

Naturalism—as Religion, within Religions, without Religion

with Willem B. Drees, “Naturalism and Religion: Hunting Two Snarks?”; Ursula W. Goodenough and Jeremy E. Sherman, “The Emergence of Selves and Purpose”; Matthew D. MacKenzie, “Spiritual Animals: Sense-Making, Self-Transcendence, and Liberal Naturalism”; Curtis M. Craig, “The Potential Contribution of Awe and Nature Appreciation to Positive Moral Values”; Mark E. Hoelter, “Mysterium Tremendum in a New Key”; Charles W. Fowler, “The Convergence of Science and Religion”; Todd Macalister, “Naturalistic Religious Practices: What Naturalists Have Been Discussing and Doing”; Paul H. Carr, “Theologies Completing Naturalism’s Limitations”; James Sharp, “Theistic Evolution in Three Traditions”; Alessandro Mantini, “Religious Naturalism and Creation: A Cosmological and Theological Reading on the Origin/Beginning of the Universe”; and Willem B. Drees, “When to Be What? Why Science-Inspired Naturalism Need Not Imply Religious Naturalism.”

SPIRITUAL ANIMALS: SENSE-MAKING, SELF-TRANSCENDENCE, AND LIBERAL NATURALISM

by Matthew MacKenzie

Abstract. Owen Flanagan has advocated for an interdisciplinary, cross-cultural inquiry into the nature and optimal conditions of human flourishing that he aptly terms *eudaimonics*. For Flanagan flourishing is multifaceted, involving biological, psychological, and social dimensions. In this article, I will explore the spiritual dimension of human flourishing from a liberal naturalist perspective. My first core claim is that, at the root of human experience, there are capacities for sense-making and self-transcendence. These capacities allow us, indeed drive us, to create, maintain, and transform *spiritual ecologies*. These ecologies allow us to find meaning, value, and purpose in our individual and shared worlds—that is, to be spiritually at home. My second core claim is that this spiritual dimension is a distinct and irreducible dimension of our flourishing. The spiritual dimension centrally involves the *depth* and *integration* of our human orientation to life. In my view, we are inescapably *spiritual* animals and any adequate eudaimonics must take this into account.

Keywords: enactivism; eudaimonics; naturalism; sense-making; spirituality

Matthew MacKenzie is Professor of Philosophy and Department Chair at Colorado State University, Fort Collins, Colorado, USA; e-mail: matt.mackenzie@colostate.edu.

Owen Flanagan has advocated for an interdisciplinary, cross-cultural inquiry into the nature and optimal conditions of human flourishing that he aptly terms *eudaimonics* (Flanagan 2007). For Flanagan and others engaged in eudaimonics, it is understood from the start that different historical and contemporary traditions—for instance, Aristotelian, Buddhist, and Confucian—offer distinct visions of and pathways to flourishing. Further, it is understood that flourishing is multifaceted, for example, involving biological, psychological, and social dimensions. In this article, I will explore the spiritual dimension of human flourishing from a liberal naturalist perspective. Liberal naturalism is a generally nonreductive form of naturalism that rejects both the supernatural and epistemic and methodological scientism (MacKenzie 2019, 133–34). My first core claim is that, at the root of human experience, there are capacities for sense-making and self-transcendence. These capacities allow us, indeed drive us to create, maintain, and transform what Thomas Alexander (Alexander 2013) calls *spiritual ecologies*. These ecologies allow us to find meaning, value, and purpose in our individual and shared worlds—that is, to be spiritually at home. My second core claim is that this spiritual dimension is a distinct and irreducible dimension of our flourishing. The spiritual dimension centrally involves the *depth* and *integration* of our human orientation to life. In my view, we are inescapably *spiritual* animals and any adequate eudaimonics must take this into account. This article, then, is a contribution to what Flanagan calls Project Eudaimonia, particularly concerning naturalistic spirituality.

