In Whitehead's cosmology, the notion of creativity is a holistic expression of the totality of organic experience, where each organism engages in its own particular creative processes and is constituted by it. Consequently, a determination of the character of "the human" from the aspect of creativity entails a focus on the human organism in

its full complexity, including its concrete experience, its faculties, its aims and purposes, its feelings and emotions, its strengths, its weaknesses, its suffering, its finitude, its lived connections with the other actual entities which help to compose Nature, and so on— and not merely, for instance, by way of their “rational faculties.” In response to the imminent criticism that in suggesting that creativity pervades Nature, Whitehead is anthropocentrically ascribing human creativity and human qualities to other organisms, it should be pointed out that for him, “the human” has itself emerged both within and from Nature, and not vice-versa.

One striking feature of Whitehead’s cosmology of organic interdependence is that in contrast to traditional Christian conceptions of God, God is neither conceived to be an asymmetrical causal force on the natural world, nor transcendently apart from it. In *Process and Reality*, Whitehead provides a profound critique of the combination of both “the notion of God [interpreted] as the ‘unmoved mover’ [as] derived from Aristotle . . . [and] the notion of God as ‘eminently real’ [which] is a favorite doctrine of Christian theology,” which have been fused by Western culture into the idea of “an aboriginal, eminently real, transcendent creator, at whose fiat the world came into being, and whose imposed will it obeys” (*PR* 342). Unlike many traditional understandings of God’s qualities which dwell on the notion of God as a Prime Mover, or as an infinite, transcendent, or self-caused substance, an Almighty causal force from and by which the temporal world is generated and kept in motion, which have served to bifurcate God and the natural world, Whitehead’s own cosmology holds that God has a “finite or temporal side,” which is *immanent* in the world and not statically outside of it. For Whitehead, God is not to be conceived as a condescending Caesar, radically separated from and unaffected by the world, yet somehow directing the unfolding of all creatures. Thus, by providing an alternative conception of God which is not based in Cartesian substance ontology, and one which is far removed, as Jones writes in her introduction to *Religion in the Making*, from “a notion of divine immutable essence and eternal normative will” (xxxiii), Whitehead’s cosmological rubric does not lend itself to human mimicry of God, conceived as an infinite, self-caused substance, which, as has been characterized in this paper, is the underlying root of the anthropocentrism which is responsible for the environmental crisis. In this way, Whitehead’s critique of traditional understandings of the definition and the qualities of God and his own cosmological formulations regarding the character

of God provide a “psychological inoculation” against the human desire to be God which is at the root of the ecological crisis.

Whitehead’s cosmology presents to us the novel alternative of “panentheism,” meaning, as Griffin explains, that “the [natural] world is present in deity and deity is present in the [natural] world” (*Spirituality* 17, my addition), God and Nature being interconnected and intermingling poles of the creative process. In his scheme, God is *with* the natural world and is in turn receptively affected by it. In his perspective, God and the natural world are partners which are caught “in the grip of the ultimate metaphysical ground, the creative advance into novelty” (*PR* 349), each standing together in their mutual requirement. It is not that God and the natural world are two distinct aspects of identical substance, as in pantheistic standpoints such as that of Spinoza. Rather, for Whitehead, God and Nature are equal, reciprocal, symmetrical, contrasting, and co-dependent poles of the creative process, which is the ultimate foundation for the cosmological order of things. As such, for him, neither God nor the World can be conceived of as static substance entirely separate from the other. According to him, “in every respect God and the World move conversely to each other in respect to their process” (*PR* 349);⁹ the traditional bifurcation of God and the World being bridged via the principle of creativity. In his cosmological scheme, both God and the World can be considered “interlocking poles” within the creative process, where the natural world is not considered merely as that which is responsible for the temporality, flux, finitude, destruction, and perishing of human creative endeavor, and as somehow “evil.” Rather, for Whitehead, temporality, flux, finitude, destruction, and perishing also belong to the Being of God. For him, perishing is in some ways a generating force in the creative process, which may not only finalize that particular process of self-creation, rendering it objectively immortal, or an unalterable stubborn fact belonging to the past, but also may be considered a moment in the fluency and/or refreshment of its creative life-process.

As part of his speculative cosmology, Whitehead embraces pan-experientialism. For him, subjectivity and feeling pervade the natural world, and whether or not the entities in question are considered either animate or inanimate, they participate in the overall creative advance of the universe. For Whitehead, creativity is “universal throughout actuality” (*PR* 164), namely, all temporal creatures participate interdependently in the creative evolution of the universe, and they have importance to the

