



FALLING IN LOVE OUTWARD: PANTHEISM AND SPIRITUAL WELL-BEING

Khai Wager

Faculty of Theology and Religion, Oxford University, UK

Correspondence email address: wager.khai@gmail.com

ABSTRACT: This paper presents a pantheistic account of spiritual well-being drawn from the life and works of poet Robinson Jeffers. The account is based on a general conceptualisation of the spiritual life according to which it has three components: a conception of ultimate reality, a conception of the human condition (including a view of the actual position human beings find themselves in and a vision of their ideal position congruent with the view of ultimate reality), and a guide to the practical structuring of a human life aimed at its transformation from its actual to its ideal position. Spiritual well-being, then, is conceived as the spiritual life that is going well for a person. A pantheistic account that includes each of the three components of the spiritual life is presented. Therefore, we arrive at a pantheistic account of spiritual well-being, and this undercuts common objections to pantheism.

KEYWORDS: Pantheism, spiritual well-being, the spiritual life, Robinson Jeffers, inhumanism, mystical experience, aesthetic experience, monism

Introduction

Pantheism is often criticised for presenting an inane view on the nature of ultimate reality and for its inability to practically guide the lives of those affirming it. In this paper, I present a pantheistic account of spiritual well-being as an avenue for responding to such objections. Moreover, the account I offer is grounded in the lived reality of pantheism rather than in mere intellectual plausibility. Its principal informant is the life and works of Robinson Jeffers, a self-described pantheist and inspirational figure within contemporary pantheism movements. The paper begins with critical scene-setting. I define pantheism and delineate two versions: realist and non-realist. Taking realist pantheism as my focus, I highlight two common objections: the objection from ontological redundancy and the objection from practical redundancy. After outlining a conceptualisation of the spiritual life and a related view

of spiritual well-being, I suggest that we see the concerns characterising the objections above as converging on whether pantheism can give an account of spiritual well-being. Drawing on the life and works of Robinson Jeffers, I demonstrate that a pantheistic account of spiritual well-being is possible and thereby undercut the objections from ontological and practical redundancy. Let us begin with some important preliminaries.

Pantheism

Given the tendency for pantheism to be misunderstood, it will help to dedicate some space to presenting its general stance and outlining a little of the logical space in which it sits. It is essential from the outset to make clear that pantheism is not a single codified view (and much less a single religious tradition) despite it sometimes being treated as such. Instead, it is an umbrella term covering a variety of views that share the common assertion that everything is God and God is everything. The “everything” here can be understood in many ways, but at the root, it is an affirmation that all things constitutive of ultimate reality are, in some sense, unified. Thus, in pantheism, there is a perfect match between the “everything” (or, more precisely, whatever the sense is in which ultimate reality is taken to be unified) and God or divinity, with neither one outstripping the other. As such, we can describe God’s relation to ultimate reality as perfectly immanent and utterly non-transcendent. (Note that I use the term “ultimate reality” to indicate that pantheists are typically concerned with reality in its fundamental form rather than its derivative form.) We can thus present a general definition of pantheism as follows:

Pantheism: All ultimate reality is God, and God is nothing more than all ultimate reality.

From here, one helpful way to sub-divide pantheistic views is according to their stance on the material universe. Note that by “material universe” I do not intend to imply materialism or physicalism about the universe; rather, I use this phrasing as a convenient way to refer to the world we are acquainted with in our ordinary experience, whether or not that is consistent with materialism or physicalism. With that clarification in place, we can separate those versions of pantheism that take a realist view of the material universe from those that take a non-realist view. Realist views hold that the material universe constitutes reality at its most fundamental (in some sense). In contrast, non-realist views reject the idea that the material universe (in whatever sense) constitutes fundamental reality. Let us outline these two categories of views, taking the realist sub-category first:

Realist pantheism: God is identical to the material universe as a whole.

Views of the realist kind hold that God is identical to the material universe as a whole. We can put the general realist stance like this: There is nothing of God beyond the universe and nothing of the universe beyond God. This differentiates pantheism from

other views in the neighbourhood. For example, one might hold that God is a part, but not the whole, of the universe, i.e. the view that the universe outstrips God. Alternatively, one might hold that the universe is part, but not the whole, of God, i.e. the view that God outstrips the universe. Neither of these would be pantheistic on this construal. The latter would be a panentheistic view, while the former would be an inverse panentheistic view, according to which God is in the world rather than the world being in God. On the pantheistic view, neither God nor the universe outstrips the other.

The other important aspect of the realist definition is that God is identical to the universe *as a whole*. This stipulation is included to indicate that “everything” does not simply refer to the mere collection of universe-parts. Rather, all universe-parts are in some sense unified. Versions of realist pantheism differ regarding the sense in which the universe is considered a whole, that is, the sense in which its parts are taken to be unified. The universe might be said to hold together as a whole in many ways. For example, it might be claimed that the universe is unified in virtue of each of its parts being formed of the same substance (substance monism), in virtue of its parts having some shared origin (original monism), in virtue of the material universe literally comprising one concrete entity (existence monism), in virtue of the universe as a whole being the one fundamental entity on which all its parts depend (priority monism), or because the universe instantiates some particular property in each of its parts (for instance, a pantheist could contend that the universe ubiquitously instantiates some fundamental “divinity” property). The point here is that there is space for many views within the realist category of pantheism.

In Western contexts, pantheism is often portrayed as restricted to realist versions and, perhaps unsurprisingly, most contemporary Western pantheists fall within this category. However, there are many non-realist versions of pantheism, which do not take the material universe to be constitutive of ultimate reality, but which nonetheless remain versions of pantheism as they consider God to be identical to ultimate reality (or at least consider God to be identical to a wholeness exhibited by ultimate reality). Such views are non-realist views, which can be defined as follows:

Non-realist pantheism: God is identical to ultimate reality, but ultimate reality is not the material universe.

Views of the non-realist kind hold that God is identical to ultimate reality but that ultimate reality is not construed as the material universe. On these views, the material universe either does not *really* exist – i.e., it is considered an illusion – or it does exist but in some form derivative of a more fundamental reality, and where that more fundamental reality is what is taken to be identical to God. We can see examples of both views drawn from the idealist Advaita Vedānta tradition within Hinduism. Vedānta is a school of Hindu philosophy concerned with providing interpretations of the latter Vedas, most notably the Upaniṣads and some other late texts like the Brahma Sūtras and Bhagavad Gita. Advaita Vedānta refers to those interpretations that take a non-dual view of the texts. On such views, reality is construed as a form of monistic idealism. In Advaita Vedānta, Brahman (for present purposes, the equivalent of God)

is considered the ultimate reality and posited as a non-personal, non-dual, pure consciousness. Interpretations of Advaita Vedānta differ with respect to how they interpret the relationship between Brahman and the material universe.

Let us first consider Śaṅkara¹, perhaps the best-known proponent of Advaita Vedānta. According to arguably the most common interpretation of his work, he considers ultimate reality to be Brahman (pure non-dual consciousness) and maintains that there is no reality beyond Brahman. On this interpretation, the material universe is an illusion. The universe is a projection of the human subject of experience, which is itself an illusory manifestation of Brahman. On this view, the illusory nature of the universe is analogous to the illusory nature of dreams. In dreams, our experience is populated with seemingly real concrete objects which do not really concretely exist. Similarly, for Śaṅkara, in waking life, our experience is populated with seemingly real concrete objects which do not really concretely exist. There is, of course, much more to this interpretation. However, the important thing for present purposes is that Śaṅkara's view can be seen as a version of non-realist pantheism because ultimate reality (Brahman) is a unified whole in virtue of being one, yet Brahman is not identical to the material universe, so this does not amount to a version of realist pantheism.

Alternatively, Radhakrishnan (1923) presents a slightly different interpretation of the Advaita Vedānta tradition (this is perhaps best described as an alternative interpretation of Śaṅkara). His differs from the common interpretation of Śaṅkara outlined above insofar as, for him, the material world is not an illusion but rather possesses a lower degree of reality than Brahman. For him, the material universe is grounded in and maintained by Brahman but does not have an existence independent of it. We can say that Brahman is ontologically fundamental and that the material universe is derivative of, therefore dependent on, Brahman.

Note that for both Śaṅkara (or the common interpretation provided here) and Radhakrishnan, Brahman transcends the material world. In Śaṅkara's case, because it is illusory, and in Radhakrishnan's case, because it is only derivatively real. If we were to understand pantheism exclusively according to the realist definition above, then Śaṅkara and Radhakrishnan's interpretations of Advaita Vedānta would be considered versions of panentheism, not pantheism. However, if we take pantheism to be the more general view that God is all of ultimate reality, then they are clearly versions of pantheism. This is important because, confusingly, in existing literature, one will frequently find these views presented as paradigmatic cases of both pantheism *and* panentheism. What I have just said might explain the root of the confusion.

At this point, the reader may understandably wonder why I have gone to such lengths to demarcate realist and non-realist versions of pantheism. To illustrate why it is necessary to begin the paper with these lengthy clarifications, I draw attention to the following passage from H.P. Owen, in which he highlights an apparent contradiction in pantheism: "Yet if God to any extent transcends the world – if there is any element in his being that is not contained in the world – pantheism, in the strict sense, is false. And that God to some extent transcends the world is implied by most pantheists"

¹ See Swami Gambhirananda (1989) for Śaṅkara's commentaries on the Upaniṣads. There is some debate about when Śaṅkara lived, but it was between 700 CE and 820 CE.

(1971, p. 70). The contradiction that Owen is picking out here is that pantheism is – purportedly – by definition, the view that God is utterly non-transcendent of the world. However, most pantheists – again, purportedly – maintain that God transcends the world in some way. Therefore, he concludes that pantheism is a contradictory position. This is a prime example of an apparent inconsistency resulting from a lack of clarity in our definitions. We can see how the contradiction dissolves when we consider the definitions I have offered in this section. Take the first item of the contradictory set – that God does not transcend the world – while realist pantheists hold this, it is rejected by non-realists. Now take the second item of the set – that God does transcend the world – this is endorsed by non-realists but not realists. We see here that neither the realist nor the non-realist pantheist affirms both items of the contradictory set, and therefore, neither is contradictory in the way stipulated. The apparent contradiction results from taking the realist definition of pantheism as the definition of pantheism *simpliciter* and then taking examples of non-realist pantheists as examples of pantheists *simpliciter*. Thus, Owen’s charge is, at best, uninformative. All it says is that non-realist pantheists do not endorse realist pantheism and *vice versa*, which is trivially and unproblematically true. Confusions surrounding the logical space of pantheism, such as the one just outlined, present unwarranted barriers to engagement with the view, so it is worth making things clear from the outset.