EUDAIMONICS

Flanagan understands eudaimonics to be “empirical-normative inquiry into the nature, causes, and conditions of human flourishing” (Flanagan 2007, 1). Moreover, eudaimonics “provides a framework for thinking in a unified way about philosophical psychology, moral and political philosophy, neuroethics, neuroeconomics, and positive psychology, as well as about transformative mindfulness practices that have their original home in nontheistic spiritual traditions such as Buddhism, Aristotelianism, and Stoicism” (2007, 4). So, while it is not itself a science, eudaimonics aims to integrate philosophy, science, and spirituality within a thoroughly naturalistic worldview.

Methodologically, Flanagan sees eudaimonics as grounded in reasoned reflection on the historical and contemporary evidence about human flourishing. Systematic philosophizing here is seen as continuous with empirical inquiry and the scientific picture of ourselves and the world is taken very seriously. More specifically, eudaimonics is methodologically pluralistic, in principle incorporating insights from the whole range of humanistic and scientific disciplines, from philosophy, to history, literature,

anthropology, psychology, neuroscience, and more. In addition, Project Eudaimonia allows for the incorporation of contemplative disciplines such as meditation. The central task of philosophy here is synthetic—it is to draw on the best historical and contemporary work on human flourishing and to discern an overall pattern or construct a robust and coherent integration of this work. This is made possible, Flanagan argues, because of the broadly naturalistic assumption that “these sciences are all engaged in studying various aspects of thinking and being of a certain very smart species of social mammal” (Flanagan 2007, 3).

Not only is eudaimonics methodologically pluralistic, it is pluralistic concerning human flourishing itself (2007, 40). Of course, it is just a fact that different traditions—Daoism, Yoga, Stoicism, Epicureanism—offered differing conceptions of human flourishing. And it is incumbent on us to study these differing conceptions. But eudaimonics, as Flanagan describes it, moves from a fairly uncontroversial descriptive pluralism, to a more ambitious if tentative normative pluralism. In his view, there may very well be an irreducible plurality of ways to flourish both individually and in terms of broader, shared forms of life. For instance, Flanagan asserts that there are distinctive conceptions of flourishing to be found (among others) in Platonist, Aristotelian, Buddhist, and Confucian philosophies. The Aristotelian conception involves a life of virtuous activity and the realization and enjoyment of one’s capacities as a rational, social animal. A Buddhist account involves, he argues, “a stable sense of serenity and contentment . . . caused or constituted by enlightenment or wisdom and virtue or goodness as these are characterized within Buddhist philosophy” (2007, 165). I will have more to say about the broadly Platonist view below. The point here is that eudaimonics starts from the presumption that there are both distinctive paths to flourishing, and also distinctive ways or forms of flourishing available to human beings.

As mentioned above, the starting point of Project Eudaimonia is a naturalistic conception of human beings as smart social mammals. Our species emerged through the same processes of biological evolution that have given rise to every other species we know about. Moreover, the naturalistic assumption entails at minimum a skepticism about (if not a decisive rejection of) life after death or other forms of radically transcending our material being, such as *mokṣa* or *parinirvāṇa*. Yet eudaimonics explicitly includes a spiritual dimension to human flourishing. Flanagan writes, “Spirituality includes multifarious religious practices and institutions, theologies, and such nontheistic spiritual conceptions as ethical naturalism, secular humanism, pagan shamanism, and Confucianism, Buddhism, and Stoicism” (2007, 7). As he sees it, the function of spirituality (or the spiritual dimension of human existence) is to achieve some degree of coherence in living well and to cultivate certain “transcendent impulses.” We “seek to transcend a narrow, local, local occluded view of the world, of our

compatriots and ourselves, and to locate a wider, broader, deeper way of making sense of things and finding meaning” (2007, 187). In particular, he posits a “Platonic orientation,” an urge or drive to live with and embody the true, the good, and the beautiful. These are not eternal forms, but rather ideals that emerge from our evolved nature as rational, social animals. Eudaimonia, for animals like us, requires our active integration of truth, goodness, and beauty. Flanagan affirms his form of naturalism is broad enough to accommodate these drives toward transcendence and the spiritual practices that may support or cultivate them.

