INTERDEPENDENCE AND IDENTITY: MORAL RELATION IN AN HISTORICAL WORLD

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ABSTRACT: The twin concepts in the title will be introduced in the contexts of the philosophy of history and of philosophical personalism, as distinct from (though related to) their uses as logical and metaphysical categories. Overviews of varieties of philosophy of history and of basic principles I employ are foundations of the argument. Concepts, or ideas, in general have, I argue, real existence through the way that personal agents use them in creating the histories of human relations. I introduce a Personalist account, which has a more thoroughly diachronic character. Further remarks on the power of ideas to create relations expands this idea into the key claim: that urgency derived from interdependent human relations links historical and moral considerations. Interdependence and identity are then considered in terms of systems theory, notably biological autopoiesis and panpsychism. The value of all this appears in terms of relationships in moral life and, in conclusion, in an understanding of the connections between moral philosophy and philosophy of history.

KEYWORDS: Autopoiesis; Panpsychism; Personalism; Personhood; Philosophy of history

Relations and identity are among the most fundamental and widespread themes in philosophy, as they are in all human thought. The abundance of varieties of these terms suggests that we can legitimately wonder if there is a core meaningful substance to either identity or relationality. I think I could show that core metaphysical or logical meanings of these terms are useful and interesting for philosophers, leaving aside the freedom with which people use language. The way I would do this arises from my view of what ideas are. I'll refer to this a bit in what follows, but it is not to be my chief matter in the scope of this paper. I will argue for a core significance in another, less delicate but perfectly common way: my claim is that the uses I will define here get at the heart of the other theoretical

usages, which other philosophical usages reflect in their various ways. I can freely take this stance because I speak from within the perspective, or the field of philosophy, that animates my work. This is the philosophy of history.

Philosophy of history is an almost invisible part of American academic philosophy. It plays larger roles in Europe and in South America. Both disciplinary philosophy and disciplinary history orphan it, but I shall not rehearse these woes. Nevertheless, as a result of this paper, I do very much want readers to see the value of the philosophy of history, to understand that it is a powerful and essential inquiry for all philosophy and for all cultural theory. I hope that the reader will see this as a side-effect of following my thoughts on interdependence and identity as they figure in understanding our relationships to time, the past, and finitude. Therefore, allow me briefly to describe the field with my view of what philosophy of history is.

Conventionally speaking, it is divided between the speculative and the critical forms. This schema is inadequate. Speculative philosophy of history refers to the panoptic theories of the whole course of human history in its patterns and meanings. This chiefly includes the work of its canonical century from Kant to World War I, meaning mostly Hegel and Marx. Spengler and Toynbee from subsequent decades are sometimes mixed in. Christian cosmosophy of all centuries also is a theory of history, but it does not figure except when relevant to philosophers—but this fact is the first of many ragged edges in the schema. Critical philosophy of history denotes focus on the methods and products of historians seen as issues in epistemology, often treated in conjunction with philosophy of science and often examined in the analytic tradition. It is here that the linguistic narrativism that dominated the field for two or three decades probably belongs, though it is also a ragged edge because, among other reasons, it was not analytic. Critical Theory, a marxisant approach that began as a theory of history and still largely revolves around its history-theoretic core, has grown in many novel directions. Philosophers use the term "critical" in a vast number of ways. So, yet another ragged edge.

Now, every discipline and theory has a diachronic side because we are finite beings whose grasp of truths flees and alters with our days. This should mean that the ragged edges are everywhere; or, more affirmatively, that the philosophy of history has a role in all thinking about knowledge, cultures, and societies. I hold

that this is true for reasons this essay will unfold. Its purchase on a certain specific kind of universality with respect to human culture is not only practical, humanistic, or theoretical and logical. It also is cosmic.

But divisions by schools and approaches tend not to conceive of history as the core of such a compendious basic philosophy. There is, then, yet another type of philosophy of history that has only uncommonly been distinguished from the rest or even allowed into the field, much less taken as its heart. Those who promote this call it existential philosophy of history. Phenomenology, hermeneutics, existentialism, systems theory, various ontologies, moral philosophy, literary studies, anthropology and sociology, some theology, and other schools of philosophy and of theory—along with all the philosophers and theorists who developed these approaches—bleed into it. And it bleeds as well into the sub-fields of philosophy, including political theory, ethics, and metaphysics. What you will read here is a salient in developing this kind of philosophy of history.

In order to help the reader to follow my line of thought, I will briefly stipulate some of the key ideas at work in the background of my argument for this theory of our relation to the past. Although these concepts have wide and complicated genealogies in philosophy and theory of the last 150 years, but I will present them here as principles.