Now that we have a handle on these definitions, I set aside non-realist versions of pantheism and focus the remainder of the paper on realist pantheism. I do this not because realist pantheism is any more viable than its non-realist siblings, but because the more challenging objections stick better to realist versions, and as such, they make a promising focus. From herein, “pantheism” will refer to realist pantheism unless otherwise stated. We now turn our attention to two common objections to pantheism. These form the backdrop against which I will propose a general account of spiritual well-being and a consonant pantheistic view.

Two Objections to Pantheism

As mentioned at the outset of the paper, my principal aim is to draw from the work of Robinson Jeffers a pantheistic account of the spiritual life and an associated account of spiritual well-being. Before proceeding to this primary focus, it will first be helpful to cover two common interrelated objections to pantheism to which this more central aim can be seen as a response. I will call these *the objection from ontological redundancy* and *the objection from practical redundancy*. The first concerns pantheistic views on the way the world is in its most fundamental form, while the second concerns the scope for pantheism to make a practical difference to a person’s life.

The Objection from Ontological Redundancy

Simply put, the argument from ontological redundancy says that pantheism is meaningless because it is ontologically indistinct from atheism or naturalism. However, I will suggest that, at best, objections of this kind boil down to the charge that pantheism does not posit anything ontologically interesting. They make little sense if taken as straightforward objections on the basis that pantheism is indistinguishable from atheism or naturalism.

Arguably, the most common version of this objection asserts that pantheism is indistinguishable from atheism. Often quoted examples of this line of objection include H.P. Owen's claim that one of its five "fatal flaws" is that "pantheism is equivalent to atheism" (1971, pp. 61–62), Schopenhauer's complaint that "pantheism is only a euphemism for atheism" (1971a, p. 114), and, more recently, Dawkins's quip in his popular book *The God Delusion*, that "Pantheism is sexed-up atheism" (2006, p. 18). Plainly, the charge here is not that pantheism is *definitionally* equivalent to atheism. To illustrate why, we can take the most simple definitions of theism and atheism and see where pantheism sits in relation to them. According to a simple definition, a theist affirms the existence of at least one god, while an atheist does not affirm the existence of any gods whatsoever. That is, atheism is simply the negation of theism. We can further specify varieties of theism based on how many gods are affirmed. Monotheism is the view that there is exactly one God, while polytheism is the view that there are two or more gods. According to these face-value definitions, it is straightforwardly true that pantheism and atheism are distinguishable because pantheism is, by definition, a version of theism because pantheists affirm the existence of a god, i.e., the universe as a whole. More specifically, we can see that pantheism is a version of monotheism because pantheists affirm the existence of exactly one god. Thus, the claim that pantheism is definitionally indistinguishable from atheism has little traction.

More charitably, the charge of atheism could be underpinned by more restricted formulations of theism and atheism. The objectors may understand these terms to relate to a traditional theistic worldview exclusively. In this case, what is meant by theism is, rather more specifically, traditional theism. So, atheism, as the negation of theism, would be characterised by the absence of affirming the traditional theistic God. We can call this position *traditional atheism*. According to these characterisations, pantheism is indistinguishable from traditional atheism because it does not affirm the existence of the God of traditional theism. While this is true, it is entirely unsurprising because pantheism is not a version of traditional theism. It would be strange to object to pantheism on the grounds that it is atheistic purely in the sense that it does not affirm the existence of a traditional theistic God. After all, in that case, those pursuing this line of objection would be handed the unfavourable consequence of claiming that other worldviews generally accepted as theistic are, in fact, atheistic. For example, it would be strange to maintain that Shinto is atheistic because its worldview does not affirm a traditional theistic God.

In some instances, the objection to pantheism appears to be based on something like the above reasoning. For example, when Arthur Schopenhauer says pantheism is "a euphemism for atheism," he does so because, on his view, it is essential to any concept

of God that God transcends the material world. Since the pantheistic concept of God does not do this, by Schopenhauer's lights, it is identical to atheism. Neither view affirms the existence of a God, according to Schopenhauer, because neither affirms the existence of a world-transcending entity:

Moreover, pantheism is a concept that invalidates itself, since the concept of a God presupposes as its essential correlative a world different from him. If, on the other hand, the world itself is to take over his role, there remains simply an absolute world without God, and so pantheism is only a euphemism for atheism. (1971a, p. 114)

Schopenhauer's complaint, therefore, amounts to an objection to the view that God can be conceptualised as entirely immanent (i.e. non-transcendent). Therefore, we might consider his objection underpinned by restricted conceptions of theism and atheism, as above. He appears to understand theism exclusively in terms of traditional theism, and therefore, he characterises atheism as the rejection of traditional theism. From there, the reasoning continues: since pantheism rejects traditional theism, it is equal to atheism.

However, as I just mentioned, it would be strange to object to pantheism on the basis that it is indistinguishable from traditional atheism, so I suspect this does not get to the heart of Schopenhauer's concern. Indeed, elsewhere, he indicates that his main problem with pantheism is that it "says nothing" because it amounts to the claim that "the world is the world":

Against pantheism I have mainly the objection that it states nothing. To call the world God is not to explain it, but only to enrich the language with a superfluous synonym for the word world. It comes to the same thing whether we say 'the world is God' or 'the world is the world'. (1971b, p. 99)

This is interesting as it is a somewhat different line of objection than those explored so far. I believe it gets to the heart of the common complaint that pantheism is equivalent to atheism – it is not that it is definitionally equivalent to atheism; it is that the two are *ontologically* indistinct. Meaning they do not differ in their accounts of the fundamental nature of things. At heart, I take it that objections of this kind amount to the claim that pantheism is ontologically nothing over and above atheism.

An issue with objecting to pantheism on the basis that it is ontologically indistinct from atheism is that it relies on the objector elucidating an ontological account of atheism from which pantheism is deemed ontologically indistinct, and doing so relies on the objector having a precise handle on the pantheist's ontological take on things. The trouble is that neither atheism nor pantheism are codified ontological positions, so the objector has the thorny task of first presenting an ontological account common among all versions of atheism and, at the same time, justifying why pantheism cannot be construed in any way ontologically distinct from it. This is a tough ask. First, many accounts of unity in the universe are open to the pantheist. Second, it is unclear

whether a general ontological account of atheism can be given. It is beholden on the atheist to inform others of the account of theism that they reject.

Perhaps the emphasis on atheism is a red herring. Maybe the operative ontological distinction is between naturalism and supernaturalism. Conceivably, objections from ontological redundancy are at heart objections to pantheism on the basis that its ontological picture is naturalistic rather than supernaturalistic. The objection, understood this way, could be that pantheism is nothing over and above *naturalism*. Indeed, when Richard Dawkins (2006) characterises pantheism as nothing but atheism, he bases it on the view that the pantheistic concept of God does not involve God as a supernatural being. Therefore, the problem, for Dawkins, essentially concerns pantheism's purported rejection of supernaturalism. So, it would appear that, for Dawkins, supernaturalism is essential to theism. Following this reasoning, pantheism becomes indistinguishable from atheism in purportedly rejecting supernaturalism:

Pantheists don't believe in a supernatural God at all, but use the word God as a non-supernatural synonym for Nature, or for the Universe, or for the lawfulness that governs its workings [...] Pantheism is sexed-up atheism. (Dawkins, 2006, p. 18)

One difficulty with this possibility is that naturalism is a hard concept to pin down, and there are various views concerning its precise definition. For this paper, I will bracket that concern and employ a general definition of naturalism, which says that naturalism is the view that all of reality, including all entities, causes, and events in the world, is natural. In contrast, supernaturalism is the view that there is more to reality than natural entities, causes and events, etc. On supernaturalism, a complete description of reality would call on more than just what is natural. The idea here would be that atheism and pantheism are indistinguishable in the sense that they are both versions of naturalism (or both reject supernaturalism). This is not hugely helpful because it does not offer us a precise account of what it is for something to be 'natural.' One way to give a more precise account of naturalism is to equate it with physicalism, the view that all reality is constituted from, or supervenes on, physical phenomena (where physical phenomena are, very roughly, those entities studied and revealed by current physics). On this way of formulating naturalism, supernaturalism would cover any non-physicalist views. However, this is problematic. The proponents of many non-physicalist views nonetheless consider themselves naturalists.

Furthermore, hinging an objection to pantheism on the basis of the naturalism-supernaturalism distinction is problematic because both naturalist and supernaturalist interpretations of the unity in the universe are available to the pantheist. For example, a naturalist interpretation might identify the unity in natural laws, while a supernaturalist interpretation might posit a universal consciousness, perhaps even with agentive powers. Moreover, atheists can be found on both sides of the distinction. For example, it is possible to be an atheist without also being a naturalist. Rejecting the existence of God - or any gods - does not commit the atheist to the view that there is nothing more to reality than the natural world. For instance, many philosophers believe there is a genuine problem in locating consciousness, value, or a basis for

mathematical truths within a naturalistic framework. It does not appear contradictory for one to be both an atheist and a non-naturalist about consciousness, value, or the basis for mathematical truths.

Moreover, the charge cannot be that pantheism is problematic because it does not endorse a supernatural *being* or *beings* since there are many traditions wherein God or the divine is not deemed a supernatural being, but which the objectors would be unlikely to charge with atheism. For example, most interpretations of Advaita Vedānta do not propose Brahman as a being, but rather as being itself. Perhaps more strikingly, many Christians, especially in the contemplative tradition, do not view God as a being, but rather as being itself.