whole cosmological scheme of things. He states that while “no entity can be considered in abstraction from the universe . . . no entity can be divested of its own [distinct] individuality” (*MG* 678, my addition), again pointing to the notion that human beings (and their interests) cannot be regarded as synonymous with (those of) the total complex of organisms that, together, compose Nature. Whitehead further suggests that while “no entity can be divorced from the notion of creativity,” each infuses “its own particularity into creativity” (*PR* 213). Elsewhere, he states that the creative principle is everywhere in Nature, namely, “in animate and so-called inanimate matter, in the ether, water, earth, [and in the] human” (*Dialogues* 370). As such, the statement that the notion of creativity provides an adequate description of the enduring character of humanity is not representative of a definition of “the human” which has its basis in a logical opposition to all other actual entities, for example, plants, animals, God, or Nature. That said, human creativity could be said to involve specific accidental qualities, characteristics, operations, and activities, such as “reasoning faculties,” consciousness, self-consciousness, language, negation, skepticism, criticism, valuation, selectivity, faith, teleology, and so on, which makes it distinct (in terms of degree) from other actual entities. But, each of these qualities, characteristics, operations, and activities can neither be interpreted in abstraction from other such characteristics so as to define the essence of “man,” nor do they make human creativity superior to the creativity of other actual entities. Hence, Whitehead’s stance is more accurately to be described as an “organicism,” rather than as a “humanism,” and it is especially critical of the anthropocentric humanisms of the modernist variety. Unlike anthropocentric humanisms which neglect the fact that a human being is an object for the creativity of others and for other organisms, for Whitehead, both a human being’s physical pole (i.e. body) and its mental pole (i.e. mind) are “objective data,” much like other entities are for it. For instance, a dog feels, recognizes, and grows with its human companion over the course of its life, a person who is fundamental to its own biological needs and to its identity. In short, in sharp contrast to anthropocentric thinking, from the process-relational perspective, neither the creative life-processes of human beings should be interpreted as standing condescendingly higher than Nature,¹⁰ as in modernist humanism, nor should Nature be viewed as standing infinitely higher than human life, as in the biocentrism of radical anti-humanist ecologism.

In Part III of *Process and Reality*, entitled, “The Theory of Prehensions,” Whitehead seeks to provide both a cosmological and epistemological account of the creative processes of organisms by which they may determine their character, which also serves the aims of eco-psychology. This account stands in sharp contrast to ego-logical conceptions of the self with their basis in Cartesian substance-ontology, with its “assumption of bodies and minds as independent individual substances, each existing in its own right and apart from any necessary reference to each other” (*SMW* 194). To reiterate, Descartes had conceived of the self as a thinking substance (*res cogitans*) entirely separate from extended things (*res extensa*) and the natural world, which was defined as something dependent only upon itself in order to exist. Whitehead criticizes Descartes for mistaking the “privacy of mental life . . . for its substantial independence as an existent fact” (*RM* liii). In contrast, in Whiteheadian philosophy, the self cannot be described in terms of Descartes’ substances, defined as dependent on nothing for their existence, self-sustaining, entirely private, self-sufficient, and self-encapsulated (but also, it is not nothing). As he writes, “there is no entity, not even God ‘which requires nothing but itself in order to exist’” (*RM* 108), for example, God requiring His creatures in order to complete His own Creative or “superjective nature.” Furthermore, the process-relational standpoint is highly critical of determinations of “the value” of a thing or a “self” on the basis of how well it matches up with the concept of a substance as attributable to traditional notions of God.¹¹ Undoubtedly, this view led to the individualism of modernity and the underlying drive to be God. Instead, for Whitehead, as Jones writes, the character “of any entity arises according to the relationships that entity sustains with all other entities” (*RM* xxi), every entity being “social,” namely, requiring the organic society of actual entities in its immediate environment in order to exist. In relation to the human organism, it is in this sense that Whitehead states that “man is a social animal” (*PR* 204).

According to Whitehead, there are two interrelated “phases” which comprise the creative process of any organism, and by which it determines its character, one of *appropriation* and one of *self-realization*. Whereas appropriation involves the feeling, grasping, taking-account of, or seizing of elements of the natural world (as in the acquisition of food) for the sake of its existence so as to develop purposes, self-realization is the creative unfolding of an organism’s life-process or self-development through the actualization of such purposes. Self-realization always presupposes a

previous activity of appropriation of elements from the world, whereas appropriation is informed by prior self-realizations and subjective aims. That is to say, Whitehead's cosmology is constituted by a fundamental recognition that creative self-realization is only possible on the basis of appropriating the elements of the natural world, a notion that the modern worldview, in respect to the desire to be God, largely takes for granted. Whitehead's epistemological stance is that of a "provisional realism," which holds that concrete experience and grasping of "the natural" provides the starting point of the creative process. By way of the notion of a "prehension," central in his epistemology, Whitehead means to describe an organism's selective "appropriat[ion,] for the foundation of its own existence, the various elements of the universe out of which it arises" (*PR* 219).¹² Whitehead's notion of a "prehension" (Latin *prehendere*) has a dual meaning. It designates an organism's feeling, or "uncognitive apprehension," i.e. meaning "apprehension which may or may not be cognitive" (*SMW* 69). Simultaneously, it means an "appropriation" of the elements in its environment for the foundation of its own existence, namely, a "taking account of," a grasping, a seizing, a "taking something in and making it part of the thing it has joined," as in a "reception of expressions . . . (or of) the data for feeling diffused in the environment" (*MT* 23). A prehension might be said to be the unity of the causal impact of the data of our environment on the organism and the reception of that data. Prehensions also involve a process of selection of data, one based in the organism's aims and interests. What Whitehead calls "positive prehensions" are feelings whereby data are positively included into the organism's internal constitution, while negative prehensions are exclusions of data from entering into the organism's internal constitution.