First, I regard our interdependence with one another and with the biosphere as the heart of human history and the chief object of historiographic inquiry. Historians study the effects of our actions on one another, so that interdependence is, in my view, the most useful and suitable content for the term "historicity." This word is used rather loosely in many ways but its original central thought was to index the ways in which we are the sort of beings who have a history and what are the consequences of this feature of our existence. The most universal and important positive content we can give to this idea, so as not to leave it a black box term, is our sociality, relationality, interpersonality, and interdependence.[1] For present purposes this aspect of historicity is salient.

Second, the effects of what we do on others and on ourselves is in the province of moral philosophy. For reflection on this, history is the universal fund of material

[1]See my "Repairing Historicity," *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy*, vol. 16, no. 2 (2020): 54–75, http://cosmosandhistory.org/index.php/journal/article/view/881/1523

because it is the sum of human behavior.

Third, I argue that all persons as moral agents and hence all moral agents as persons. Moral agency is constitutive of personhood. This leads to a vast area of controversy, so for here and now I shall add only that this is called moral agency Personalism.

To put these together, we can say that philosophical inquiry into the effects of our actions as constituting our moral lives must concern our interdependence, which comprises our histories. History, or the past with the present plus the future from where we stand, is therefore our reality. In the framework of the Personalist tradition in philosophy, which is my doctrinal home base, Persons are the most real thing there is.[2] However, because "real" in philosophy most often refers to physical or natural reality, I prefer the term "actuality." This has the added benefit of connoting what is currently happening before us or pressing upon us. Because our moral positions are the most important things we do, they are the truest actuality. They are present to us in the gravity of human suffering and well-being.[3] This form of Personalism, in my way of viewing things, deflates or re-frames the epistemological problems of the non-presence of the past and obviates most of the vexing ontology of time. Our actions and thoughts are inherently evaluative, as argued in the developing line of descriptive ethics stemming from the work of Wittgenstein, Murdoch, and others.[4] The evaluative is existential because what we always are evaluating is the logical and practical fit of our thinking and behavior to our drives and needs.

The interdependence and identities of which I speak here are these actualities of history. Readers might now begin to see the ways in which one can argue that other versions of these concepts in logic and in other field are abstractions, dilutions, displacements, alienations, or other oblique reflections of the moral

[2]General introductions to Personalism include Manuel Burgos, *An Introduction to Personalism* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2018); ans Rufus Burrow, *Personalism: a critical introduction* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1999).

[3]Although there might be significant reasons for regarding moral life as lacking some kind of reality on ontological, neurological, psychological, social, or other analyses, the consequences of our actions on others with whom we must actually live is as real as it gets, truly and fully real, so much so that it is fair, or at least plausible, to say that for Persons they are the ultimate reality.

[4]See Nora Hämäläinen, *Descriptive Ethics: what does moral philosophy know about morality?* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019). A popular introductions to this is Clare MacCumhaill and Rachel Wiseman, *Metaphysical Animals: how four women brought philosophy back to life* (Doubleday, 2022).

historical actuality of persons. For this reason, we ought to regard personhood as that which explains many philosophical concepts. Other ways of looking at these concepts and issues abstract them from personhood and for this reason conclude unsatisfactorily. As I said above, I am not dwelling here on this line of thought, or on the notions of universals it suggests, though this idea will be suggested later. But I hope to have begun to demonstrate ways to regard moral agency Personhood as genuinely, historically real, or actual.

This line of thinking gives us a certain understanding of interdependence. What then about identity and identities? The human identities that are formed by our past and that form what will become past—the objects of historical, political, and ethical inquiry—include economic and labor identities, the national identities (paralytically infantile though they are), cultural identities, intellectual allegiances, gender, and every sort of tribal, collective, political, social, and individual identities that historians study. Around these over the last four decades, ranging from the local to the global, a great portion of modern historiography has clustered itself.[5]

One approach is to say that they derive from interdependence as a kind of compensation actuated by primordial subjectivity to backfill a melancholic regret for the virginity of solitude. They serve to compensate us for needing others, with whom, as Samuel Beckett said, all the trouble begins. Or they serve as attachment to the site of a wound around which forms an identity that we prefer to emancipation from the hurt or any solution to the problem it has caused.[6] But even if this somewhat pathologizing view has force as an observable truth about human motivation, stopping with it—that is, dismissing identities just because they are not universal or enter into anti-social conflicts and even hatreds—utterly fails to inquire into the responsiveness that is indispensable to human co-existence at all levels, which also motivates us. Even were identity solely reactive, we must learn how and why, to what and for what, it reacts.

The issue to be faced here is that an identity must be refractory, as well as responsive. Other things must bounce off it, so to speak. This is true of the

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[5]Stefan Berger's *History and Identity: how historical theory shapes historical practice* (Cambridge University Press, 2022) is a magisterial account of the sorts of social identities at the core of modern historiography.