So far, I have given some initial notes of caution against the objection from ontological redundancy. Overall, it is unclear how to interpret objections of this kind. At their most basic, I suggest, objections of this kind boil down to the claim that pantheism does not posit anything ontologically interesting (rather than ontologically distinct). However, the charge of ontological redundancy precedes engagement with the ontological accounts proposed by pantheists, thereby precluding such engagement.

Pantheists will undoubtedly have varied reasons for holding that the universe as a whole exhibits unity, and they will have various reasons for equating the universe and God or the divine. Moreover, these reasons will likely impart some particular significance to the universe that is central to their account. The significance might be purely ontological (in which case its ontological distinctness might become more central). However, it may also be practical, i.e., the significance of the universe considered as a unified whole might, at least in part, consist of its practical implications for a pantheist's life. In this case, the relevance of pantheism cannot be judged purely according to its ontological stance; it must also consider its practical significance.

This brings us to the second common objection to pantheism, which directly targets the question of its practical significance.

The Objection from Practical Redundancy

We can now turn our attention to the second objection, which may be partly motivated by the first. I call this the objection from practical redundancy. The objection centres on the contention that holding a pantheistic worldview cannot make any practical difference to a person's life. That is, there is no sense in which a person's pantheistic view of ultimate reality – for example, their concept of God as identical to the universe – feeds into their life. Therefore, it is *practically* redundant.

Before I introduce a conception of the spiritual life, which I take to represent a plausible way to understand practical relevance, let us first explore some objections to pantheism from this angle of practical redundancy. I noted earlier that one of the “fatal flaws” of pantheism that H. P. Owen proposes is its lack of any distinctive meaning over and above atheism. Another of those flaws is its lack of “religious possibilities,” which we might equate with an objection on the grounds of pantheism's inability to make a practical difference in the lives of those who uphold it. He writes:

The religious possibilities of pantheism are strictly limited. Although it can permit reverence for, and even a quasi-mystical union with, Nature qua divine, it has no place for salvation, prayer, or any personal relationship between God and man. Stoic 'Providence' is another word for 'Fate'. Spinoza's 'intellectual love of God' is far removed from Platonic eros, and even farther from Christian agape; it is simply the mind's desire for self-identification with the determined order of things. (Owen, 1971, p. 73)

It seems that for Owen, prayer, a vision of salvation, and a personal relationship with God, are necessary conditions for accurately describing a worldview as having religious possibilities. This is a problematically narrow construal of religious possibility because it precludes traditions that clearly have religious possibilities from counting as such. For example, some Daoist and Buddhist traditions are bereft of religious possibilities on this construal. It is a strange criticism that pantheism should, but cannot, conform to these traditional monotheistic notions of what it means to live out one's spirituality. Consider Owen's apparent view that having a personal relationship with God is necessary for a worldview to have practical relevance. Having a personal relationship with God requires that God be a person, but according to most pantheists, God is not a person. What it is for pantheism to be practically relevant will depend on how the pantheist conceives of God (or ultimate reality, the universe, etc.). Here, we see the interrelatedness of this objection and the previous one in action. And the interrelatedness of a worldview's picture of ultimate reality and the precise form of practical relevance.

In *Fragments for the History of Philosophy*, Schopenhauer expresses concern with pantheism's ability, or lack thereof, to be action-guiding. He writes, "The pantheists cannot have any seriously meant morality, for with them everything is divine and excellent" (1971a, p. 132). The concern is that the pantheistic thesis that everything is God results in a general moral levelling, wherein all actions become equally divine. The implication is that one's view of the divine should constrain one's actions by underpinning our notions of right and wrong, but pantheism lacks the resources for this. We see this sentiment elaborated in his short essay *A Few Words on Pantheism*, where Schopenhauer describes pantheism as "the greatest perversity of the mind." He says:

[Pantheism] admits of only a physical, not a moral, significance of the world since, on the assumption of the latter, the world always presents itself as the means to a higher end. But this very notion that the world has merely a physical, and no moral, significance is the most deplorable error that has sprung from the greatest perversity of the mind. (Schopenhauer, 1971b, p. 102)

The criticism here rests on an assumption that is misplaced, or at least hasty, namely, that the world does not present as a means to a higher end for the pantheist. The charge is that pantheism affords the world only a "physical" significance – which presumably

refers to its claim, at least as anticipated by Schopenhauer, that the parts of the physical universe are unified in some physical way – and that that physical significance cannot ground any practical significance. However, it seems that the question of whether or not pantheistic worldviews can present the world as a means to some higher end can only be answered through a proper engagement with specific pantheistic accounts. Later sections of this paper will, I think, show Schopenhauer’s assumption to be misplaced.

Michael Levine highlights the frequent objection to pantheism on practical grounds, “In effect, they deny pantheism can be religiously useful – can function as a religion – because they claim that there is no feasible way to practise it” (1994, p. 342). He acknowledges that pantheism faces a critical challenge in setting out how it can be practised and, more specifically, how any account of practice can be linked to its ontological commitments. He says, “some account must be given of the relation between belief and practice – specifically, between religious beliefs and actions they engender” (Levine, 1994, p. 288). Again, we see the interplay between pantheism’s ontological commitments and its practical relevance. Levine’s focus is on determining which practices are appropriate for pantheists, given their ontological commitments. In short, he offers an indication as to the general form of pantheistically relevant practices, noting that traditional practices presuppose a personal God (as has been noted already) which is not generally applicable to pantheists. Therefore, practices will likely take a contemplative form to achieve some state rather than a devotional form aimed at developing a personal relationship with God.

As I have previously highlighted, pantheism is not a codified position but an umbrella term that refers to a wide range of views. As such, general accounts of pantheistic practice are of limited use and liable to appear overly vague. The core of the concerns detailed here is that pantheism is not such that it can be lived out and is, therefore, a practically redundant worldview. I have offered some initial reasons to be suspicious of these concerns. However, my aim in the rest of the paper is to present a specific account of pantheism that will undercut both the objection from ontological redundancy and the objection from practical redundancy.

The Spiritual Life and Spiritual Well-Being

I have suggested that a lack of engagement with specific accounts of pantheism underlies, at least to some extent, the objections we have just explored. My next suggestion is that a promising way to frame engagement with specific pantheistic worldviews is through their account of the spiritual life and a related account of spiritual well-being. Presenting an account of the spiritual life (on the conception of the spiritual life that I will outline in a moment) involves addressing precisely the concerns that underpin the objections. Moreover, it does justice to the sense that a worldview’s ontological and practical dimensions are interrelated. In the spiritual life, as I conceive it, these dimensions are intimately tied.

Let us now formulate a conception of the spiritual life. It should be such that it does not preclude pantheistic accounts by definition. However, it must also be consistent –

at least broadly – with traditional theistic accounts because if we are to make progress, we must agree that pantheistic and traditional theistic accounts of the spiritual life are equivalent *qua* accounts of the spiritual life. With this in mind, I draw inspiration from three recent conceptions of the spiritual life and spiritual well-being that, while intended as non-tradition-specific, the scholars structure more detailed Christian accounts around.

David McPherson offers an account of the spiritual life according to which it is,

[A] practical life-orientation that is shaped by what is taken to be a self-transcending source of meaning, which involves strong normative demands, including demands of the sacred or the reverence-worthy. (McPherson, 2017, p. 1)²

Similarly, Tyler VanderWeele (2020) presents a broad account of spiritual well-being, according to which spiritual well-being consists of a person's life being oriented toward whatever they take to be the ultimate context of the human person. Finally, Mark Wynn (2021) offers a minimal conception of spiritual well-being as “living successfully by reference to some conception of the human condition” (p. 306). Wynn’s conception is underpinned by a “spiritual ideal of life” which he defines as “a vision of what it is to live well relative to some conception of the human condition and perhaps, in turn, some conception of the fundamental nature of things” (Wynn, 2021, p. 306).

I intend the conception I outline below to be broadly consistent with the above, but it is especially indebted to Wynn’s account. In particular, I adopt his distinction between the spiritual life and spiritual well-being. I propose the following as a helpful way to conceive of the spiritual life:

The spiritual life: A life that is practically structured in accordance with some conception of the human condition (including its actual and ideal positions) and its reference to some conception of ultimate reality.

So construed, the spiritual life has three distinct components. First, it involves a view of ultimate reality. For many spiritual and religious traditions, this will have their concept of God at its centre, but ultimate reality need not be understood in reference to a God or gods in order to satisfy this component. Second, it articulates a view of the human condition grounded in, or otherwise related to, the view of ultimate reality. This second component is comprised of two elements: a view of the actual position human beings find themselves in and a vision of their ideal position congruent with ultimate reality so viewed. Third, it includes a guide to how – given the views of ultimate reality and the human condition – a human life can be structured to promote a transformation from its present position to its ideal position. Let us lay this out clearly:

² To be clear, McPherson is here defining “spirituality,” but I think we can take this equally as a definition of the spiritual life.

Component 1: A conception of ultimate reality

Component 2: A conception of the human condition consisting of a view of the actual position human beings find themselves in and a vision of the ideal position of human beings in congruence with ultimate reality, so conceived

Component 3: A guide to the practical structuring of a human life which promotes a transformation from its actual to its ideal position.

A side note is in order. According to the view I am presenting here, whether a person is properly considered to be living a spiritual life depends on their assent to its core components. They must assent to the conception of ultimate reality and the portrayal of the human condition as it relates to that conception of ultimate reality (I take it that assent here need not be underwritten by a conviction that the accounts of ultimate reality and the human condition are true, only a weaker sense that it seems to them likely that they are true). Moreover, they must have practically oriented their life in the relevant ways. With these stipulations in place, a person can be said to be living a spiritual life.

A further consequence of this conception is noteworthy. It is not part of the definition that I have given that the spiritual life must necessarily go well for the person. To account for this, I introduce the further concept of “spiritual well-being”:

Spiritual well-being: A spiritual life that is going well for a person.