In terms of human creativity and self-realization, the natural objects which are prehended provide the contents of mentality, including eternal objects, subjective aims, and purposes. This notion stands opposed to the idea of a substantial ego at the root of consciousness. For Whitehead, the "self" of a living human being is something which is *in process* and inter-related with the natural world. All of the contents of the self-realizational phases of the creative process are derived from an appropriation of the data issuing from the world. But, this observation neither "cheapens" the creative process or notions of "spirituality," nor does it commit Whitehead to an atheistic position, as theologians and idealistic philosophers might claim. At the same time, Whitehead's emphasis on creative process is

what distinguishes his standpoint from that of deconstructive postmodernism. In defending the notion that there are no subjective imaginings and purposes which contain contents that transcend the existents that we experience in the natural world, Whitehead's notion of a prehension as a "process of appropriation" (*PR* 219) is of central importance. It implies that the self is largely the product of the prehensive process of feeling and appropriating the elements of the natural world.¹³ Whitehead's "provisionally realistic" stance, by which he maintains that the appropriations of past experience ground future self-realization, means that the self is not an ego, conceived as an independent substantial entity, transcendent of, and/or separated from the natural world. Since Whitehead's cosmology alludes to the fact that in order to engage in the creative life-process, organisms must appropriate or prehend the elements of the natural world, both in terms of the physical resources that they need to live (e.g., food and water) as well as in terms of the mental resources via their past experience (with which they may develop and actualize fundamental purposes in the world), his epistemology and cosmology provide an implicit rationale for why human beings need to have reverence for the natural world. In this way, Whitehead's theory of prehensions, as well as the interplay between the bodily and mental aspects (or "poles") of organisms can be said to advance eco-psychology's investigations and understanding of the relationship between the human self and the natural world. However, Whitehead's "provisional realism" does not commit him to the point of view that human beings *are* Nature. They are not mere passive appropriators of "the natural" which thereby founds the totality of their Being. "The natural" as the content of Spirit is not simply read off via experience or through sense-perception as it may be in Hume's account. Not only are the conceptual operations of selection, re-enactment, valuation, and synthesis thoroughly involved in human creative processes, but "the natural," as appropriated, is creatively transformed through such operations. While the contents of the human imagination and the human capacity for perception in the mode of symbolic reference are derived from past experience of the (natural) world, conceptual operations play a chief role in creativity.

Admittedly, there are highly destructive or negative aspects at work in the particular creative processes attributable to human beings. In Whitehead's theory of prehensions, negative prehensions are chiefly representative of the critical and destructive operations within the creative process. Negative prehensions are eliminations from feeling. In their

fluctuating interplay with positive prehensions, negative prehensions are the ground of the operations of selective appropriation at the root of experience. In experience, while some data are felt to be relevant to human aims and positively prehended, other data are eliminated, negatively prehended, or dismissed from feeling. Human beings are perhaps the organisms who depend most highly upon an engagement with activities of negation and of negative prehension; negation, for Whitehead, being the peculiar, yet fundamental characteristic of consciousness. Negation is fundamental to human reasoning, yet, alluding to the deconstructive postmodernist stance, it is also its undoing. In this sense, for Whitehead, while every organism prehends both positively and negatively, an engagement in operations of negation and objectification factors highly into the particular character of “the human” in our contemporary epoch. In other words, of all organic species, human beings engage in operations of negation with the highest degree of intensity. This point may coincide with deconstructive postmodernist manners of thinking. At times, Derrida locates the context of deconstruction within creative play, but deconstruction also reveals an intent toward a totalizing destruction without further construction. Certainly, Sartre was fond of the term, “nihilation,” and as part of his phenomenological description of the in-itself-for-itself: “the only being that can be called free is the [one] that nihilates its being” (*Existentialism* 65). In other writings, I have pointed to the notion that Whitehead’s negative prehensions, in their contrast with positive prehensions, are the efficient cause of the creative process (Scarfe 94). Whether an engagement with operations of negation belongs to the enduring character of humanity might be a topic for further discussion stemming from this paper. One might also inquire into the impact the human operations of negation, negative prehension, and selectivity (which enable the objectification and appropriation of “the natural”) have on the natural world as a whole. Nevertheless, from the process-relational standpoint, the distinction might be made that human beings are not merely libidinal animals, but also “appetitive” animals, pointing to their creative abilities.