[6]I draw this idea from Wendy Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton University Press, 1995), 52–76, who applies it to identity politics.

identities people adopt as it is of many objects in the world for the object to be intelligible to us.[7] For anything to have *hacceity* or identity, it must have *antitupia*, or antitypy—a word first coined by Democritus that was essential to Leibniz in establishing the identity that makes a monad a monad.[8] The movement of history allows persons and collectives to solidify the identities that they desire in their circumstances, and it also subjects these identities to ceaseless change. One could say that the passage of time terminates identities, but memory and our deepest drives broadly incorporate them into the mentalities of later Persons so that they sometimes persist though differing in form. There they often re-constellate, sometimes violently when they conflict with changed historical situations and charged circumstances. We know, of course, that every boundary is permeable, that no identity is immune—this is the principle of continual change in another form. From this comes the question: is antitypy real? Or is it not just a tool for our practical understanding? However desperately propositional logic needs antitypical identity principles, the actual world is relational in so far as it is in the purchase of human understanding. The reason for this, from the Personalist perspective, is that all the Persons to whom anything is intelligible are themselves deeply constituted by interpersonal and social relations. That we cognize something already puts ourselves and it into relation to one another. Logic is less real than history and the Persons who make it.

We today inherit an important trend away from thinking of Persons and their identities as substances and as static and toward understanding them as active and relating and thereby diachronic. This proto-processual type of personhood is the great insight of the "Boston" Personalism founded by Borden Parker Bowne (1847–1910), still a canonical system set apart from a variety of continental versions and the Thomistic form; it developed in connection with American Pragmatism,

[7]For one account of how social identities can polarize people, see Rodrigo Cordero and Raimundo Frei, "Demarcating Rights in Divided Social Worlds: an introduction to the moral Economy of constitutional struggles," *Journal of Language and Politics*, vol. 23, no. 5 (2024): 633–652, https://doi.org/10.1075/jlp.24096.cor.

[8]See André Laks and Glen Most, et al., eds., *Early Greek Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016), vol. 7, pt. 2, p. 139 (*Later Ionian and Athenian Thinkers*), chapter 22 (Atomists).

initiated by William James and developed by John Dewey.[9] Bowne's great contribution was his development of a conception of Personhood as active relational intelligence.[10] His work, fraught by some fault lines, was not altogether successful. But it was ahead of its time. The philosophical anthropologists of the early twentieth century thematically develop it. Thus, Helmut Plessner argues that our capacity to stand far enough outside of ourselves to understand other forms of life is an essential human quality.[11] In ethics we have broad concepts of the human as marked by responsiveness to others, especially in religious thinkers such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, John Crosby, Abraham Heschel, Knud Løgstrup, Max Scheler, and Karol Wojtyła (John Paul II). Bonhoeffer and Scheler emphasize our collective Personhood, which necessarily cannot be impersonal but must exist in ethical responsibility.[12] Heschel says that the human Person "relates to the existence that he is, to the existence of his fellow men, to that which is given in his immediate surroundings, to that which is but is not immediately given."[13] Jeff Malpas summarizes this trend when he says, following Heidegger, that

> ...the question of finitude is not a question that concerns the human as solitary, but rather directs attention to the human as situational and as relational.... the question of finitude or situation itself underlies the question of the human from the very beginning.[14]

We find this as well in the Marxist tradition. As Étienne Balibar puts it, for Marx the essence of the human is not any traditional essence but our transformability in the matrix of the relations that comprise and determine our lives, an indeterminacy by which we can exceed any present circumstances, which

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[9]Bowne's principal works are *Metaphysics: a study in first principles* (New York: Harper, 1882) and *Personalism* (Houghton Mifflin, 1908). *Personalism Revisited: its proponents and critics*, edited by Thomas Buford and Harold Oliver (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002) is a stimulating collection of papers largely on Boston personalism.

[10]See his *Metaphysics: a study in first principles,* 16–24 (American Book Co., 1910).

[11]This is one of the principle theses of Plessner's *Levels of Organic Life and the Human: an introduction to philosophical anthropology*, translated by Millay Hyatt (Fordham University Press, 2019).

[12]Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church,* translated by Reinhard Krauss and Nancy Lukens, 45–48 (Fortress Press, 1998).

[13]Abraham Heschel, *Who is Man?*, 16 (Stanford University Press, 1985).

[14]Jeff Malpas, "In the Vicinity of the Human," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, vol. 25, no. 3 (2017): 430 (423–436).

Balibar calls "transindividuality."[15] Relationality founds Confucian and other non-Western theories of personalism and is prominent in current development of global comparative philosophy.[16] Philosophical Personalism takes this up as a key not only to the identities we use for ourselves but a key also to understanding the world. Erazim Kohák puts it beautifully: ""To speak of the world as 'personal' means to conceive of it as structured in terms of relations best understood on the model of meaningful relations among persons."[17] Life everywhere relentlessly negates logic.