The reason for distinguishing a “spiritual life” and “spiritual well-being” is to acknowledge that a person may assent to an account of the spiritual life without successfully living it. The distinction also acknowledges the possibility that there may be accounts of the spiritual life the implementation of which is impossible or only very remotely possible. Having this further stipulation of spiritual well-being rules out these possibilities. We can say then that a person’s instantiating spiritual well-being is a matter of their living a spiritual life that is going well, where living a spiritual life is a matter of that person affirming some conception of the human condition and some conception of the ultimate nature of things with which it is congruent, and structuring their life accordingly.

Notice that a pantheistic account of the spiritual life, so construed, will undermine both objections from ontological redundancy and objections from spiritual redundancy because it will have presented an account of ultimate reality which, although it may be independently interesting, will garner an extra measure of significance from its role in supporting the spiritual life. Additionally, it will have presented an account of the practical relevance of the view owing to its provisions for transforming the human person in accordance with ultimate reality.

A Pantheistic Account of Spiritual Well-Being

With this groundwork now in place, in the remainder of the paper I will endeavour to present a pantheistic account of spiritual well-being. Instead of offering an account that is merely intellectually plausible, I will base the account on the views of an actual pantheist. In so doing, I hope to make a small contribution to a movement in the philosophy of religion towards taking seriously the lived dimension of religious and spiritual lives, which, until recently, has been largely overlooked. In my case, this approach is grounded in the conviction that religion and spirituality are fundamentally lived endeavours, and as such, work in the philosophy of religion and spirituality should draw on, and connect up with, the lived realities of religious and spiritual lives. Furthermore, it is based on the sense that spiritual lives can be lived outside of religious traditions and that these are proper subjects for the philosophy of religion. In what follows, my concern will not be whether the conceptions of ultimate reality and the human condition comprising the account on offer are actually true or defensible, i.e., I will not be interrogating its metaphysics of the divine or conception of the human condition.³ Instead, I aim to show that there are accounts of spiritual well-being available to the pantheist and, indeed, that they are actually operative. In doing this, as I have mentioned, I thereby respond to the two objections sketched earlier.

Robinson Jeffers as Pantheist Exemplar

Robinson Jeffers will be my pantheist exemplar, and I draw on his work and life to formulate an account of the spiritual life. It will help to first introduce him and get a feel for his spiritual views. Robinson Jeffers was a twentieth-century American poet (1887–1962). While he is relatively unheard of today, he was considered among the greatest American poets at the height of his fame in the 1930s and 1940s, even featuring on the front cover of *Time* magazine in April 1932. In the mid-1940s, his popularity plummeted. This was partly due to his opposition to the USA's entry into the Second World War, which was considered unpatriotic. Additionally, many disliked the persistent themes in his poems, particularly his constant emphasis on the insignificance of humanity. Furthermore, his frequent use of murder, incest, and rape in his narrative poetry was deemed gratuitous and grotesque by many.⁴

Jeffers forwent the trendy poetic devices of his day. He wanted to be direct and write clearly about things of fundamental importance, when his modernist peers were using obscurity, ambiguity and irony. Moreover, he wanted his poems to say something true – he sought to avoid being caught up on transient issues of the day. These aspects make Jeffers an excellent source for this paper since his poetry, as well

³ For treatments of pantheistic metaphysics of the divine see Buckareff (2022); Buckareff and Nagasawa (2016).

⁴ The reason for their frequent use was that, for Jeffers, they were symbols for what he saw as humanity's core existential concern, as we shall see.

as his personal correspondence and other prose pieces, present a vivid and direct view of his understanding of things. He was also a self-described pantheist, as we shall see. Moreover, despite being relatively unheard of in general, he is somewhat of a figurehead to contemporary pantheist groups. For example, he is often referenced in discussions within the World Pantheist Movement. This contributes to the case that he is an ideal candidate to serve as our pantheist exemplar in this paper.

His books almost always follow the same structure: one epic narrative poem or verse drama accompanied by a series of short lyric poems, the lyrics reflecting the themes of the narratives. While in the narratives the target themes are explored through the characters, their interactions, and the settings, in the lyrics, they are explored directly in Jeffers's own prophetic voice. The persistent themes in his poetry became consolidated relatively early in his writing career, and it will be relevant to our purposes to detail the context of their emergence briefly. Even by his own judgment, Robinson Jeffers's first two books of poetry were a veritable failure. Shortly before the publication of the second, he and his wife Una moved to Carmel-by-the-Sea on the rugged Big Sur coast in central California. They initially lived in a rented log cabin before acquiring land on a low hill over Carmel Bay in 1919. They drew plans for a simple home based on an English Tudor barn, which would be named Tor House. It was to be constructed from granite boulders strewn across the shore at the foot of the land. In August of that year, Jeffers apprenticed himself to the stonemason contracted to build Tor House. Throughout the summer, as he worked with the stone, he underwent what Una described as an "awakening," which would be formative for both his poetry and philosophical views:

As he helped the masons shift and place the wind and wave-worn granite I think he realized some kinship with it and became aware of strengths in himself unknown before. Thus at the age of thirty-one there came to him a kind of awakening such as adolescents and religious converts are said to experience. (Una Jeffers, 2011, p. 518)⁵

Jeffers became acutely aware of his deep connection to the natural world during this awakening. Through his interactions with the stone and the landscape which bore them, his poetic themes were consolidated and remained consistent for the rest of his life. Following his awakening and the completion of Tor House, Jeffers structured his days around poetry and stonemasonry, writing in the morning and working with stone (and sometimes planting trees) in the afternoon. Most notably, he set about single-handedly building an elaborate 40ft stone tower. Hawk Tower, as it would be named, took him five years to build, and, like Tor House, was constructed from granite boulders he dragged up from the shore. Jeffers's third book, *Tamar and Other Poems*, was written in the wake of his awakening, during the construction of Hawk Tower. In 1924, he paid to print 500 copies of *Tamar*, which quickly sold out – unlike his earlier books. In 1925, he published *Tamar* with an additional lead poem as *Roan Stallion, Tamar and Other Poems*. It was this book that catapulted him to widespread

⁵ In a 1934 letter to Lawrence Clark Powell.

fame. There is an intricate connection between his awakening experience and the themes that went on to define him. These themes are central to this paper.

From *Tamar* onwards, Jeffers's works – which are a direct representation of his views – view the world's workings from a divine cosmic perspective, where the trials and tribulations of human lives are framed against a backdrop of the vastness of geological time, often juxtaposing the immense lifespan of the granite boulders from which Tor House and Hawk Tower were constructed, with the fleeting lifespans of human beings and indeed humanity itself. Furthermore, they present the lives of rocks, plants and animals, as attuned to ultimate reality, in contrast to the lives of human beings, which, to their detriment, are incongruent with the fundamental nature of things. The Big Sur coast is central to all of his poetry (as indeed it was to his life), being a constant inspiration and the setting of almost all of his narrative and dramatic poems. Furthermore, the landscape – with its natural features; the ocean, rocks, plants and animal life – can more often than not be seen as the main character in his poems, especially the lyrics. From the time of *Tamar* onwards, Jeffers's poetry, prose, personal correspondence, and life, present a remarkably clear and consistent view of the ultimate nature of things and how human beings should live accordingly. This is what makes Jeffers such a fruitful source for the task at hand here.

His prose and correspondence contain several concise explications of his views on spiritual matters. Most notably, he was asked directly about his “religious attitudes,” to which he replied:⁶

[T]hey are simple. I believe that the universe is one being, all its parts are different expressions of the same energy, and they are all in communication with each other, influencing each other, therefore parts of one organic whole. (This is physics, I believe, as well as religion.). The parts change and pass, or die, people and races and rocks and stars, none of them seems to me important in itself, but only the whole. This whole is in all its parts so beautiful, and is felt by me to be so intensely in earnest, that I am compelled to love it, and to think of it as divine. It seems to me that this whole alone is worthy of the deeper sort of love; and that here is peace, freedom, I might say a kind of salvation, in turning one's affection outward toward this one God, rather than inward on one's self, or on humanity, or on human imagination and abstractions – the world of spirits. (Jeffers, 2011, pp. 604–605)

In a transcript of a 1941 lecture on the themes in his poems, we again get a clear description of his pantheism. He says:

Another theme that has much engaged my verses is the expression of a religious feeling, that perhaps must be called pantheism, though I hate to type it with a name. It is the feeling [...] I will say the certainty [...] that the universe is one being, a single organism, one great life that includes all life and all things: and is so beautiful that it must be loved

⁶ In a 1934 letter to Sister Mary James Power.

and revered; and in moments of mystical vision we identify ourselves with it. (2000, pp. 411–412)

These two excerpts alone anticipate all three components of the spiritual life. Let us now consider in more detail how Jeffers's "religious attitudes" might bear each component.

Component 1: A Conception of Ultimate Reality

The first component of a spiritual life is providing a conception of ultimate reality. Therefore, it has an ontological character. Before considering how such an ontological picture can be drawn from the work of Jeffers, let us consider how a plausible Christian account of the spiritual life might fulfil this component.⁷ On one plausible account, ultimate reality might be understood in terms of a created material universe and a personal creator, God, with God transcending and being distinct from the creation. On such a view, the material universe might be understood as the result of divine agency, i.e., God intentionally created it. Furthermore, on a somewhat standard Christian view, God is conceived of in broadly anthropomorphic terms, being in some crucial respects like a human person. So, on this view, we might have a person-like God whose intentional agency created the material universe, from which it is substantially distinct.

Jeffers's picture of ultimate reality differs from the Christian account just given. For him, God is not considered a transcendent anthropomorphic being but is instead considered identical to the material universe. Thus, for Jeffers, God is perfectly immanent and utterly non-transcendent (non-transcendent in the sense of not transcending the material universe, at least). We can state this more simply as the view that there is a perfect match between God and the material universe, with nothing more to God than the universe and nothing to the universe that is not God. Note: We can see here that Jeffers is very much a *realist* pantheist. To better understand Jeffers's pantheistic concept of God, we need to explore his view of the nature of the universe. There is much one could say about this, but here, I focus on the three features most relevant to extracting a pantheistic conception of spiritual well-being. Namely, its monism, beauty, and consciousness.