Against the imminent, deconstructionist counterclaim that Whitehead’s metaphysics of creativity is merely synonymous with Sartre’s notion of the pursuit of the in-itself-for-itself and the desire to be God, Whitehead’s emphasis on finitude and contingency of the creative processes of organisms points to the impossibility of the absolute correspondence of

the in-itself and the for-itself. Without the hope of self-realization, or a satisfaction implying the correspondence between potentiality/eternal objects and actuality/actual occasions, there would be no creative process. However, such a satisfaction is never constituted by a perfect, exact, complete, mirror-like, infinite one-to-one correspondence between them. But, even with its imperfections and “symbolic vaguenesses,” the correspondences that are achieved are still enough to satisfy the human organism’s quest for meaning. Whitehead admits that all organisms attempt to found their own Being as in the notion of *causa-sui*, “shar[ing] with God this characteristic of self-causation” (PR 222) and can be successful in defining and determining themselves *qua* “selves,” thereby satisfying Spinoza’s notion of a substance as being a *causa sui*. However, from the process-relational perspective, they never determine themselves in a way akin to being fully self-caused (*causa sui*), interpreted, in the purely substantialist sense, without recourse to their feelings of, appropriations of, and relations with other entities. Every organism requires its environment, which provides the data for the derivation of possibilities for its own self-creation. As such, the process of self-creation does not occur in a vacuum, as implied by substantialist philosophies. Rather, an entity is “the product of the efficient past.” (PR 150). Furthermore, as Whitehead writes, creative “adventure rarely reaches its predetermined end” (AI 379), imagination being unable to fully encapsulate actuality. Even if the satisfaction exhibits a high degree of correspondence between potentiality and actuality, all organic self-realization is subject to the ravages of perpetual perishing. At the same time, Whitehead goes to great lengths to show that the urge toward creative self-realization is not “mere wreckage,” (PR 346), since the organism, even through perishing, remains “everlasting” or “objectively immortal,” not to mention fueling further creative advance in the world.

While human creativity can take on the form of “development,” it is definitely not reducible to it. One only need to point to the difference in terms of aesthetic value of a truck stop in contrast to Michelangelo’s painting of the Last Judgment above the altar of the Sistine Chapel in order to convey this distinction. Regardless, “sustainable development,” interpreted from the perspective of Whitehead’s critical non-anthropocentric organicism, is not to be defined in purely economic terms, as is common today, namely, as the ability to keep up a certain rate of economic growth. Rather, from a Whiteheadian stance, sustainability is to

be construed in environmental terms. Sustainable development means striking a balance between the needs and wants of human populations and the natural ecology which sustains and supports life. It involves a serious effort to maintain a balance between the “ego-logical” and the “eco-logical,” between human self-realization and its appropriation of “the natural,” between human aims and the creative life-processes of other organisms, and beyond the “drives” corresponding with the desire to be God and the desire to be Nature, respectively.

A stipulative definition of sustainable development from a process-relational perspective is two-fold. Sustainable development means, first, that because the Earth is a finite ecological system, the appropriation and extraction of resources, pollution emissions, habitat disruption, and the transformation of “the natural,” which are implied by the term “development,” should not exceed the regenerative capacity of the biosphere, as a whole, to absorb their effects. Second, it means that human beings should appropriate or consume resources at a rate which corresponds with the pace of their natural restoration or replenishment, as well as with cognizance of the needs of future generations. Sustainable development is about human beings using their reasoning capacities to restrain and to limit their appropriation and consumption of resources as well as the development and transformation of “the natural.” This stands in sharp contrast to blindly following the “human interest” in attempting to overcome Nature via technology, by both destroying it and ourselves in the process. Perhaps the most important factor in arriving at genuine sustainability is the limiting of human population growth, which reduces the net need for development and resource consumption, and, in turn, reduces the net impact on the natural environment.

In relation to the issue of sustainability, Whitehead pointed out that “the function of reason *is* the direction of the attack on the environment” in order to secure the conditions for human survival and the perpetuation of human life, but further, “to live, to live well, to live better,” (*FR* 8). It must be noted here that Whitehead’s “is” here, descriptive of the current state of affairs at the time that he was writing this statement, is by no means a prescriptive “ought to be,” for according to constructive postmodernist philosophy, humanity’s over-exertion of its technical-rational faculties, characterized in terms of the desire to be God, has led to the over-development and the transformation of “the natural” beyond the bounds of planetary sustainability. In light of the ecological crisis, the aim to “live