The kinds of personal and collective identities we consider through the framework of our understanding the past by research and reflection are, then, nodes informing relationships but also must have some sort of monadic integrity if they are to be fully conceivable by us. This kind of internal core should be understood through the ideas any Person forms of the relationships important to her perspective, tasks, goals, and feelings.

When we put one thing in relation to other things, the concept of the relationship we thus form is an idea that we create out of the facts and feelings we have. This is not to say that it has no "real" consequences. In fact, it is to say the opposite: its actuality is the consequences it helps to motivate in, with, and among the Persons (that is, moral agents) who create it in response to circumstances they aim to understand, improve, change, or escape. By ideating relations, Persons develop intentions and skills to change their behaviors or their situations. Ideas themselves are relations that persons use to communicate, from which productions and actions flow. Ideas are entangled in all human action and behavior. This consideration places the study of them wholly into the context of

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[15]Étienne Balibar, "Philosophies of the Transindividual: Spinoza, Marx, Freud," translated by Mark G. E. Kelly, *Australasian Philosophical Review*, vol. 2, no. 1 (2018): 12–14 (5–25), doi: 10.1080/24740500.2018.1514958.

[16]See *Relationality across East and West*, edited by Jun-Hyeok Kwak & Ken Cheng (Routledge, 2024); Roger Ames, *Human Becomings: Theorizing Persons for Confucian Role Ethics* (State University of New York Press, 2020); and Thaddeus Metz, *A Relational Moral Theory: African Ethics in and beyond the Continent* (Oxford University Press, 2020). Paul Ricoeur, a personalist in part, socialized personalist ideas through the hermeneutics of narrative and history across his works; among neo-Thomists Crosby emphasizes the collective in *The Selfhood of the Human Person* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1996) more than Wojtyła does in *The Acting Person* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1979).

[17]Erazim Kohák, *The Embers and the Stars: a philosophical inquiry into the moral sense of nature*, 209 (University of Chicago Press, 1987).

Personhood and its moral situation. If we view ideas as relations that come from the effects of other ideas and cause changes in the human situation, we will then approach understanding ideas in their true actuality (or "reality"). Are there non-ideal (in the ontological sense of the word) or mind-independent experiences of real mind-independent relations? If by mind-independent one means that ideas exist in no context of any subjectivity, there are not and cannot be. If by non-ideal one means expressions that are not conceptual, then there certainly are relations—for example, sensory relations such as communication by touch. But as a relation, such communication is ideal. It occurs as ideas in our minds, souls, and bodies, and in our actions.

By looking at identities historically, in terms of the events or behaviors that people enact so as to connect certain others with themselves or with certain others, we see that they are relations both in their synchronous internal structure and in their outward or public historical genesis and diachronesis. They exhibit interdependence in their external relations. If then identities, both the loose ones and the harshly rebarbative ones, are relations among Persons, identities are ideas, if one accepts this line of reasoning. And they are temporal things because we form them along the lines their consequences in the course of events suggest to our minds. Though ideas are mental, they have para-causal force through labor, that is, the actual work in time that people, acting on their views of relationships relevant to a task at hand, do in order to exercise their efficient agency toward ends they intend in an infinite variety of degrees of awareness.[18]

Diachronesis and history here are not simple duration along time's arrow. In philosophy taking identity—as enduing or perduring or as discontinuous and fractured—is to think solely and merely of self-identity. As Whitehead, Merleau-Ponty, and others have observed, even in strictly bodily terms the identity we associate with selfhood requires memory and history because it cannot be built solely on succession. In the historical and Personal actual world, self-identity is useful or valid solely as a metaphor or a loose term for those occasions on which we can point to certain stabilities in a thing even though it has greatly changed

[18]A good example is the power of ideas of nationalism, as detailed by Daniel Woolf, "Of Nations, Nationalism, and National Identity: reflections on the historiographic organization of the past," in *The Many Faces of Clio: cross-cultural approaches to historiography. Essays in honor of Georg G. Iggers*, edited by Q. Edward Wang and Franz Leander Fillafer, 71–103 (Berghahn, 2006).

over time or even because of its endurance. In my view, further analytic metaphysics about self-identity is a quite fruitless way to spend one's time.[19] Human identities develop through the conjuncture of many temporalities, through memory and context, that move in all sorts of directions due to the contingencies of life; these also include the feelings and ideas that what did not happen provokes. Thus, a dinner plate is self-identical to the volumes of time and space its materials occupy. But its identity or identities relates it to other human things for any personal agent or subject cognizing that dinner plate in the context of her life events. It is both some kind of core stuff but also must comprise external relations.

