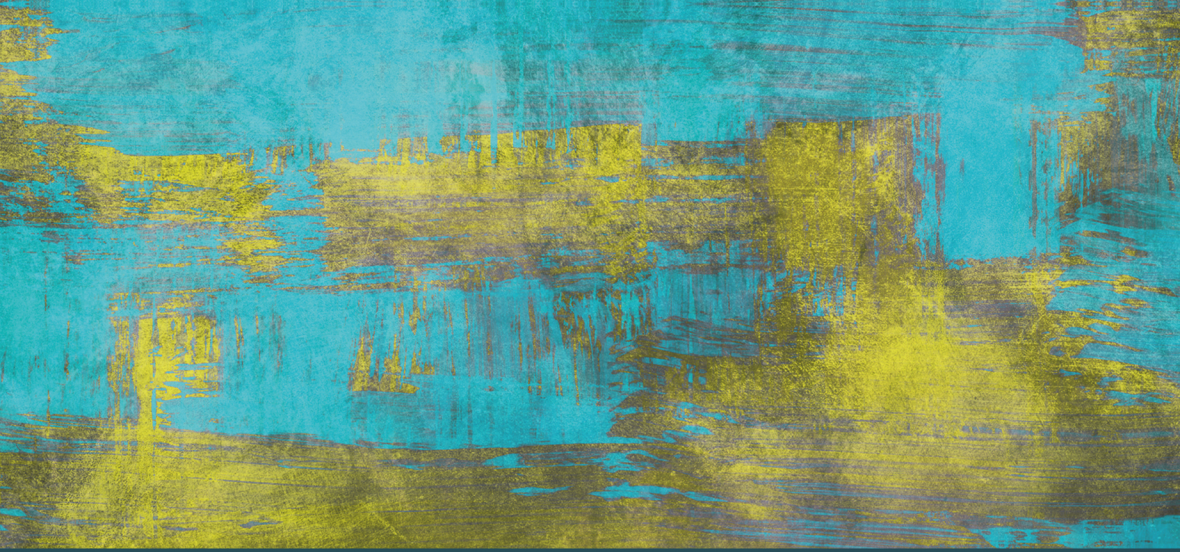
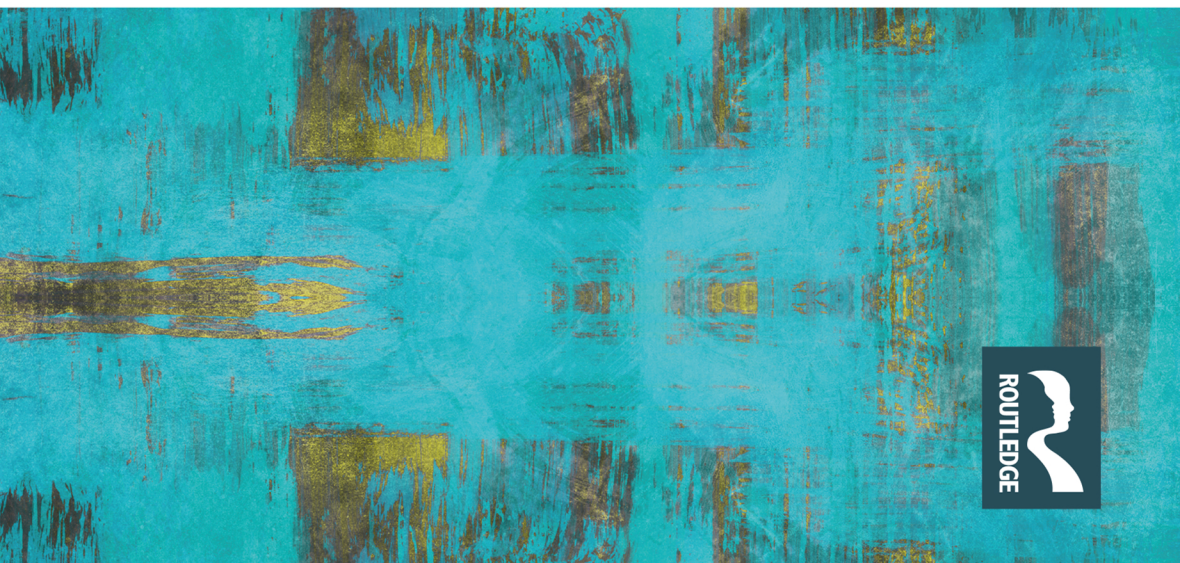