First, let us consider how the universe relates to its parts. We can see clearly from the above two excerpts that Jeffers presents a clear sense of the unity of ultimate reality – of God – in terms of the material universe. He sees the universe as a single "organic whole" exhibiting many interrelated parts. This view of the metaphysics of ultimate reality is closely related to monistic views in contemporary metaphysics. For example, Jeffers might be construed as endorsing existence monism (Horgan & Potrč, 2008), according to which the universe is a single concrete entity. However, according to existence monism, the universe does not have proper parts since it is considered a

⁷ I will refer to this as a "Christian" account throughout, but it is not distinctly Christian. It may be just as applicable to other forms of Western monotheism too. Additionally, not all Christians will agree with it, of course, but I take it that it would be unsurprising for a Christian to maintain something like this view.

single partless entity. On reflection, Jeffers's view of ultimate reality is clearly not existence monistic because he explicitly acknowledges that the universe has parts: "This whole is in all its parts so beautiful." Alternatively, he might be construed as endorsing priority monism (Schaffer, 2010), according to which the universe as a whole is a single entity, but unlike existence monism, it holds that the universe instantiates proper parts. Furthermore, priority monism holds that the universe's proper parts are derivative of the universe as a whole, which means that the parts depend for their existence on the whole. I take it that Jeffers's view is priority monistic, or something close to it, because the universe, for him, is not "one being" in the sense that it is a mere aggregation of all its parts; rather, he describes it as an "organic" whole, which is similar to what Schaffer calls an "integrated whole" as opposed to a "mere aggregate" (Schaffer, 2010, p. 47).

Now that we have outlined how the universe and its parts hold together, let us consider beauty, a central attribute of the universe and its parts, according to Jeffers. For Jeffers, it is in virtue of its beauty that the universe (as an organic whole) is considered of supreme value, and it is the human capacity to register and experience its beauty, as we shall see, that is central to the spiritual life. The structure of beauty in the universe mirrors its priority monistic structure. The universe instantiates the fundamental form of beauty, while each of its derivative parts instantiates derivative beauty, due to their being partial aspects of the universe. Jeffers's stipulation, that the universe as an organic whole is divine, is grounded in its being the instantiator of beauty in its fundamental form. He says it is because of the beauty of the universe that he is "compelled to love it and think of it as divine" (Jeffers, 2011, pp. 604–605). Note that this is the second way the universe is unified, on Jeffers's view. First, its priority monism entails a sense of unity in its concrete nature, and now we see that reflected in its aesthetic nature.

It is important to briefly note Jeffers's view on the subjectivity and objectivity of beauty. For him, beauty is both subjective and objective. It is subjective in that when we talk of beauty, we often refer to the *sense* of beauty we feel, and this sense of beauty, Jeffers says, is subjective. So, the *sense* of beauty I have as I watch waves break on the ocean under a setting sun results from something going on in my brain. However, crucially, Jeffers also says that beauty is objective because the sense of beauty, as subjective as it is, is occasioned by some objective property in the world. To keep things simple, when I mention "beauty," I refer to the objective property in the world that occasions a sense of beauty rather than the sense of beauty itself. This sentiment, that beauty is objective, is expressed powerfully in the poem 'Credo':

I think the ocean in the bone vault is only
The bone vault's ocean: out there is the ocean's;
The water is the water, the cliff is the rock, come shocks
and flashes of reality. The mind
Passes, the eye closes, the spirit is a passage;
The beauty of things was born before eyes and sufficient
to itself; the heartbreaking beauty

Will remain when there is no heart to break for it. (Jeffers, 2001, p. 147)

The objective nature of beauty enables it to play a central role in Jeffers's worldview and in the pantheistic account of the spiritual life that I am to deduce therefrom. The key is that because beauty is, fundamentally, an objective property of the universe as a whole, it is not dependent on human designations. Thus, there is a sense of value whose grounding transcends human lives and even humanity.

A final attribute of ultimate reality – the universe, God – that will be important to our discussion is consciousness. Jeffers's clearest account of his view on consciousness appears in his final book, *The Beginning and the End and Other Poems* (1963), published posthumously. On his view, the phenomenality of the universe follows the same structure as its monism and beauty. The universe, as an organic whole, is conceived as a conscious entity, with all of its parts inheriting a measure of consciousness. Let us elaborate on this a little.

In "The Beginning and the End," Jeffers details his thoughts on the status and distribution of consciousness in the universe. He illustrates a form of panpsychism,⁸ viewing consciousness as a ubiquitous feature of the universe. Everything is conscious, even things we ordinarily assume are devoid of consciousness. In the part of the poem immediately preceding the following extract, Jeffers is responding to the question "what is this thing called life?" (1963, p. 7) by describing its development through chemical evolution to the point where we encounter what is known in contemporary philosophy of mind as *the problem of strong emergence*: how do we get consciousness from non-consciousness? He writes:⁹

[...] pleasure and pain, wonder, love, adoration, hatred
and terror: how do these things grow
From a chemical reaction?
I think they were here already. I think the rocks
And the earth and the other planets, and the stars and
galaxies
Have their various consciousness, all things are
conscious;
But the nerves of an animal, the nerves and brain
Bring it to focus. (Jeffers, 1963, p. 7)

Here, we see Jeffers respond to the problem of strong emergence in the same manner as contemporary panpsychists approaching the problem of phenomenal consciousness; consciousness does not miraculously emerge in the world from an entirely non-conscious base, so the reasoning goes, it was there all along in everything. While all things are conscious in some sense, Jeffers indicates that it is the complex structuring of matter occurring in the animal brain that results in higher-level

⁸ For a good historical overview of panpsychism see Skrbina (2005). For examples of contemporary accounts see Brüntrup and Jaskolla (2017).

⁹ 'The Beginning and the End' is the title poem of *The Beginning and the End and Other Poems* (1963).

cognition. This higher-level cognition is absent in most things. Again, we see an affinity with contemporary panpsychists here, who claim not that all things have ordinary conscious experience like us, but that the vast majority of things instantiate phenomenal properties – the properties that characterise the *feel* of conscious experience – in the absence of higher-level cognition. Contemporary panpsychists typically maintain that consciousness of the sort we are acquainted with in our human conscious experience is extremely rare.

Jeffers's views on consciousness do not stop at his panpsychism. His view of ultimate reality – the universe, God – is also a version of cosmopsychism,¹⁰ because he says that the universe as a whole is a conscious entity:

[...] the old stones in the door-yard
Prefer silence: but those and all things have their
own awareness,
As the cells of a man have; they feel and feed and
influence each other, each unto all,
Like the cells of a man's body making one being,
They make one being, one consciousness, one life,
one God. (Jeffers, 1963, p. 8)

From the wording of the above passage, one might infer that Jeffers proposes a bottom-up view on which the universe's consciousness is derivative of an aggregation of smaller consciousnesses. However, it is clear that he thinks the universe's consciousness is more fundamental than smaller consciousnesses. For instance, he views human consciousness as a transient and ultimately insignificant part of God's consciousness. While human consciousnesses exist they are "one of God's sense-organs" (1963, p. 9), but "on other globes / Throughout the universe much greater nerve-endings / Enrich the consciousness of the one being / Who is all that exists" (1963, p. 10). In summary, we see again a priority monistic structure, this time with respect to the universe's phenomenal nature. Consequently, we have a third sense in which the universe exhibits unity; it is unified concretely, aesthetically and phenomenally.

Now that we have a more filled-out example of a plausible pantheistic view of the ontological nature of things, we are better positioned to reflect on the objection from ontological redundancy. An objector would be hard-pressed to maintain that the view presented here is ontologically insignificant. Moreover, the significance of the pantheistic ontological account, that we are considering here, may be further enriched due to its practical relevance.

¹⁰ For a blueprint of a cosmopsychist approach to the problem of phenomenal consciousness see Nagasawa and Wager (2017), who note that their blueprint may be adopted by pantheists. For an in-depth exploration of cosmopsychism see Wager (2020). For further examples of contemporary cosmopsychism, see Shani (2015) and Goff (2017).

Component 2: A Conception of the Human Condition

As I have presented it, the second core component of any account of the spiritual life is that it provides a conceptualisation of the human condition that accords with the view of ultimate reality. We can see this component as a response to the question: how are human lives to be understood against the backdrop of ultimate reality so conceived? An account of the human condition will have two elements: An account of the position humans actually find themselves in (generally speaking) and a vision of the *ideal* human position in congruence with ultimate reality. The spiritual life of an individual will involve the practical structuring of their life so as to transform it from the actual to the ideal position.

To get a handle on what a pantheistic account of this second component might look like, let us first return to the earlier example of a plausible Christian account of the spiritual life, according to which ultimate reality was understood in terms of a single personal creator God and the material universe as their intentional creation. How might such an account speak to the second component of the spiritual life? The human condition might be understood in terms of human beings' separation from God and their need to overcome this separation by developing a relationship with God. The ultimate context of the human person might be envisaged as a union with God in an afterlife, and where an integral part of the preparation for such a union is the development of a relationship with God in life. Thus, we can see both elements.

Given the differences in their views of ultimate reality, we should not expect a pantheistic account of the spiritual life to be the same as the Christian one above. Indeed, for Jeffers, there is no such separation between God and human beings. A transformation from the actual position of human beings to their ideal position is not about addressing a separation from God. On Jeffers's view, God is the universe, and the universe is a whole with myriad parts, among which are human beings. Recall: "[T]he universe is one being, a single organism, one great life that includes all life and all things" (Jeffers, 2011, pp. 604–605). Therefore, human beings are inseparable parts of the universe as a whole. They are parts of God. Moreover, they are *derivative* parts of God, which depend on God for their existence. Consequently, Jeffers's vision of the human condition is quite different from that of the Christian view outlined above, since no substantial separation of human beings from God must be addressed.

That said, Jeffers does diagnose a mismatch in the human condition between human beings' actual and ideal standings in relation to ultimate reality. For Jeffers, the incongruence consists in human beings' lack of recognition of the relation they already bear to God – as we shall see later, his remedy is to foster recognition of the existing relation. An interesting consequence of Jeffers's view of the human condition is that a person's life being congruent with the ultimate nature of things does not make a difference to their ultimate context. In the Christian view outlined, a person's conduct in life plays a pivotal role in preparing them for their afterlife in God; it is possible that a human being will lack the required preparation to achieve their ideal context. In Jeffers's view, the ultimate context of the human person is fixed and pertains to its earthly existence. As such, the ultimate aim of the spiritual life is to transform a person's earthly life, rather than orienting them toward an afterlife.