An identity, then, is something like a specious present: a colligation fundamental to human affairs. ("Specious" here does not denote anything suspect; instead, it is William James' idea of the specious present, the short clumps of time that are not literally all in the present instant but by which we shape the form, or species, of the present in which we live or perform acts.[20]) Persons use it to form their awareness of themselves and of the world from their point of view. It is impossible to form a personal perspective without identity through ideas as relations, but perspectival identity is in fact only temporarily rebarbative. Such specious continguities as ideas are necessary in all human activity, though they can lead to pareidolia or paranoia. Individual and social identities have their proper actuality through such the production of such colligatory ideas from the use of causality, succession, association, metaphor, metonym, synecdoche, necessities for survival, deep drives, and other lines of thought and feeling that the contexts of our thoughts and actions generate. Correct understanding of them in historiographic study or by the method of any human science avoids reduction to self-identity and instead considers contingency and unpredictability, counterfactuals engendered by past and present hopes and fears, and reflexivity and context. Adjacency in one specious present moment of time is but a part of

[19]Claude Romano reads Heidegger as "suggesting, although he does not say it explicitly, that the identity that *does matter* and toward which we bear a responsibility is not numerical identity, but a completely different form of identity (he does not say which one) concerning Dasein...." in his 2020 Gadamer chair lecture, "From Event to Selfhood: an intellectual journey," at https://www.academia.edu/41990694/From_Event_to_Selfhood_an_Intellectual_Journey_1

[20]First proposed by James in "The Perception of Time," *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, vol. 20, no. 4 (1886): 374–407; but developed in *The Principles of Psychology*, 609–610 (New York: Holt, 1890).

the actuality of anything. Its actuality comes from the virtually infinitely complex activities of Persons. "Core" identity is just a part of Personhood.

Let us pause to look at where we are in this discussion. Human interdependence is a basic historical condition and category. It is so much a fundamental and universal relationship that we might as well consider contingency itself to be interdependence. One event or thing depending on others for the course of its existence from coming-to-be to passing-away means that it is contingent on the other forces or objects. Contingent events are context and cause of interdependence. The course of existence of each person contingently depends on the actions by and events affecting the rest of humankind and our Earth.

As to the identities in question within the scope of the human sciences, we now can see that they are small-scale interdependencies. They arise from the contingent circumstance and the intentional acts of persons that form the context of human historical movement. In so far as these identities are ideas, they comprise not only internal relations that give them a particular sort of solidity but also external relations within the vast interdependence on which our survival depends. Ideas as relations are as real as anything physical, or actual (as I like to put it) and are empirically observable in human productions and behaviors. Such identities that the human sciences explore are ideas that contingently relate those participating in the identity to one another and that also relate formed identities to one another. This way of looking at the matter now puts us into position to consider the relationship between interdependence and identity. This relationship does not seem to me to be adequately described by the concept of dialectic. A better figure is chiasmus: an identity as narrowed interdependence and the interdependence of things as unconstrained identities trace a chiastic figure. As one swells, the other lowers; and as the latter loses constraints, the former gains them. Maximum and minimum change places in inverse proportion. One can describe this relationship from the perspective of either element of the course of events.

Agents do oscillate between identity and interdependence as between poles, but they also oscillate between dialectical recognition and hard alterity. Ideated identities do not affect the world like an arrow shot from human consciousness that hits a targeted problem and then fixes it, or seems to fix it. They provoke and animate the personal agents who create them. They express changes in

consciousness and they have the para-causal power to help make changes in consciousness. As they do so, consciousness accretes into a more complex and more self-reflective awareness. I am speaking here of those consciousnesses with moral agency, i.e., those that are personal. Such agents use the beliefs, reasons, desires, and motives that are features of our moral lives. Moral agency in the interplay of interdependence and ideas is a real part of our existence and part of what makes human thought and action inherently evaluative and is intrinsically existential—and of what might extend some non-material consciousness to all existents. But to make sense of the moral force of ideated identities, we need something that drives agents to action or at least to changes of mind. This extra and pervasive something is the urgency with which events we come to know strike the faculty, usually called conscience, that orients us to the suffering and well-being of others and generates the mysterious pressure of moral obligation.

The urgencies of moral obligation, I argue, are the key to the relationship between interdependence and identity. I shall offer a suggestion as to how urgency impels interdependence and identity into one another. It arises from Whitehead's great intuition of the sentience in all things and the vision arising therefrom of continuous feeling that self-interprets, self-determines, and self-creates all the discontinuous novelty constituting the universe.