SENSE-MAKING AND SELF-TRANSCENDENCE

How can a liberal naturalist account for these transcendent urges, this spiritual orientation? In this section, I argue the spiritual orientation arises from capacities for sense-making and self-transcendence at the roots of experience. To make this case, I will draw on both classical pragmatism and enactivism to sketch an account of experience, sense-making, and self-transcendence.

According to John Dewey, “experience” refers not to private sensory-conscious episodes, but rather, “Experience includes what men do and suffer, what they strive for, love, believe, and endure, and how men act and are acted upon, the ways in which they do and suffer, desire and enjoy, see, believe, imagine—in short, processes in experiencing” (Dewey 2000, 18). For Dewey, the general term “experience” refers to the various dynamic modes of interaction between an organism and its environment. More specifically, it is the ongoing and co-constituting (sensory, motor, affective, behavioral, cognitive) transaction between sentient organisms and their “preeminently qualitative” world. On this view, experience includes the experiencer, the experienced, and the dynamic relations between them. Human experience is also multivalent. It includes, for example, physical, biological, aesthetic, social, historical, and spiritual dimensions. So, a naturalistic account of spirituality needs to explain the emergence of the spiritual dimension of experience in terms of the more basic modes of organism-environment transaction.

In my view, experience is sense-making (MacKenzie 2016). That is, what Dewey calls experience, at its roots, just is what enactivists call sense-making. According to Evan Thompson:

Sense-making is threefold: (1) sensibility as openness to the environment (intentionality as openness); (2) significance as positive or negative valence of environmental conditions relative to the norms of the living being (intentionality as passive synthesis—passivity, receptivity, and affect); and (3) the direction or orientation the living being adopts in response to significance and valence (intentionality as protentional and teleological). (Thompson 2011, 119)

The emergence of an autonomous (i.e., organizationally and operationally closed) organism entails the emergence of a field of possible interactions between that organism and the larger environment. Some interactions will allow the organism to continue and even thrive, while others can harm or kill it. Thus, the environment takes on significance and valence: some events are dangerous for the organism, some things are food, and so on. What we label the organism's physical surroundings becomes for it an environment, a relational domain of significance and valence. Moreover, the overall state of the organism-environment system at a given point is the organism's "situation," in Dewey's sense of the term.

Co-emergent with sentient and mobile beings is a sensorimotor world, which in turn shapes the on-going dynamics, structure, and viability of the organism. To be alive is to come into being in the midst of this circular process. To remain alive entails making sense of and acting appropriately in relation to the significance and valence of one's world. Thus, the organism engages in sense-making at a variety of levels. First, the very sense of the world will be partly a function of the structure, capacities, and evolutionary history of the organism. Second, sense (significance and valence) is enacted and transformed through the organism's action in the world, for example, in exploration of the sensorimotor environment. Third, the organism makes sense of its world through viable conduct, which is arguably the most primitive form of circumspection or understanding. Overall, we can say that sense-making for the viable organism involves a form of experiential niche construction.

On this account of experience as sense-making, more complex organisms are capable of and require more varied and complex forms of sense-making. The *Escherichia coli* bacterium, for example, makes sense of its world through simple chemical receptors and the ability to swim and tumble. In comparison, a mouse has an exponentially more complex array of sensory, affective, conative, and cognitive capacities to make sense of and adaptively respond to its world. Since sense-making and viable conduct are deeply interconnected, complex organisms must achieve and maintain some degree of coherence in these activities even in the face of a dynamic and unpredictable environment. In the case of human beings, as I will argue below, this drive for some degree of coherence and integration in experience is a key element in human spirituality.