In his Preface to *The Double-Axe and Other Poems* (1948), Jeffers summarises the collection's theme: a "philosophical attitude" he calls "Inhumanism." In his *Inhumanism*, we find both elements of the second component of the spiritual life; it offers an account of the actual position human beings find themselves in, together with a vision of their ideal position in congruence with ultimate reality. Let us first see how Jeffers describes his *Inhumanism* before drawing out the elements of our second component. In his Preface, he writes:

Its burden, as of some previous work of mine, is to present a certain philosophical attitude, which might be called Inhumanism, a shifting of emphasis and significance from man to not-man; the rejection of human solipsism and recognition of the transhuman magnificence. It seems time that our race began to think as an adult does, rather than like an egocentric baby or insane person. This manner of thought and feeling is neither misanthropic nor pessimist, though two or three people have said so and may again. It involves no falsehoods, and is a means of maintaining sanity in slippery times; it has objective truth and human value. It offers a reasonable detachment as a rule of conduct, instead of love, hate and envy. It neutralizes fanaticism and wild hopes; but it provides magnificence for the religious instinct, and satisfies our need to admire greatness and rejoice in beauty. (Jeffers, 1948, p. vii)

He explains it in a slightly different way in the original unpublished version of the Preface:

[Inhumanism is] A new attitude, a new manner of thought and feeling [...] [which] is based on a recognition of the astonishing beauty of things and their living wholeness, and on a rational acceptance of the fact that mankind is neither central nor important in the universe; our vices and blazing crimes are as insignificant as our happiness. We know this, of course, but it does not appear that any previous one of the ten thousand religions and philosophies has realized it. An infant feels himself to be central and of primary importance; an adult knows better; it seems time that the human race attained to an adult habit of thought in this regard. The attitude is neither misanthropic nor pessimistic nor irreligious, though two or three people have said so, and may again; but it involves a certain detachment. (Jeffers, 2000, p. 418)

Let us begin with the first element of the second component: the actual position human beings find themselves in, according to Jeffers. As mentioned, Jeffers views everything, including human lives and all they encompass, and indeed humanity itself, from the divine cosmic perspective. Viewed against this vast cosmic backdrop, the ebbs and flows of an unfolding human life, and even the human species, are but fleeting, microscopic, inconsequential blips in the universe's unfolding. To put it bluntly, viewed in the context of Jeffers's ultimate reality, human lives are insignificant.

However, to avoid misunderstanding, it is essential to distinguish between Jeffers's views on the significance of human lives in the context of ultimate reality and a derivative sense of importance. While he would maintain that our lives are devoid of ultimate significance, he would also maintain that they have earthly significance, "Humanity has its lesser beauty, impure and painful; we / Have to harden our hearts to bear it" (1954, p. 107).¹¹ There is a sense in which our lives matter, as does whether or not they go well or go badly – moreover, our relationships with other human beings, other animals, and the planet matter. However, any sense of importance imparted onto these should be framed against the divine cosmic backdrop, and to not do this is to our harm.

For Jeffers, human beings find themselves in a position where they do not recognise or duly acknowledge their proper standing in relation to ultimate reality. The consequence of this lack of recognition of ultimate reality and their place in respect of it is that human beings (and humanity overall) have radically overemphasised their importance and the importance of the events of their lives. This inflated and mistaken sense of ultimate significance, Jeffers contends, leads to a dangerous human-centredness, or what he calls "introversion." According to him, this introverted perspective underpins a whole host of disastrous states of affairs: wars, environmental and humanitarian catastrophes, societal prejudices and divisions, interpersonal strife, stresses and anxieties, all of which human beings suffer. He describes it as follows:

More than half its [humanity's] energy, and at the present civilised level nine-tenths of its energy, are devoted to self-interference, self-frustration, self-incitement, self-tickling, self-worship. The waste is enormous; we are able to commit and endure it because we are so firmly established on the planet; life is actually so easy that it requires only a slight fraction of our common energies. The rest we discharge onto each other – in conflict and charity, love, jealousy, hatred, competition, government, vanity and cruelty. (Jeffers, 2000, pp. 418–419)¹²

Thus, human beings find themselves in a position of suffering as a result of excessive levels of introversion. Note: Jeffers includes charity and love, above, because, in his view, they are somewhat risky owing to their propensity to promote a problematic level of human-centredness and, therefore, the ensuing consequences.

'The Double-Axe' (1948) is a poem in two parts. The first part, 'The Love and the Hate,' represents the current state of humanity, the first of our elements. Symbolising the actual positions of human beings, 'The Love and the Hate' is a disturbing and gruesome narrative poem. It tells the story of Hault, a 17-year-old soldier recently killed in battle who, through sheer force of fury and desire for revenge, reanimates himself and returns home to Gore Place, as a rotting corpse, to avenge his parents for

¹¹ From from 'The World's Wonders' in *Hungerfield and Other Poems* (1954).

¹² From the original unpublished version of the Preface to *The Double-Axe and Other Poems* (1948). It should be noted that Jeffers does not mean to imply here that individual lives are all "so easy," indeed a core motivation of Inhumanism is its being, to Jeffers's mind, a remedy for the unimaginable suffering in the world, rather he refers to human beings as a species.

sending him to war. Upon his arrival home, Hoult finds his parents happily continuing life without him, seemingly oblivious to, or unconcerned by, the horrors to which they sent him. His father continues his war-mongering from a safe distance, while his mother is more preoccupied with her new young lover than with her son's fate at war or the state of the world beyond Gore Place. Raging, Hoult goes on a killing spree, first, executing a family dog in an exhibition of spite towards his father, before murdering his best friend, who, in his absence, his mother has taken as her lover. Finally, he murders his father, before unintentionally causing the death of his mother. The poem is unredeemed, ending with a massive fire engulfing Gore Place and destroying everything that remains. The poem explores the results, as Jeffers sees it, of rage, jealousy, hate, and retribution, and it is uncompromising in its violence, and for Jeffers, symbolises the catastrophic consequences of human introversion as it stands.

Let us now turn to the second element. That is, to a vision of the ideal position of human life given the nature of ultimate reality. Inhumanism is central to Jeffers's account of the ideal human life, so let us return to 'The Double-Axe.' The second part, 'The Inhumanist,' relates to our second element. The poem is also set at Gore Place, though at a different point in time. It follows the interactions of an old man, a partly human guardian who protects the planet from excessive human introversion. His double-axe (the poem's namesake) represents humanity's two possible ways forward. Either humanity follows the path depicted in 'The Love and the Hate,' in which its self-centredness sees it suffer into oblivion, or it takes the second path open to it: the path of Inhumanism. In this option, humanity trades its continued self-centredness for its very survival, but also for its flourishing. At one point, echoing through the rock faces of the canyon, the old man hears the cries of future children, and replies:

[...] Oh future children:
Cruelty is dirt and ignorance, a muddy peasant
Beating his horse. Ambition and power-lust
Are for adolescents and defective persons. Moderate
kindness
Is oil on a crying wheel: use it. Mutual help
Is necessary: use it when it is necessary.
And as to love: make love when need drives.
And as to love: love God. He is rock, earth and water,
and the beasts and stars; and the night that contains
them.
And as to love: whoever loves or hates man is fooled
in a mirror.' He grinned and said:
'From experience I speak. But truly, if you love man,
swallow him in wine; love man in God.
Man and nothing but man is a sorry mouthful.'
(Jeffers, 1948, p. 106)

The old man's response to the children's cries amounts to a summary of the Inhumanist option, the second side of his axe.

Recall that Inhumanism involves “a shifting of emphasis and significance from man to not-man; the rejection of human solipsism and recognition of the transhuman magnificence” (Jeffers, 1948, p. vi). From this, we can delineate two features: A shifting emphasis from human to non-human and a recognition of the universe’s magnificence.

The first of these features (the shifting of emphasis from human to non-human) amounts to fostering a general inhumanist attitude according to which human beings and their affairs are properly considered against the backdrop of the cosmic perspective, a perspective from which they are ultimately insignificant. That is, the general inhumanist attitude acts to deflate human beings’ overinflated sense of their own importance. As Jeffers declares in ‘Animula,’ “Man’s world puffs up his mind, as a toad / Puffs himself up; the billion light-years cause a serene and wholesome deflation” (1963, p. 71). Given their grounding in an overinflated sense of self-importance, this deflation of human-centredness will coincide with a reduction in its negative consequences, so the thinking goes. It is important to note that Jeffers includes a moderating clause in his Inhumanism: “*Turn outward from each other, so far as need and kindness permit*” (Jeffers, 2001, p. 721). We can see this moderating clause expressed by the old man in his message to future children, in the quotation above. It is also worth highlighting that a general inhumanist attitude – that is, a shifting of emphasis from human to non-human – allows for varying degrees. One can assume an inhumanist attitude to greater and lesser extents. And an inhumanist attitude may be assumed unintentionally, to some benefit. Indeed, Jeffers often highlights examples of human lives somewhat naturally oriented toward Inhumanism as better lives.