Although we place identities of individuals and collectives opposite the maximal interdependence of all things, they occur as concrete and historical matters across time—not opposites but instead not different from one another except notionally or pragmatically according to the diachronesis of circumstances, because identities are localized interdependencies. Identities are construed out of interdependence into ideas of identity focused on ends that sometimes are good and sometimes are bad. Even the most rebarbative and hardened identities in time will all require interdependence by encountering the limits of their defenses. We can say this, I suppose, of other kinds of assemblages of other sorts of things. A statement or instance of identity is a synchronic idea for the purposes of analysis or persuasion. But the actuality to which they refer is diachronic and, as such, is unlimited in its reach as a practical matter, though embedded in finitude. We can separate interdependence and identity merely as concepts. In this view, interdependence is the more capacious and inclusive notion because it is both historical and also comprehensive in generality. From it come

the circumstances and drives we face and yet also the cosmic point of view.

Interdependence in this ontologically sweeping sense can point us toward system theories in order to understand its historical activity. Persuasive modern concepts for autopoietic systems were first presented by Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela in the 1970s and 1980s.[21] Some of the roots of their holism are in the process philosophy of Bergson and Whitehead, with its tendencies toward Neoplatonism and panpsychism—though Whitehead himself specifically abjured panpsychism. This established a modern Heraclitean view of the universe, in which any identity must have a close relation to the interdependence of all things if it is not to be frozen and insentient assemblage of mechanical parts. One way in which this was partially developed was through the vision of groundlessness in postmodernist cultural theory.[22] Quantum theory also pointed in a similar direction; the work of Karen Barad in connecting quantum physics to deconstruction in a way that permits a kind of holism has made a deep impression.[23] Some theorists, such as Isabelle Stengers, seek to fuse social constructivism with process thought.[24]

One processual recent approach, by the Lithuanian philosopher Audrone Žukauskaite, conceives of sentient life in a suggestive way. In her view, human interactions (and that of all living systems) with the environment are all cognitive.[25] She says, "Organisms not only manipulate and change their environments, but also change themselves in recursive operations. In other words, they are closed and bounded individuals at an organisational level and open at an environmental level." This "openness from closure" marks the "holobiont," "the host organism plus its symbionts." Thereby we (and other organisms) invent our means of survival and well-being: by moving from identity to interdependence and by mixing the two in right measure.

But is this our morality? Do we see moral urgency in it? Symbiogenesis leads

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[21]Umberto Maturana and Francisci Varela, *Autopoiesis and Cognition: the realization of the living* (Reidel, 1980).
[22]Q.v. Derek Attridge, Geoffrey Bennington, and Robert Young, eds., *Post-Structuralism and the Question of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).
[23]Notably her *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).
[24]See her "A Constructivist Reading of *Process and Reality*" in *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 25, no. 4 (2008): 91–110.
[25]Audrone Žukauskaite, *Organism-oriented Ontology* (Edinburgh University Press, 2023).

to increasingly complex bioforms, but is this the hermeneutic governing the development of our epistemic base or of our understanding of ourselves? The great advantage of systems theories of this sort is that they work at undermining the separation of the human from that concept of the natural which is mechanistic and reductive. Prior to early modernity in the West, and for aeons before and since in other civilizations, nature included not only human beings but the human. Our ideas and feelings were, in that view, a constitutive part of nature rather than an epiphenomenon. But all such notions of interdependence are human colligations construed or abstracted or selected out of the actuality of personhood. "Openness" here is much like the humankind's "excedence" of itself noted by Plessner, Levinas, and Derrida, as mentioned above. It is or results in our "transformability." But calling it openness as an epistemic observation does not tell us anything about why this openness is not free-floating but becomes an accretive capability for moral growth in ways that exceed the individual's need for survival. This failure both overlooks something the distinctively human way in which practical knowledge is raveled into self-understanding.

Other types of systems come closer to understanding the way that interdependence presses upon us in its most humanly salient forms—for example, communications, in language or by technology or through other means and media as a hermeneutic system. Another type of systems thinking is panpsychism, in its various forms. Its fundamental idea is that consciousness is not a stranger, an oddity, or a hollow neurological event in the universe but constitutively pervades all its parts. I think both of these approaches come closer to the mark and can serve to underlie autopoietic systems or objects because they both take consciousness seriously into account. But as accounts of interdependence, these two are abstracted out of the full lived actuality of persons both human and other-than-human in their moral lives—inevitably and ineluctably fabricated from our human perspective and, contrary to the myth of objectivity, situated in our lives and fates.