better” must not be seen one-sidedly to be synonymous with “attacking the environment” and pursuing development without novelty, but rather with adopting a way of life that takes the health of the biosphere into consideration; the health of the natural world being here associated with, but not reducible to, the well-being of human individuals. To illuminate this interrelationship, it stands to reason that if environmental conditions deteriorate, then human societies will become increasingly unable to guarantee the human rights and freedoms that we enjoy today. Hence, a defense of the environment is a long-term defense of human rights and the ability of human beings “to acquire an increase in [life] satisfaction” (FR 8). In applying Whitehead’s descriptions of the features of the creative process to the issue of sustainability, whereas the modern worldview aims to maximize human self-realization by way of maximizing the appropriation of “the natural” (largely taken for granted in the process), and whereas the extreme anti-humanism of radical ecogism aims to arrest both the appropriation of “the natural” as well as human self-realization, and, in turn, arresting human creativity in general, the process-relational environmental epistemology offers a sustainable “middle way” between the two. It points to the wisdom of tempering both contemporary society’s decadence, as well as each individual’s appropriation of “the natural” in terms of human self-actualization, while allowing for naturally sustainable levels of development, human creativity, life-satisfaction, and self-enjoyment. In Aristotelian language, Whitehead’s perspective is that of a return to the “golden mean” between extremes, for not only does immorality consist in a person’s thwarting of the ability, either in themselves or in another, to actualize their potential, as in the cases of alcoholism, anorexia, murder, theft, adultery, or withholding food or water from another, but conversely, it is also found in the vice of human self-maximization in relation to the actualization of one’s potentiality, beyond the bounds of planetary sustainability.

Whitehead’s critical, non-anthropocentric organicism recognizes that it is in the highest interest of human beings to maintain the well-being of the natural world around them. “The natural,” for example, wild or undeveloped land not yet subordinate to human ends, ought not to be merely dismissed into irrelevance or negatively prehended in favor of development, for that which is wild or undeveloped is indeed relevant to human life. Process-relational philosophy holds that “the natural” has aesthetic value, which gives human beings pause to contemplate the deeper

meaning of life. Whitehead stated that “our enjoyment of the values of human art, or of natural beauty, our horror at the obvious vulgarities and defacements which force themselves upon us [such as the destruction of “the natural”]—all these modes of experience . . . disclose the very meaning of things” (*ESP* 129, my addition). Whitehead’s epistemology depicts how feelings and emotions comprise the bedrock of experience and that our responses to objective states-of-affairs in the world, be they attracting or repulsing, are largely aesthetic valuations. Aesthetic judgments involve feelings of harmony or discordance, which arise from the causal efficacy of objects or events on us. As mentioned above, it is out of our experience of the natural world, namely, out of our feelings and our emotions, that we selectively develop subjective aims or fundamental purposes to be actualized in the world. Occasions which procure positive feelings are more apt to be selected than those which produce negative ones, in terms of how human beings develop such fundamental purposes.

In Whitehead’s scheme, the aesthetic dimension of experience is the basis of consciousness, self-realization, as well as sound ethical intuitions. He goes to great lengths to discuss how aesthetic judgment involves the contrast of positive feelings (e.g., beauty, wonder, attraction, harmony, happiness) and negative feelings (e.g., repulsion, anxiety, horror, dislike, antagonism, suffering) in relation to the natural environment, thereby being cognizant of the fact that experiences of negative states-of-affairs have a fundamental role in giving meaning to human life. For instance, by experiencing environmental destruction first-hand, we become consciously aware that a correction of our behavior is necessary as part of our own self-development. But, Whitehead also holds that the domination of destructive discord, such as rampant destruction of the natural world, brings with it an “immediate feeling of evil, and the anticipation of destructive or weakened data for the future” (*AI* 263). Whitehead’s premise here is that since the aesthetic dimension of experience grounds our capacities for self-realization, the domination of aesthetic destruction (for example, in relation to huge tracts of rain-forest being clear-cut or burned down, or complete species being rendered extinct due to human negligence) also diminishes the human potentiality for self-realization, for richness of experience, and for novel modes of creativity, thus “robbing life of its zest for adventure” (*AI* 293). This diminishment can be conceived either in terms of the experience of present generations of human beings, or of future ones. For example, it is hard to imagine our children and

grandchildren living in a world where they will not be able to experience a polar bear, due to the species being rendered extinct. It should be obvious here that Whitehead's discussion of aesthetic experience in relation to "the natural" provides insights which may augment eco-psychology's investigation and treatment of the negative mental effects and traumas arising from the experience of environmental destruction.