So, on the account we are developing, a person in an ideal position will exemplify Inhumanism, the first feature of which is exemplifying, to the greatest reasonable degree (recall Jeffers’s moderating clause), the general inhumanist attitude. However, the ideal position can only be attained by also exemplifying the second feature of Inhumanism, in addition to the first. The second feature (a recognition of the universe’s magnificence) represents the part of Jeffers’s account that involves a radical transformation of the human person from their actual to their ideal position in congruence with ultimate reality. The ideal human position is one in which a person recognises the beauty of the universe as a whole and their relation to it: “[It] is based on a recognition of the astonishing beauty of things and their living wholeness” (Jeffers, 2000, p. 418). Their relation to it is such that they are an inseparable part of it, and therein lies their felicity. Recall that, on the view I have drawn from Jeffers, the universe as a whole is the fundamental concrete entity that instantiates the fundamental form of beauty. All universe-parts, including human beings, are dependent for their existence on the universe as a whole, and are beautiful in virtue of being its parts. Importantly, there is an asymmetric chain of dependence between the universe and its parts: the universe does not depend on human beings, but human beings depend on the universe, and the beauty of the universe does not depend on the beauty of human beings, but the beauty of human beings does depend on the universe’s beauty. Therefore, there is a sense that everything is significant because it is intimately related to the universe, which is, as a whole, fundamental. However, there is also a sense in which nothing is significant independent of its relation to the whole. On the view we are extracting here, coming to recognise and understand this

state of affairs is what is best for human beings. This is clearly expressed in 'The Answer':

[To] know that however ugly the parts appear the
whole remains beautiful. A severed hand
Is an ugly thing and man dissevered from the earth
and stars and his history [...] for contemplation or in
fact [...]
Often appears atrociously ugly. Integrity is
wholeness, the greatest beauty is
Organic wholeness, the wholeness of life and things,
the divine beauty of the universe. Love that, not man
Apart from that, or else you will share man's pitiful
confusions, or drown in despair when his days
darken.
(Jeffers, 1937, p. 107)

For Jeffers, this recognition and understanding does not arise from a purely intellectual pursuit; rather, it arises from a person *experiencing* their identity with the universe. He refers to such experiences as mystical experiences. Mystical experiences are a type of aesthetic experience, but while aesthetic experiences are experiences of beauty in general, Jeffers's mystical experiences are those experiences of beauty which involve the experiencer identifying themselves with the universe and its beauty. Moreover, the result of mystical experience is a person falling in love with the universe, which he calls "falling in love outward." We will see why it is essential that a person falls in love outward, but let us first understand the term's origin.

In 'The Tower Beyond Tragedy,' which is Jeffers's original take on the Electra theme, his Orestes has returned home with his sister Electra to fulfil their filial obligation to kill their mother, Clytemnestra, to avenge the murder of their father, Agamemnon. Orestes kills both his mother and her consort before, under the weight of his actions, entering a psychotic break and disappearing to the hills. Spending the night on the hillside, he comes to a realisation, through an intense and profound experience, that humanity has turned in on itself to disastrous effect. He finds peace through experiencing a mystical identification with the universe, which results in him falling in love with the universe. In the morning, he returns to tell Electra of his experience:

To-night, lying on the hillside, sick with those
Visions. I remembered
The knife in the stalk of my humanity; I drew and it
broke; I entered the life of the brown forest
And the great life of the ancient peaks, the patience of
stone, I felt the changes in the veins
In the throat of the mountain, a grain in many
centuries, we have our own time, not yours; and I was
the stream

Draining the mountain wood; and I the stag drinking;
 and I was the stars,
 Boiling with light, wandering alone, each one the lord
 of his own summit;
 And I was the darkness
 Outside the stars, I included them, they were a part of
 me. I was mankind also, a moving lichen
 On the cheek of the round stone [...] they have not
 made words for it, to go behind things, beyond hours
 and ages,
 And be all things in all time, in their returns and
 passages, in the
 Motionless and timeless centre,
 In the white of the fire [...] how can I express the
 excellence I have found [...]
 What fills men's mouths is nothing; and your threat is
 nothing; I have fallen in love outward.
 (Jeffers, 1925, pp. 81-82)

Here is how Jeffers describes Orestes's experience in a New York Times article about 'The Tower Beyond Tragedy':

Orestes at last escapes the curse; he turns away from human lust and ambition to the cold glory of the universe.

A patriot may identify himself with his nation, or a saint with God; Orestes, in the poem, identifies himself with the whole divine nature of things; earth, man and stars, the mountain forest and the running streams; they are all one existence, one organism. He perceives this, and that himself is included in it, identical with it. This perception is his tower beyond the reach of tragedy; because, whatever may happen, the great organism will remain forever immortal and immortally beautiful. Orestes has 'fallen in love outward,' not with a human creature, nor a limited cause, but with the universal God. (Jeffers, 2015, p. 953)

Here, Jeffers indicates that as a result of falling in love outward – that is, a person coming to identify themselves with the universe and falling in love with it – a person will be better placed to face the confusions and despair of difficult times. The reason it is so vital for a person to fall in *love* with the universe rather than simply recognise and understand their identity with it is because in falling in love with it, a person thereby values, in the most powerful way, their parthood of the universe, and in so doing their confusions and despairs are transformed.

Let us look at one example of a source of confusion and despair that might be addressed by the method just mentioned. Jeffers has much to say about the effect of falling in love outward on a person's approach to death (which, for many, but sadly

not all, will be chief among life's difficult times). Let us revisit the following line from an earlier quotation,

It seems to me that this whole alone is worthy of the deeper sort of love; and that here is peace, freedom, I might say a kind of salvation, in turning one's affection outward toward this one God, rather than inward on one's self, or on humanity, or on human imagination and abstractions – the world of spirits. (Jeffers, 2011, pp. 604–605)

Jeffers suggests here that there is “a kind of salvation” in falling in love outward. Falling in love with the universe offers a kind of salvation because when a person recognises their identity with the universe and comes to love that universe with which they identify, death is radically reframed. Death is no longer anticipated as oblivion, but simply as becoming what we love and what we have always been: “So we: Death comes and plucks us: we become part of the living earth / And wind and water whom we so loved. We are they” (1963, p. 72).¹³ In the narrative poem ‘Hungerfield,’ written in the wake of his wife's death, Jeffers interjects the narrative of the poem to write directly to Una, with a clear illustration of his conviction that she is the beautiful universe he so loves:

Here is the poem, dearest; you will never read it [...]
[...] nothing human remains.
You are the earth and air;
And the great streaming triumphs of sundown; you
are alive and well in the tender young grass rejoicing
When soft rain falls all night, and little rosy-fleeced
clouds float on the dawn.--I shall be with you
presently. (Jeffers, 1954, p. 24)

In another personal poem, in which Jeffers reflects on his own death and his hopes for his young granddaughter, we get a sense of how earnest are his convictions that to be fulfilled, human beings must discover the beauty of the universe and identify themselves with it: “When she is eighteen / I'll not be here. I hope she will find her natural elements, / Laughter and violence; and in her quiet times / The beauty of things – the beauty of transhuman things, / Without which we are all lost” (Jeffers, 1963, p. 60).¹⁴ The transformational effect, for life and the fear of death, of falling in love outward is palpable in ‘Nova’: “all life is beautiful. We cannot be sure of life for one moment ... / ... we know that the enormous invulnerable beauty of things / Is the face of God, to live gladly in its presence, and die without grief or fear knowing it survives us” (Jeffers, 1937, p. 112).

The two features of Inhumanism that I have delineated are mutually reinforcing. It is plausible that a person develops some degree of an inhumanist attitude in the absence of mystical experience, but that that degree of the attitude will then promote

¹³ From ‘The Shears’ in *The Beginning and the End and Other Poems* (1963)

¹⁴ From ‘Granddaughter,’ in *The Beginning and the End and Other Poems* (1963).

mystical experience, and then when it occurs, the mystical experience reinforces and deepens the inhumanist attitude. Indeed, I take it that Jeffers would contend that one of the principal ways falling in love outward is supposed to improve a person's life is by way of it deepening and underwriting their general inhumanist attitude (which, recall, is supposed to ease human suffering by addressing excessive introversion, which, Jeffers contends, is largely its cause). It is also plausible that mystical experiences occur in the absence of any degree of an inhumanist attitude. Orestes's mystical experience was sudden and occasioned by extreme psychological distress and not preceded by any degree of an inhumanist attitude. However, I take it that Jeffers would suggest that although mystical experiences can come out of the blue on relatively rare occasions, there is great value in pursuing them intentionally by fostering an inhumanist attitude and otherwise promoting falling in love outward.

Now that we have seen how we can draw a picture of the second component of the spiritual life from Jeffers, we can turn to the final component.

Component 3: A Guide to the Practical Structuring of a Human Life

The third component of the spiritual life, as I have portrayed it here, is that it provides a guide to the practical structuring of a human life in accordance with a conception of ultimate reality and a related conception of the human condition. Again, the conception of ultimate reality tells us about the fundamental nature of things, while the conception of the human condition tells us how human beings stand in relation to that reality and, in doing so, diagnoses an incongruence between the two. The third component is treating the diagnosed incongruence, offering human beings a practical guide to attuning their lives to the fundamental nature of things. Another way to understand the third component is as the *method* of personal transformation from a current position of incongruence to the ideal position of congruence.

Let us return one last time to our plausible Christian example to consider how this component might be addressed on that view. Recall that on the Christian view, ultimate reality is understood in terms of a personal creator God who is distinct from the created world. Furthermore, on this view, the human condition is understood in terms of the separation of human beings from God, and the ideal human life is one that is oriented toward closing that separation through developing a personal relationship with God. The third component, on this view, will consist of the ways that a human life can be practically structured to foster the development of a personal relationship with God. There are many such ways available to the Christian. Perhaps the principal among which is prayer, but we might also consider the sacraments (baptism, matrimony, the eucharist, etc.) as instructive in the development of a person's relationship with God, given that their purpose will likely be understood as bringing the person closer to God. Indeed, the Christian might also see their engagements with others as constitutive of their relationship with God, and those engagements might therefore be a mode of developing their relationship with God. Plausibly, on this view, a person's spiritual well-being consists of them being in an ongoing personal relationship with God.

Again, we should not expect a pantheistic account to adopt this same mode of transformation because, as we have seen, the pantheistic picture is quite different to the Christian one. So, how can we draw on Jeffers to offer a pantheistic account of this third component? As we have just seen, for him, the lives of human beings tend to be out of joint with the fundamental nature of things to the extent that they lack recognition that they are a part of the universe, which is, as a whole, fundamental. The ultimate aim is for a person to fall in love outward, that is, to fall in love with the universe from which they recognise they are inseparable. How might a human life be practically oriented toward falling in love outward? Recall that falling in love outward results from mystical experience of identification with the universe, where mystical experience is a form of aesthetic experience. It makes sense, therefore, that a life practically oriented toward falling in love outward would be a life structured around engagements with the world that foster aesthetic experiences, and in particular, those experiences of beauty which have a particular propensity to result in a person identifying with the universe as a whole, and indeed falling in love with that universe. For the sake of ease, let us call such engagements *spiritual engagements*:

A spiritual engagement: An engagement with the world that promotes aesthetic experience that has a propensity to result in mystical experience – wherein a person comes to identify themselves with the universe as a whole and comes to love that universe.