A panpsyche might account for an interdependent biosphere or even a universe to a degree that autopoiesis or systems holism does not reach. For panpsychism we must extend ourselves, it seem to me, outside Occidental thinking. Our understanding of pre-conceptual cosmic and universal

interdependence has been increasing.[26] While "new materialism" and speculative realisms pursue dead-ends of ontology, scientists are looking across the borders of their discourse toward a something that is both ancient and modern, real and ideal.[27] But no book so far brings the imperative of our survival as a moral force closer to post-materialist science, with strong theoretical and evidentiary bases, than does Robert MacFarlane's brilliant and moving *Is a River Alive*?[28]

A central problem bedeviling the philosophy of panpsychism is whether the "parts" of the universe combine to form the cosmic panpsyche or whether the cosmic panpsyche differentiates itself into all the subsidiary consciousnesses of the universe. This is called the composition problem.[29] On one level this is a false problem. Because the Whiteheadean process philosophy, which opens to us the actual possibility of panpsychism, robustly overcomes the One/Many conundrum, the composition problem merely backtracks into the same dead end that Bergson, James, Whitehead, and others got us out of. But there is a deeper concern that we can see in light of the direction of my remarks. The two disputants in this problem proceed as if analyzing a mechanism, which we must understand as a functioning assembly of connected parts. Even setting aside the composition problem, the panpsychic theory of cosmic consciousness does not seem able to explain the way consciousness consciousness integrates everything there is.

The chiastic movement between identities as constrained interdependence and interdependence as unrestrained identity expresses the activity of consciousnesses and of consciousness—that is, of life, which panpsychism attributes to all existents in a way that includes and surpasses the notion of life. Vitality, taken for as broad a concept as we can push ourselves up to in conceiving

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[26]A good example is Davi Kopenawa and Bruce Albert, *Falling Sky: words of a Yanomami shaman* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013).

[27]Cf. David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: perception and language in a more-than-human world* (Westminster: Knopf Doubleday, 2012); and Eduardo Kohn, *How Forests Think: toward an anthropology beyond the human* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).

[28]New York: Norton, 2025.

[29]Two central papers in the composition problem discussion are Miri Albahari, "Beyond Cosmopsychism and the Great I Am: how the world might be grounded in universal 'Advaitic' consciousness" in *The Routledge Handbook of Panpsychism*, edited by William Seager, 119–130 (New York: Routledge, 2020); and Itay Shani and Joachim Keppler, "Beyond Combination: How Cosmic Consciousness Grounds Ordinary Experience" in *Journal of the American Philosophical Association*, vol. 4, no. 3 (2018): 390–410.

panpsychism, cannot fail to include the energies of continuation, reformation, and survival; and this, in the case of moral agency for as we decide we must legitimately extend this class, becomes what we know as the moral force of urgency. This consideration presents a far more interesting question than that of composition: is the panpsyche, if it exists, personal? Or perspectival? Or evaluative? Or morally laden? Is it good? Is it the Good?

What matters for us in any of these theories or accounts is what these facts or proposed facts do for us: what difference they make in our lives and, at the business end of the whole matter, what obligations for right action they ground or in some way support or even just suggest to which we will consider ourselves bound. And this in turn is only and never more than the determinations of our choosing when we face the exigencies and desires in our lives. If we are to be part of nature in an understanding that includes nature as part of us, of who we human Persons are, the needs and aims of our lives cannot be discarded as actualities or even if one wants to pursue ontology, deflated as realities.

Thus, our individual, tribal, political, and chosen identities are off-shoots of something vastly larger, which I call interdependence, in that we as historical beings find and face the consequences of our actions. Because history arises out of interdependence, because our history is that of interdependence, the identities we strive for, in their weaknesses and in their strengths, both partake of interdependence and rub against it. Many moral dilemmas may be understood in this way, especially those in which we struggle to reconcile partial and local projects with impartial and universal moral demands. Indeed, the pull of morality even in the tiniest loyalties arises from interdependence. Our moral claims on each other come into force in the history of events, of our actions, and of how we think about their consequences with increasing or decreasing urgency. For us, interdependence is personal, whether or not we can ever understand the cosmic consciousness to be personal or can credit a personal God; and anything that is for us must be evaluative and must serve our need for moral prescription. Interdependence itself, as vast as it is, matters because of our social Personhood and the identities it insistently inhabits. And as a universal circumstance of needs common to us all, interdependence as we use it to make sense of the world leads to understandings that exert pressure on our moral dilemmas by way of our conceptions of it.

While I think that a form of panpsychism can meet the various ontological requirements that interdependence as a moral force needs, for present purposes I will focus solely on how consciousness at a cosmic level might illuminate the moving relationship between interdependence as a single universal actuality and identities as multiple local actualities. We have seen that systems-thinking, though farther-reaching than dialectic, fails to integrate human moral agency and therefore human existence into the overarching entity that is supposed to include it because if that entity is impersonal and amoral it will not include the urgency by which moral agents select actions and attitudes that shape their identities from the infinite field of relations that is cosmic interdependence. We have noted as well that communications of any sort among Persons is richer and provides for the accretive manner in which moral agents augment their understanding. And we have also laid down the principle that the movement between interdependence and identity is diachronic in a chiastic pattern. Taken together, the impulsion of this movement must therefore accrue or diminish awareness of the urgency to which moral agents respond by communicating over temporalities ranging from the rapid to the transgenerational.