Whitehead's cosmology also involves the ethical stance that the natural world has intrinsic value or value in-itself and that natural entities have value for the sake of themselves. This standpoint is not to be confused with the notion that an entity has its value in terms of how well it reflects the Cartesian notion of a substance. In *Science and the Modern World*, Whitehead contrasts his philosophy of organism with Descartes' dualistic substance ontology and its effect on the human psyche, in relation to how it conceives of the natural world. Whitehead describes that with the intellectual rise of Cartesian substance ontology in early modernity, "the emergent individual value of each entity (was) transformed into the independent substantial existence of each entity . . . leading to an ascription of value to what is in itself valueless" (195). In short, according to Whitehead, Descartes' materialistic perspective leads to a view of Nature as without intrinsic value. He charges that the notion of the "bare valuelessness of mere matter [leads] to a lack of reverence in the treatment of natural beauty," in terms of aesthetic value, but it also furthered "the habit of ignoring the intrinsic worth of the environment" (196). Hence, for Whitehead, it is largely because of the dominance of the Cartesian worldview holding that the natural world is composed of barren material substances, purely mechanistic, devoid of life, and dependent only upon themselves in order to exist, that Nature was understood as devoid of inherent value. For if Nature is conceived of as a mere collection of bits of matter, hurrying purposelessly through empty space, then there is no reason to have respect for or to have appreciation for it as it is in itself. But, because of his claim that all existents, including inanimate objects (like rocks and dust) and organisms (like plants, plankton, and coral) are to be considered a part of the web of organic life, Whitehead's cosmology provides a re-enchanted view of the natural world, namely, one teeming with life and re-invigorated with value, instead of being simply considered to be a lifeless material substance. While Whitehead's notion of the mutual interdependence of actual entities or occasions does imply that every organism has instrumental value for all others, for him, each

actual entity, taken independently, can also be said to have an individual life-history and an enduring self-identity which is part of the creative unfolding of the organic whole. That is to say, the intrinsic value of an actual entity is not to be defined merely in terms of how well it reflects the Cartesian conception of a substance, but rather in respect to the fact of its existence as part of the web of organic life.

In outlining some of the main contours of the process-relational environmental ethic, in *The Ethics of Creativity: Beauty, Morality, and Nature in a Processive Cosmos*, Brian Henning provides an analysis of Whitehead's appeal to both the aesthetic and intrinsic value of "the natural," although he emphasizes the former. Working on the premises that for Whitehead, "morality consists in the control of process, so as to maximize importance" (*MT* 13-14), and that "morality is always the aim at that union of harmony, intensity, and vividness which involves the perfection of importance for that occasion" (*MT* 13-14), Henning soundly argues toward a *kalocentric* ethic. A *kalocentric* ethic is one in which the most fundamental obligation human beings have is to act in such a way as to maximize beauty, value, and "greatness of experience" (*MT* 14) for the world as a whole, within the context of the specific situation and occasion. As Henning defines it, a *kalocentric* ethic is based in the notion that "an action is morally appropriate only if it would achieve the most beauty possible in the situation taken as a whole" (*Ethics* 192).

This is not to suggest that the notions of "beauty" and "value" simply reside in mere subjective and anthropocentric judgments of taste, a perspective that comes as the result of not recognizing the holistic depth of Whitehead's notion of "importance." Henning is not here suggesting that the bulldozing of an ecologically vital swampland which appears to an individual as "an eyesore," so as to build an aesthetically-pleasing cathedral, is justified. Rather, for Henning, value and importance here extend "not merely to the self but to others (the past actual occasions in an occasion's actual world) and to the whole (the totality of achieved occasions)" (*Ethics* 133), although again, one cannot merely identify oneself as *being* that whole. Furthermore, while for Whitehead, "the *generic* aim of process is the attainment of importance" (*MT* 12, my emphasis), this is not to say that human creativity itself is implicitly "moral." Rather, it is through realizing the aesthetic and the intrinsic value of "the natural," and acting accordingly, namely, attaining a balance through *controlling* (e.g., via reasoned direction, restraint, and self-limitation) the appropriations

and self-actualizations which constitute human creative processes, that the ethical path is to be found. In other words, since human creativity has been interpreted by many philosophers and theologians as a function of the desire to be God (e.g., living up to our human potential, having been made in “God’s image”) and/or the desire to be Nature, the ethical course of action is to avoid these extremes as well as the calamities that will befall us due to the vicious fluctuation between such extremes. Certainly, “sustainable development,” as has been re-defined above, is to be found in the control of the creative process (e.g., to limit the appropriation of “the natural”), and not simply in an appeal to the creative process itself. The point is that not all creativity is moral. Human creativity must be tempered by reasoned self-limitation, if it is to arrive at the requisite ecologically sustainable balance. To be sure, Henning notes, “the ‘maximization of importance’ aimed at in morality is made possible only by the ‘control of process’” (130). In any case, for our purposes here of setting out the contours of the process-relational environmental epistemology, I shall have to leave further considerations of a process-relational environmental ethic to a future work.