Recall the prior exploration of Inhumanism wherein I suggested we see in it two features: the development of a general inhumanist attitude (which admits to varying degrees and can be held in the absence of mystical experience, and even without intentionally developing the attitude) and mystical experience (that results in a person identifying themselves with the universe and falling in love with it). Given this, I suggest that an important background to spiritual engagements is the development of a general inhumanist attitude to some degree. On the account we are building, we might say that this general shifting of emphasis from human to non-human, even to a small degree, will orient the person toward those aesthetic experiences less tethered to human-centeredness and, thus, arguably, more apt to be the basis of mystical experience.

Next is the question of what engagements might function as *spiritual engagements* on this view. We can draw a few prominent examples from Jeffers's life. First, his own spiritual awakening occurred as a result of working with the "sea-worn granite" boulders to build his house, whereupon his "fingers had the art / To make stone love stone" (Jeffers, 1928, p. 150).¹⁵ This was his most formative mystical experience and the first time he fell in love outward. From his awakening onwards, Jeffers spent his afternoons, almost without fail, on stonemasonry. His was an intimate relationship with stone: from encountering the granite boulders strewn across the shore, to undertaking the punishing task of singlehandedly hauling them to land, before painstakingly working with them to form the various buildings, walls and other features that he spent his life creating. This relationship became a powerful symbol of

¹⁵ From 'Tor House' in *Cawdor and Other Poems* (1928).

the reduced significance of human beings in the universe. Moreover, his connection to stone, developed principally through his intimate relationship with it, also emphasised to him his sense of continuity with it (and, by transition, the rest of the universe), and consequently, imparted to him a sense of salvation. Here we have a potential example of a spiritual engagement: stonemasonry.

Second, the process of creating poetry, for Jeffers, represents another form of spiritual engagement. His poems are packed to the rafters with profound reflections on and expressions of the unity and beauty of the natural world and the place of human beings concerning it. His process of writing poems involved myriad forms of prolonged engagement with the natural world, which was his muse. He spent decades observing the ocean, sky and birds from his seat at the top of Hawk Tower, hauling granite boulders from the shore, and hiking the rugged and barely populated Big Sur coast. These experiences are all baked into the fabric of his poetry. Moreover, his poems often have spiritual engagements as their subject. Furthermore, Jeffers's poems might plausibly function as a source of spiritual engagements for others. They are a tool others can use to pursue spiritual well-being, acting either to deepen a developing sense of an inhumanist attitude or more directly as catalysts of mystical experience. For these reasons, we have two further potential examples of spiritual engagements: creating poetry and consuming poetry.

Continuing my theme of drawing on real lived examples, we can see a vivid illustration of both a spiritual engagement and, through it, the generation of further contexts for such engagements, in Ansel Adams's approach to photography. Adams was a pioneering and influential photographer of the twentieth century, when the discipline was fighting to be recognised as a legitimate form of art. He is best known for his landscape photography and, relatedly, his advocacy for protecting the American wilderness. Adams knew Jeffers personally, was inspired by his poetry, and shared many of his views about the natural world and human beings' relationship to it. As he notes in his autobiography: "Jeffers saw man as inseparable from nature; thus man must conduct himself accordingly or he is doomed. Jeffers was a prophet of our age" (Adams, 1996, p 70). In his biography of Adams, Spaulding highlights the importance of these shared views for Adams's development as a photographer: "Jeffers directly addressed the issues of humanity's relationship to nature, issues that were central to Adams' creative development" (Spaulding, 1995, p. 61). Elsewhere, Baird recounts Adams's defence of themes in Jeffers's poetry from criticism relating to its tendency to deflate the significance of humanity, by highlighting the importance of such a message for the project of protecting the American wilderness:

When some members of the Sierra Club board objected to the use of Jeffers's poetry as a springboard for environmental issues, Adams defended the poet's work and noted a proper regard for the small role of humankind in the great workings of nature, something of which Jeffers was always reminding his readers, is necessary for the true advancement of conservation. (Baird, 2005, pp. 29-30)

For Adams, the aim of making a photograph was not to create an accurate record of what lay within the purview of the lens; rather, the purpose was to create a record of the experience he was having in response to the scene. In his view, the completed photographic print should be an *equivalent* of what he saw and felt. In an interview, he described it like this:

If I feel something strongly I would make a photograph that would be the equivalent of what I saw and felt. When I am ready to make a photograph I quite obviously see something in my mind's eye that is not literally there, in the true meaning of the word. I am interested in expressing something which is built up from within rather than just extracted from without. (PBS, 2002, *Ansel Adams: A Documentary Film*)

Adams coined the term "vizationalisation" to refer to an essential feature of his photographic method. Given that he aimed to produce "equivalents" of his experience of the object, rather than merely recording what was in front of the lens, he needed to take his experience in the presence of the object and visualise how the final print would need to appear to express that experience, and then work backwards to ensure the mechanical and technical setup was such as to allow for its embodiment in the final print. Adams came to this realisation in an epiphany while making a photo of Half Dome in Yosemite Valley. After an arduous climb, and with only two plates remaining, he made his first exposure. While preparing his final plate, he had the following realisation:

As I replaced the slide, I began to think about how the print was to appear, and if it would transmit any of the feeling of the monumental shape before me in terms of its expressive-emotional quality. I began to see in my mind's eye the finished print I desired: the brooding cliff with a dark sky and the sharp rendition of distant, snowy Tenaya Peak. I realized that only a deep red filter would give me anything approaching the effect I felt emotionally.

I had only one plate left. I attached my other filter, a Wratten #29(F), increased the exposure by the sixteen-times factor required, and released the shutter. I felt I had accomplished something, but did not realize its significance until I developed the plate that evening. I had achieved my first true visualization! I had been able to realize a desired image: not the way the subject appeared in reality but how it felt to me and how it must appear in the finished print. The sky had actually been a light, slightly hazy blue and the sunlit areas of Half Dome were moderately dark gray in value. The red filter dramatically darkened the sky and the shadows on the great cliff. (Adams, 1996, p. 60)

Made possible by "vizationalisation," photography was for Adams about recording the experience of the beauty of the natural world. These experiences involved a sense of identification with the natural world and, importantly, a love for it. This love

compelled him to record his experiences: “The man who made unforgettable images out of the grandeur and mystery of nature did so because he could not help doing so, because he loved what he saw” (Stegner, 1988, p. X). Moreover, the universe’s beauty grounded that love: “The dawn-struck peaks and shadowed cliffs and piled thunderheads, the black skies in which for his benefit some god has pasted improbable moons, contain and express him. They are, and were intended to be, ‘equivalents,’ [...] of his own respect and wonder and awe in the face of the world’s beauty.” (Stegner, 1988, p. VI).

Adams’s prints are plausibly records of mystical experiences and documents portraying his falling in love outward. Thus, we have another plausible form of spiritual engagement. Moreover, like Jeffers’s poetry, which I have suggested can be a source of spiritual engagements, engagement with Adams’s prints might also represent a form of spiritual engagement. Indeed, Adams seems to anticipate this:

Both the grand and the intimate aspects of nature can be revealed in the expressive photograph. Both can stir enduring affirmations and discoveries, and can surely help the spectator in his search for identification with the vast world of natural beauty and the wonder surrounding him (Adams, 1960).

So here are two more potential examples of spiritual engagements: creative photography (in the manner exemplified by Adams, for example) and the consumption of photography.

Among innumerable other plausible examples, we might include hiking, rock climbing, gardening, conservation activities, sailing, writing, reading, music (both creating and listening), cinematography, painting, drawing, sculpting, woodwork, interacting with non-human animals, and even just walking or sitting. Importantly, we might also include engagement with the above outputs; contemplating a painting or a sculpture might be considered a context of spiritual engagement as much as the act of painting or sculpting itself. So far as they are oriented in an inhumanist direction, such activities are potential forms of spiritual engagement. Thus, the pantheistic account of the spiritual life we have been forging can respond to the third component of the spiritual life with its account of spiritual engagements, exemplified in the examples above.

Conclusion

Let us recap the conception of spiritual well-being that I presented earlier. According to this conception, spiritual well-being consists of a spiritual life that is going well for a person. The spiritual life, as I conceived of it here, comprises three components: a conception of ultimate reality; a conception of the human condition, which is formed of two sub-elements: a view on the position human beings actually find themselves in and a vision of the ideal position of human beings in accordance with the ultimate nature of things, and; a guide to the practical structuring of a human life such as to

bring about a transformation from its actual to its ideal position. Based on this understanding of spiritual well-being, my task was to present a pantheistic account of the spiritual life, which would, in turn, underpin an account of spiritual well-being. I concentrated on the realist version of pantheism since such forms are especially vulnerable to the most common objections – the objections from ontological and practical redundancy, and I tasked myself with grounding the account in the lived reality of pantheism rather than focusing on providing an account that is merely intellectually plausible. To this end, I extracted an account from the life and works of Robinson Jeffers. As we have seen, it was possible to draw out each of the components of the spiritual life: the universe as a whole is the fundamental concrete entity and instantiates the fundamental forms of beauty and phenomenality (forming the first component); human beings actually find themselves in a position of introversion, but their ideal position is exemplifying Inhumanism. The two features of which are: exemplifying a general inhumanist attitude and recognising, through the experience of falling in love outward, the relation one bears to the universe (forming the second component), and; spiritual engagements are the method of a person’s transformation from their actual to their ideal position. Consequently, it seems there are accounts of the spiritual life, and therefore spiritual well-being, open to the pantheist, and this arguably undercuts the objections from ontological and practical redundancy.

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