Furthermore, for both Dewey and enactivism, human experience is constitutively social. At the level of primary, unreflective experience we are enmeshed in bodily, sensory-motor-affective interaction with others. At the reflective level, Dewey argues that "mind" is "primarily a verb...[that] denotes every mode and variety of interest in, and concern for, things: practical, intellectual, and emotional. It never denotes anything self-contained, isolated from the world of persons and things, but is always used with respect to situations, events, objects, persons and groups"

(Dewey 2005, 267–68). In the enactivist perspective, human experience involves *participatory sense-making*: “the coordination of intentional activity in interaction, whereby individual sense-making processes are affected and new domains of social sensemaking can be generated that were not available to each individual on her own” (De Jaegher and Di Paolo 2007, 497). Like the drive for coherence, the fundamentally social and participatory nature of human sense-making is a key aspect of human spirituality.

According to the pragmatist-enactivist account just sketched, we are social, sense-making animals. The human drive for meaning, then, is not a fluke or a spandrel. It reflects what it is to be a living, sentient, minded being. Furthermore, as social and reflective beings, we have the capacity to make sense of things in a “wider, broader, deeper way” and to do so with others. In doing so, we transcend the narrow concerns of our local environment and the immediate survival and viability concerns of our biological nature. But in a pragmatist-enactivist view, this capacity for transcendence emerges from our biology and does not transcend it in any dualistic way. That is, the movement of transcendence here retains what is transcended even as it moves beyond it. We are more than our biology without ever leaving it behind. Mind emerges from life and our mindedness reflects our nature as living beings. In this sense, the transcendent impulse to seek deeper and broader meaning is also deeply *natural* for human beings.

In addition to the impulse for a broader view of the world, human spirituality includes a movement of *self-transcendence*. Psychologist Pamela Reed defines self-transcendence as “expansion of self-conceptual boundaries multidimensionally: inwardly (e.g., through introspective experiences), outwardly (e.g., by reaching out to others), and temporally (whereby past and future are integrated into the present)” (Reed 1991, 67). In later work, she explicitly connects self-transcendence to spirituality by including connection with “dimensions beyond the typically discernible world” (Reed 2021). The question here is: what are the natural roots of self-transcendence? I propose we can find an answer in an account of the self as an emergent, multidimensional process.

In my view, a sentient being is one who is capable of conscious sensation, feeling, and action. Creature subjectivity arises from and facilitates the synchronic and diachronic integration of sensation, feeling, and action and constitutes a sentient organismic perspective in and on the world. Being a self involves the synchronic and diachronic integration of (at least) four paradigmatic capacities or features: (1) subjectivity, (2) ownership, (3) agency, and (4) valuation. In the normal case, there will be both functional and phenomenological dimensions to the on-going integration of these features. Further, on this view, the emergence of the self is linked to the emergence of a degree of psychological autonomy from the biological autonomy of living systems. Hence, the self is a complex or pattern

of processes and capacities not a substantial entity. It emerges from and is sustained by selfless psychobiological processes and structures. The self, then, is the on-going functional and phenomenological integration and maintenance of subjectivity, ownership, agency, and valuation.

The self is not a substantial *thing*. Rather, it is a complex structure or pattern of processes and capacities. This structure emerges from and is sustained by selfless processes and structures of the living organism. The self is the ongoing integration and maintenance of subjectivity, agency, ownership, and valuation in the life of the organism itself. In this sense, my account of the self is both emergentist and functionalist. A self is what it does and what it allows the organism to do.

There are three key features of the self that are relevant here. First, the self is inherently dynamic. As a structured process it is ever-changing. And in human beings (and other animals with sufficient psychological complexity) a central function of the self is to maintain diachronic continuity amidst this change. Second, the self is multidimensional. Following William James, we can identify the material, social, and spiritual dimensions of the self, as well as the fundamental phenomenological distinction between the empirical *me* and the *I* or self as subject. Third, the self is developmental. We become selves through human (biological, psychological, and social) development and, as Dewey remarks, “The self is not something ready-made, but something in continuous formation through choice of action” (Dewey 2018, 343). Indeed, the developmental process continues throughout life such that, in the optimal case, “the growing, enlarging, liberated self . . . goes forth to meet new demands and occasions, and readapts and remakes itself in the process. It welcomes untried situations. The necessity for choice between the interests of the old and of the forming, moving, self is recurrent” (Dewey 2018 307).