Persons, as moral agents, might always have some unconscious understanding of the cosmic system or panpsychic entity of which they are a part, regardless of its realistic ontological status, through perceptions of urgency, that is, the consequentuality of any choice and every action. This understanding is part of their belonging to the universal consciousness. But at the most "pan" level, as cosmic or universal, such understanding is static. It is just belonging. It is in history that it becomes narrowed and sharpened into urgencies (or forgotten) around which we stake our lives, thereby forming individual and collective identities as responses to and as part of the consequences of actions we choose. Under this framework, identities are dynamic and interdependence is static. Now, this would mean that identities in their essence are maximally dynamic, whereas we ordinarily think of maximally instituted identities as rigid or resistant to change. It would likewise mean that maximally comprehensive interdependence is fully static and unchanging. But as the relationship between interdependence and identity is itself diachronic, the conventional understanding must be revised, as I indicated above at several points. Even the most unyielding identities must change because in actuality they are part of a vastly changeful system; and that system,

interdependence (which can be understood panpsychically) is also part of a changeful system. Eternal identities, if they exist, must stand obliquely both partly in and partly out of the panpsyche. Setting this aside, our conception of universal interdependence must include the effects of entities on other entities, which are consequences unfolding over time. Moral agents, whether human Persons or other-than-human Persons, have the remarkable capacity of self-transformation according to what they pick out, or are moved to pick out, from the infinite field in which they live. Thus, urgency, the grasping of moral consequences, is a criterion that relates to moral agents. Whether they grasp urgency under freedom or under unfreedom is not relevant.

The activity of persons in constraining interdependence into identity and in expanding identity into interdependence, doing so variously through the effects of communicated expression upon the thoughts and actions of others, is neither natural in the philosophical sense nor merely performative in the sense of having no ground. It is not an epiphenomenon of either physical processes, or of social determinations, or of whim or passion. It intersects these modes, but it also is something other than they and more than they. Universality here is not eliminativist. The entire picture, from local identities to universal interdependence, is dynamic. For interdependence itself has particulars but is no less universal because it is a network of relations that for moral agents are taken as consequences with moral valence. Persons, therefore, contribute to whatever consciousness we ascribe to interdependence because they actively bring matters to consciousness on account of the moral disposition that define their nature.

Within philosophical discussions, there is lively debate over the issue of whether the panpsyche is perspectival or aperspectival, personal or non-personal.[30] Here I maintain solely that we human Persons cannot conceive of our participation in it without the movement between our collective and individual, pubic and private, universal and local projects. William James said that our interaction with the world around is a matter of what he called "warmth." This functions rather like intentionality in phenomenology: it is meant to describe how

[30]A good view of the issue and well-argued position is in Swami Medhananda, "Can Consciousness Have Blind Spots? A renewed defense of Sri Aurobindo's opaque cosmopsychism," *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, vol. 31, no. 9–10 (2024)L 113–31.

and why some things are meaningful to us and feel close.[31] Warmth can be kindled into urgency. It is warmth, or something like it, that moves us closer in upon and further out from the interdependencies comprising life. It is a part of the mystery of existence and Being—just that part which we can see from down here.

The reader doubtless has noticed my disposition toward impartialist moral philosophy. And she also likely observed that I try to mate this with the particularity and contingency for which history stands as the expressive and representative idea. Furthermore, I have somehow managed to travel from philosophy of history to panpsychism, an unlikely feat lately arisen in my work and still as much a surprise to me as it is to others. Rejecting Kant's displacement of moral law to reason is part of the steamworks that enables this endeavor. Like Plato, Kant put moral needs at the heart of his work, as did Plato; both sought the form of the Good Itself in a way that was consonant with human finitude, though they worked with nearly opposite conceptions of finitude and of nature. Kant, however, initiated canonical philosophy of history that, taking full flight with Hegel, has chewed over the conflict of identities from which the diachronesis of history seems to arise. But history's movement is really that of Persons, who respond to external forces, so that it is within the consciousness of persons, amidst their many relationships, that the grounds of normativity are to be found. And our interdependent consciousness might be part of the existential actuality that forms reality.

I have tried to show some of the ways in which interdependence and identity can be synoptically theorized through philosophy of history for the purpose of making sense of moral universals in a contingent world. One of these ways is, as I have argued elsewhere, the intergenerational conversation of humankind that is history. Can it be that the hermeneutic event itself reflects the cosmic interdependence of consciousness?

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[31] See Richard Cobb-Stevens, *James and Husserl: the foundations of meaning* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1974), 75–76.