**FROM THE “PROCESS-RELATIONAL” ENVIRONMENTAL EPISTEMOLOGY
TO THE INVESTIGATION OF “CONSTRUCTIVE POSTMODERN”
ENVIRONMENTAL PRAXIS**

The preceding analysis has elucidated some of the main contours of Whitehead’s process-relational environmental epistemology. In it, I have identified how it informs the various investigations of ecologically engaged psychology, such as those of eco-psychology, as well as offers novel proposals for environmentally ethical *praxis*. Specifically, with reference to characterizations of the modern and the deconstructive postmodern paradigms, as interpreted from the works of Sartre and Derrida, and involving the notions of “the desire to be God” and “the desire to be Nature,” respectively, this paper has demonstrated how Whitehead’s critical, non-anthropocentric organicism overcomes the vicious dichotomy between the ultimate aims of the anthropocentric humanism of modernity and the radical anti-humanism of deconstruction and radical ecogism. Parallel with the main problematic outlined by eco-psychology, the constructive postmodern paradigm is driven by an impetus to replace the dominant, ego-logical conceptions of the human self (for example, those advanced in mainstream psychology) which postulate it as a static ego, entirely separate from the natural world,

devoid of process, and, in particular, as a Cartesian substance dependent only upon itself for its existence, with one conceived as thoroughly engaged in creative flux, organic, and thoroughly interconnected with the rest of the natural world, yet not simply definable by the latter. Environmentalist Bill McKibben's statement in *The End of Nature* to the effect that the answer to the ecological crisis is not for humanity to simply disband our rational faculties, but to "exercise our reason to do what no other animal can do: we could limit ourselves voluntarily, *choose* to remain God's creatures instead of making ourselves gods. . . . Such restraint . . . is the real challenge" (182-83) resonates, to a certain extent, with process-relational environmental epistemology. The "restraint" of which McKibben speaks may be achieved by recognizing human limitations as well as through "knowing ourselves," namely, through a deeper understanding of the creative character of "the human" in this contemporary evolutionary epoch. Specifically, as has been alluded to in this paper, the process-relational environmental epistemology is largely constituted by the recognition of what the modern worldview takes for granted, namely, that "the natural" fuels all human creative processes, processes which constitute the self to begin with. In other words, it seeks to cultivate a heightened conscious awareness of the *prehensive character* of human life and experience in our culture, with a concern to limit the rate and extent of the appropriation, consumption, and destruction of "the natural" within human creative processes, thereby tempering the "attack on the environment" via reasoned self-limitation, while at the same time allowing for naturally sustainable levels of development, human creativity, life-satisfaction, and self-enjoyment. From the process-relational point of view, McKibben's call for "restraint" will also entail an embracing of novel modes of human creativity which are not merely a function of instrumental reason, monetary gain, "development," or "material appropriation," but rather heighten the senses of both the aesthetic value and the intrinsic value of Nature.

NOTES

1. In response to the possible charge that I am here committing Hume's is/ought fallacy, one might hypothesize that if we confined our thought in the way that the unmitigated Hume would direct us, ethics would not even exist as a branch of philosophy. In matters pertaining to what human beings have control over, descriptions of what is can certainly lead to prescriptions for what should be, at the level of *praxis*.

2. See Chalquist, C. "Mind and Environment: A Psychological Survey of Perspectives Literal, Wide, and Deep." Retrieved July 3, 2007.

3. In *Earth in the Balance*, Al Gore makes constant reference to the assumed separation of "the human" and "the natural" as the major issue for environmentalism. For example, see pp. 218-19, 230-31, 237, 249-50, 257, 262, 366.

4. According to Sartre, the historical existence of a human being or of humanity precedes the definition of the essence of the self or of humanity. He states that atheistic existentialism holds to the position that "if God does not exist, there is at least one being in whom existence precedes essence, a being who exists before he can be defined by any concept, and that this being is man, or, as Heidegger says, human reality. What is meant here by saying that existence precedes existence? It means that, first of all, man exists, turns up, appears on the scene, and, only afterwards, defines himself. If man, as the existentialist conceives him, is indefinable, it is because at first he is nothing. Only afterward will he be something, and he himself will have made what he will be. Thus, there is no human nature, since there is no God to conceive it. Not only is man what he conceives himself to be, but he is also only what he wills himself to be after his thrust toward existence. Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself" (*Existentialism* 15).

5. This is the case with German Idealism, especially, in Fichte's *die Tathandlung* or Act of the "I's" self-positing as absolute consciousness.

6. It is to be mentioned here that Sartre's phenomenological investigation of the meaning of desire as appropriation can be said to correspond closely with Heidegger's notion of "the event of appropriation of Being" or "enowning" (*Ereignis*) as it relates to the essence of technology in *Identity and Difference* and *The Onto-theological Constitution of Metaphysics*. According to Heidegger, the essence of technology is made manifest by "enframing" (*Ge-Stellen*) which may be conceived of as an instrumental "prelude to . . . the event of appropriation [of Being]" (*Identity* 14), by which human beings treat Nature as a "standing-reserve," setting it up in advance, in order to reveal its secrets and to extract its resources. Certainly, while Heidegger was not himself an environmental philosopher, many scholars have pointed out that the later Heidegger's holistic philosophizing as well as his critique of technology in *The Question Concerning Technology* lend themselves well to environmentalist discourses. For example, as Devall and Sessions point out in *Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered*, Heidegger "concluded that [the] anthropocentric development [of Western philosophy since Plato] paved the way for the technocratic mentality which espouses domination over Nature" (98).