Of course, there are a number of distinct accounts or models of self-transcendence found in spiritual traditions and in recent academic work (MacKenzie 2018). For instance, what we could call a *self-self model* understands self-transcendence in terms of moving from one type of self to another type. One might move from a lower self to a higher self or from a false self to a true self. In contrast, a *self-selfless model* understands self-transcendence as a movement that in some way weakens, displaces, or eliminates the self. The most well-known example here is the Buddhist view that the self is an illusion and that awakening involves transcending that illusion and achieving a lucid, selfless mode of being. On a *self-other model*, self-transcendence is understood as the movement from self to that which is both other and (often) greater than the self. For instance, one may move toward a community, or toward God, or toward a sense of oneness with all things. Furthermore, a particular form of spirituality may incorporate or blend aspects of these models.

Self-transcendence, then, reflects the very nature of the self as a dynamic, multidimensional, and developmental process. A healthy self moves beyond itself, while maintaining a sufficient degree of diachronic continuity and integration. Spirituality is the art of self-transcendence, both inducing and managing the dynamic movement of self-transcendence toward a “broader, deeper” way of being. As Abraham Maslow puts it, “Transcendence refers to the very highest and most inclusive or holistic levels of human consciousness, behaving and relating, as ends rather than means, to oneself, to significant others, to human beings in general, to other species, to nature, and to the cosmos” (Maslow 1976, 269).

SPIRITUAL ECOLOGIES

The capacities for sense-making and self-transcendence are at the roots of our nature as living, sentient, minded animals. Beyond survival, human beings also seek a sense of value and meaning in their lives. Thomas Alexander calls this drive the *Human Eros*. He writes:

At the root of our lives we manifest a deep-seated drive *to exist with a sense of meaning and value*. . . Quite simply, we seek fulfillment on a number of levels and flourish when we find it and wither when we do not. A human life that has been denied or stripped of love, friendship, happiness, creative work, curiosity, awareness of mystery and beauty, and, above all, hope, has been destroyed. This drive for meaning and value will allow us to endure suffering and even death for the sake of love for another person or for an ideal. (Alexander 2013 140)

The drive to sense-making is built into our nature as living beings, but our Eros distinctively human. Furthermore, our drive to seek fulfillment takes us outside and beyond ourselves toward “love, friendship, . . . awareness of mystery and beauty, and . . . hope.” In this way, the Human Eros is also a drive toward self-transcendence.

In Alexander’s view, the Human Eros is deeply social and cultural. Culture is the web of meaning and value woven by the Human Eros. He writes, “Human beings need to live meaningful lives and cultural environments are conditions for that possibility. They are, so to speak, ‘ecologies of the spirit.’ They transform a biophysical environment into a ‘world’” (Alexander 2013, 11). Cultures as spiritual ecologies both express and sustain the human drive to meaning and value. It is through culture that human beings come to inhabit the Earth as an *oikos*, as a home. And this, of course, is something we social animals can and must do together with others.

In this sense, just as beavers build dams and spiders weave webs, we weave spiritual ecologies. Our distinctively *human* forms of sense-making are social and participatory, allowing us to develop forms of social

sense-making that no individual human being could achieve on her own. Moreover, a distinctive aspect of this account—drawing on the American Naturalist tradition and Dewey in particular—is that our individual and social forms of sense-making are fundamentally *aesthetic*. As Dewey writes, “The world in which we immediately live, that in which we strive, succeed, and are defeated is preeminently a qualitative world. What we act for, suffer, and enjoy are things in their qualitative determinations. This world forms the field of characteristic modes of thinking, characteristic in that thought is definitely regulated by qualitative considerations” (Dewey 2008, 243). A spiritual ecology, then, is a particular word of meaning and value that is enacted and sustained through participatory sense-making and its central function is to sustain “an aesthetics of human existence.”

Spiritual life, then, involves the proper participation in the creation, maintenance, and defense of a spiritual ecology as an appropriate environment for the expression and fulfilment of the Human Eros. In particular, we might see ritual as especially relevant to this task. Further, spiritual life also involves warding off the transformation of Eros into, what Alexander calls Eris (strife). When the human need for a sense of meaning and value goes unfulfilled, we may experience a sense of depression, a crisis of meaning, or even death. And when the Human Eros is thwarted or undermined, it can become destructive, even nihilistic. “Eros denied,” he tells us, “turns into a destructive power that rages against what denies meaning to one’s being or, when turned inward, becomes the negation of oneself” (Alexander 2013, 420).

A central task for Project Eudaimonia is to develop a richer and more sophisticated descriptive-explanatory grasp on the nature and maintenance of spiritual ecologies. Indeed, Flanagan has offered an account of six interconnected domains—art, science, technology, ethics, politics, and spirituality—that constitute the early twenty-first century space of meaning. In his view, “it is, to some significant degree, by living in these spaces that we make sense of things, orient our lives, find our way, and live meaningfully” (Flanagan 2007, 12). Further, eudaimonics must also develop a prescriptive vision of the optimal conditions for healthy spiritual ecologies and a critical perspective on those activities and forces that undermine them.

SPIRITUAL ANIMALS

So far, I have suggested that we are spiritual animals due to three intertwined aspects of our evolved nature. First, we are sense-making—that is, meaning-seeking, meaning-making—beings. Second, the human self is dynamic and self-transcending. Third, we enact and sustain networks of meaning and value—spiritual ecologies—that allow us to express and

hopefully fulfill our Human Eros. To be spiritual here is to seek the integration of sense-making and self-transcendence in and through a particular spiritual ecology.

A fully developed eudaimonics would need an account of how spiritual animals like us could have evolved. However, that is beyond the scope of this article. Here, I want to focus on the compatibility between naturalism and the above sketch of humans as spiritual animals. In particular, I want to examine an account suggested by Flanagan (2007) and elaborated by Lane and Flanagan (Forthcoming). The idea is:

that philosophical reflection on human nature and social life reveals that while working to be and remain biologically fit, humans also seek meaning in a way that conforms to a pattern recognized by Plato. We argue that human beings should seek “the good,” “the true,” and “the beautiful”; moreover, the proper measure of human flourishing is the degree to which humans achieve these three, in a maximally harmonious way. (Lane and Flanagan Forthcoming)

Flanagan aptly calls this meta-structure “platonic space”—that is, our basic orientation toward the true, good, and beautiful within and through our particular space of meaning. These are not eternal forms, but rather ideals that emerge from our evolved nature as rational, social animals. Eudaimonia, for animals like us, requires our active integration of truth, goodness, and beauty. Flanagan sees the platonic orientation as grounded by a hypothetical imperative: if you want to flourish, harmonize the true, good, and beautiful. Why? Because the cognitive, conative, and affective dimensions of our nature require an orientation to or in such a platonic space. The hypothesis, then, is that our spiritual needs involve this cultivation and maintenance of a harmonious integration of the good-true-beautiful and the spiritual ecology that supports it. In this sense, we are inescapably spiritual animals and that spirituality is in some deep sense *Platonic*.

Returning to the notion of sense-making discussed above, it is worth noting that the enactivist account involves the dynamic integration of cognitive, conative, and affective dimensions. In the case of human beings, our capacities for symbolic language, reflection, abstraction, and projection allow us to both grasp and be guided by ideals. In this way, our cognitive capacities can be aimed at truth, our conative capacities at the good, and our sensory-affective capacities at the beautiful. And, in this view, when we so orient ourselves in a harmonious and integrated way, we are able to flourish as rational, social, spiritual beings. But note that the ideals of truth, goodness, and beauty are not conceived as metaphysically robust eternal forms. Rather they emerge from the bottom up through a reflexive process of abstraction, projection, and constraint. As Nicholas Rescher writes:

Human aspiration is not restricted by the realities—neither by the realities of the present moment (from which our sense of future possibilities can free us), nor even by our view of realistic future prospects (from which our sense of the ideal possibilities can free us). Our judgment is not bounded by what is, nor by what will be, nor even by what can be. For there is always also our view of what should be—what might ideally be. The vision of our mind’s eye extends to circumstances beyond the limits of the possible. (Rescher 2014, 130)

Here, we see the interweaving of sense-making, self-transcendence, and the Platonic orientation. Human sense-making can be explicitly guided by ideals that themselves emerge from the nature of our cognitive, conative, and sensory-affective capacities. As ideals, they draw us to reach beyond our present situation, beyond our present selves, toward what might ideally be. As Plato taught us, Eros reaches out toward the ideal, drawing us to self-transcendence.

Given the central role of the ideals of goodness, truth, and beauty in this account, we may follow Santayana in understanding spirituality as the imposition of a direction and an ideal on the natural forces of human existence (Levinson 1992). That is, to be spiritual is to strive to live in the light and the presence of a worthy ideal (or ideals). Of course, this requires commitment, discipline, and willingness to sacrifice, in addition to genuine love for the ideal. In other words, the spiritual life requires the cultivation of virtues under the aegis of the ideal (and in continuous awareness of the real). Moreover, the process of cultivating virtue requires the harmonious integration of our human capacities and drives as well as the virtues that shape our character. Indeed, we might think of this as analogous to Plato’s harmony of the soul (Weiner 1993), here understood as inward, outward, and temporal depth and integration.

Which virtues? There are, of course, several distinct lists of virtues related to the spiritual life. One might appeal to the five Confucian virtues of *ren*, *yi*, *zhi*, *xin*, and *li*. Or one might appeal to six perfections of Mahāyāna Buddhism: *dāna*, *śīla*, *kṣānti*, *vīrya*, *dhyāna*, and *prajñā*. Flanagan appeals to the “high six,” the list of universal virtues identified by Peterson and Seligman (2004). These are: wisdom, justice, courage, humaneness, temperance, and transcendence. This seems like a pretty good list, particularly when it comes to thinking about the morally good life. But what about the spiritual life? Peterson and Seligman explicitly link the virtue of transcendence to spirituality. They define transcendence “in the broad sense as the connection to something higher—the belief that there is meaning or purpose larger than ourselves” (Peterson and Seligman 2004, 38). In terms of our discussion, transcendence has to do with the Human Eros and with the *self-other* model of self-transcendence. However, as Flanagan points out, transcendence may not be a virtue in the proper sense. Rather,

it “describes a more global orientation to experience than virtues do. Furthermore, it is hard to see what, if any, type of action it calls forth” (Flanagan 2007, 52). So, it may be that Peterson and Seligman have committed a category error in listing transcendence as a virtue alongside justice, courage, and the rest. We might instead think of transcendence as pointing to a particular (spiritual) domain within which certain virtues should operate. For instance, this is a proper domain of the virtues of reverence and piety.

As Paul Woodruff defines it, the virtue of reverence “is the well-developed capacity to have the feelings of awe, respect, and shame when these are the right feelings to have” (Woodruff 2014, 6). And the proper object of reverence is that which is greater than the human being and outside human control. He writes, “[r]everence begins in a deep understanding of human limitations; from this grows the capacity to be in awe of whatever we believe lies outside our control—God, truth, justice, nature, even death” (Woodruff 2014, 1). Of course, Woodruff points out that “reverence has more to do with politics than with religion” (2014, 2), but he and Ursula Goodenough elsewhere argue for the spiritual importance of mindful reverence in a religious naturalist context (Goodenough and Woodruff 2001). I think reverence is a spiritual virtue because of its relation to awe and transcendence and its recognition of human limitations in the face of a greater reality. Moreover, reverent persons would, I think, be good stewards of their spiritual ecologies, including feeling appropriate shame or outrage at its desecration.