7. For some deconstructionists, modernity has, for example, allowed for the patriarchal domination and oppression of non-European cultures by European cultures. In this respect, in rejecting the dominating meta-narratives of modernity, deconstruction can be said to lead to the liberation of peoples oppressed by modernity and to return to their own cultural identities and ways of life which are more harmonious with Nature. Especially, some strands of “Post-Colonial” theory ally themselves with deconstructive postmodernism and tend in this direction. As Clare Palmer describes it, “Post-Colonial” theory aims “to expose and to criticize the power-relations embedded in colonial regimes and in the relationships between societies that economically and politically dominate and societies and cultures that are dominated . . . usually on the basis that such power relations cause suffering and other kinds of harm (*Response* 51). It should be noted, however, that with respect to its alliance with the French deconstructionists, Post-Colonial theory has been criticized for itself being “strongly influenced by Continental European” philosophy (Keller 21) as well as accused of being the mere defense of cultural relativism.

8. For example, see the article by W. S. Weed, “Can We Go To Mars Without Going Crazy?”

9. Some scholars have sought to interpret Whitehead’s cosmology agnostically or even atheistically, namely, without reference to God, and others have done so in order to maintain the primacy of Darwinian evolution over intelligent design theories. Whitehead’s cosmological scheme can be said to be an attempt to synthesize these seemingly antagonistic perspectives. Whitehead’s cosmology was inspired by Darwin, but it also involves a claim that all organisms participate in creative processes which drive evolution. Whitehead’s notion of the creative process is not to be simply lumped in with Creationism. From a process-relational perspective, while contemporary science demonstrates that random mutations drive the evolutionary process and that there is no evidence of an intelligent designer or a direction toward an ultimate goal, scientists who reduce the evolution of species to genetics tend to omit the central fact that natural selection requires some reference to the life-process and the experience of organisms in determining whether such mutations are biologically successful. Similarly, without recourse to the creative processes of organisms, there is little room for an account for the intrinsic value of Nature; Nature, conceived as mere static bits of matter, being left “valueless” and “lifeless.” However, whether or not Whitehead can withstand the types of criticisms that were leveled against Bergson, especially in relation to the charge that his scheme is Lamarckian, is a subject matter for debate.

10. This is not to say, for example, that following from this notion, a parent needs to allow a mosquito to suck the blood of its infant child (see

Henning 184). Rather, from the process-relational view, the parent ought to be selectively interested in the baby's value as an intrinsically valuable organism, more so than a single mosquito, and therefore, she should protect it, for example, against the possibility of contracting the West Nile virus. However, at the same time, the parent does not need to carry out systematic acts of aggression against "the natural" as vengeance against the mosquito's actions, fogging every corner of the planet in an attempt to destroy all mosquito species. Parents should understand that the mosquito's selection of their particular baby as a food supply is a highly contingent event, that mosquitoes are an intrinsic part of the interconnected web of life, yet that there is, as part of human life, a need to deal with them (e.g., flick them off) when they are potentially in the process of causing harm to our loved ones. However, a reverential recognition of what Nature provides for us is important. At the very least, mosquitoes and their larvae provide food for fish that humans eat, and therefore parents ought to realize that reciprocal "trade-offs" between the aims of human beings and the maintenance of the wildness of the natural world are necessary in order to provide that balance necessary for a healthy planet as a whole. Especially important for parents, ethically speaking, should be a concern for the life-long health of their child, which will, in part, be a function of the maintenance of the health of the planet.

11. In *Religion in the Making*, Whitehead quotes Descartes' articulation in the *Principles of Philosophy* that "when we conceive of substance, we merely conceive an existent thing which requires nothing but itself in order to exist. To speak truth, nothing but God answers to this description as being that which is absolutely self-sustaining, for we perceive that there is no other created thing which can exist without being sustained by His power. . . . Created substances, however, whether corporeal or thinking, may be conceived under this common concept; for they are things which need only the concurrence of God in order to exist" (106). In the objections and replies to his *Meditations*, Descartes also states "the notion of a substance is just this—that it can exist by itself, that is without the aid of any other substance. And there is no one has ever perceived two substances by means of two different concepts without judging that they really are distinct" (*Selected* 146).

12. A strong parallel can be drawn here between Sartre's phenomenological investigation of the desire to be as an activity of appropriation and Whitehead's notion of a prehension. However, the distinction to be made here is that it is apparent that Whitehead is using the word "foundation," not in the sense of becoming self-caused, in the purely substantialist sense, but in the sense of any organism's, human or nonhuman, maintenance of its own existence through a selective appropriation, in the organic sense.

For Whitehead, the reality is that in the natural world, “life is robbery” (PR 105).

13. Whitehead would here seem to agree with Heidegger in relation to the question of metaphysics that “Being grounds beings, and beings, as what *is* most of all, account for Being” (*Identity* 69).

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