CONCLUSION

I have argued that the capacities for sense-making and self-transcendence are at the roots of our experience as human beings. And these capacities drive us to create, maintain, and transform spiritual ecologies that allow us to find meaning, value, and purpose in our individual and shared worlds. I have also argued for a dynamic and developmental understanding of the self. In this liberal naturalist account, to be spiritual is to seek the integration of sense-making and self-transcendence in and through a particular spiritual ecology. In this way, we are inescapably spiritual animals. Moreover, following Lane and Flanagan, I have explored a naturalistic and Platonic form of spirituality that is fundamentally aimed at the harmonious realization of the ideals of goodness, truth, and beauty and the cultivation of virtue. Of course, this is but one form that a naturalistic spirituality might take. But it is a venerable one, and worthy of further exploration as part of the larger project of eudaimonics and the development of naturalistic forms of spirituality that facilitate human flourishing.

REFERENCES

- Alexander, Thomas M. 2013. *The Human Eros: Eco-Ontology and the Aesthetics of Existence*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- De Jaegher, Hanne, and Ezequiel Di Paolo. 2007. "Participatory Sense-Making." *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 6 (4): 485–507.
- Dewey, John. 2000. *Experience and Nature*. *Enlarged*, revised edition. New York: Dover Publications.
- . 2005. *Art as Experience*. New York: TarcherPerigee.
- Dewey, John. 2008. *The Later Works of John Dewey: 1929–1930, Essays, the Sources of a Science of Education, Individualism, Old and New, and Construction of a Criticism*. Carbondale, IL: SIU Press.
- Dewey, John. 2018. *Democracy and Education by John Dewey: With a Critical Introduction by Patricia H. Hinchey*. Gorham, ME: Myers Education Press.
- Flanagan, Owen. 2007. *The Really Hard Problem: Meaning in a Material World*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Goodenough, Ursula, and Paul Woodruff. 2001. "Mindful Virtue, Mindful Reverence." *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* 36 (4): 585–95.
- Lane, Timothy, and Owen Flanagan. Forthcoming. "Neuroexistentialism, Eudaimonics, and Positive Illusions." In *Mind and Society: Cognitive Science Meets the Social Sciences*. New York: Springer.
- Levinson, Henry Samuel. 1992. *Santayana, Pragmatism, and the Spiritual Life*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press.
- MacKenzie, Matthew. 2016. "Dewey, Enactivism, and the Qualitative Dimension." *Humana.Mente Journal of Philosophical Studies* 9 (31): 21–36.
- . 2018. "Virtue, Self-Transcendence, and Liberation in Yoga and Buddhism." In *Self-Transcendence and Virtue: Perspectives from Philosophy, Psychology, and Theology*, edited by Jennifer A. Frey and Candace Vogler, 203–22. New York: Routledge.
- . 2019. "Physicalism and Beyond: Flanagan, Buddhism, and Consciousness." In *Naturalism, Human Flourishing, and Asian Philosophy: Owen Flanagan and Beyond*, edited by Bongrae Seok, 131–48. New York: Routledge.
- Maslow, Abraham. 1976. *Farther Reaches of Human Nature*. London: Penguin Books.
- Peterson, Christopher, and Martin E. P. Seligman. 2004. *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Reed, Pamela G. 1991. "Toward a Nursing Theory of Self-Transcendence: Deductive Reformulation Using Developmental Theories." *Advances in Nursing Science* 13 (4): 64–77.
- . 2021. *Theory of Self-Transcendence*. New York: Springer Publishing Company.
- Rescher, Nicholas. 2014. *A System of Pragmatic Idealism, Volume II: The Validity of Values, A Normative Theory of Evaluative Rationality*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Thompson, Evan. 2011. "Living Ways of Sense Making." *Philosophy Today* 55 (Supplement): 114–23.
- Weiner, Neal O. 1993. *The Harmony of the Soul: Mental Health and Moral Virtue Reconsidered*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Woodruff, Paul. 2014. *Reverence: Renewing a Forgotten Virtue*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.