Routledge Research in Health, Nature and the Environment

EMBODIED NATURE AND HEALTH

HOW TO ATTUNE TO THE OPEN-SOURCE INTELLIGENCE

Marcin Fabjański



Embodied Nature and Health

This book describes how, as a species, our survival and capacity to flourish depends on realizing the intimate relationship of humans with nature through active, embodied participation with nature. Living within the physicality of the planet is not a limitation, rather it is our liberation. Full realization of the consequences of this relationship, through embodied action, can liberate us from ego-dependence and transform us into a community of interdependent and flourishing beings.

Embodied Nature and Health: How to Attune to the Open-source Intelligence describes a systems analysis of presence-centered cultivation of well-being through particular ways of being physically and mentally active in relation to nature that aims at helping the individual attune to natures' rhythms. The systems analysis proposes the hypothesis of Open-source Intelligence: an intelligence which originates from the placement of individual organisms in the tissue and the process of life. This framework draws upon and integrates contemporary research into the human–nature relationship and human well-being, and ancient philosophies that were developed prior to the Cartesian gap between the mind and the body, as well as using an auto-ethnographic approach derived from the experience of the author.

The proposed system highlights a practical approach to well-being, based on research into human attention and its effective usage in daily life. The book outlines a methodology that can be used in schools, as a basis of training in sports, as well as in the field of self-development, and highlights the necessity to develop a new, non-abusive relationship with the natural environment. This novel, multi-discipline, first-of-its-kind book will be of strong interest to experts and academics in the fields of physical activity, education, ecology, and philosophy.

Marcin Fabjański is Assistant Professor at Uniwersytet Śląski in Katowice, the founder of the Apennine School of Living Philosophy in Italy, and a guest lecturer at the Sapienza and Roma Tre universities in Rome. He is the author of several books published in Poland and Italy, including *Stoicyzm uliczny* (Street Stoicism), and *Uwolnij się: Dobre życie według siedmiu filozofów-terapeutów* (Free Yourself: A Good Life According to Seven Philosopher–Therapists).

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Embodied Nature and Health

How to Attune to the Open-source Intelligence

Marcin Fabjański

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Contents

Introduction

What if we are looking too narrowly at the ecological disaster? What if we will not save our species by adopting a new narrative, returning to old ethical systems, or choosing the most promising idea from the supermarket of secular and religious ideologies? What if we need something far more radical to survive as a species: a new human presence on planet Earth?

This book explores these themes and proposes a philosophical foundation and practical considerations for such a new presence based on a new idea explaining why we thrive when in nature: the Open-source Intelligence (OSI) hypothesis. The hypothesis states that the various kinds of human intelligence we have identified recently (emotional, social, musical, kinetic, or ecological) are all too narrow, no matter how many bestsellers have been written about them. The OSI hypothesis says that human intelligence is not human at all, or at least not exclusively human. Instead, it emerges from an environment, part of which is human being. And to this intelligence we have to turn to save our species from the environmental catastrophe we witness today.

Something has gone wrong on the planet. A pregnant woman breaks through a crowded street in Rome. In her belly, she carries a small being; in her head, dreams of its happy future. Though evolution grants this woman the energy to push through the crowd and to dream, during this turn of natural selection, it seems to have invested poorly. What are the chances for a long and happy life for this new offspring? What is the likelihood she won't be killed by a hurricane of unknown scale, by hunger, heat, or the war for clean water? By the extinction of bees or radioactive vapors from a neglected nuclear power plant? A European Union report argues that if we do not alter the trend of global warming, humanity will be extinct before the year 2100. It further predicts the end will be preceded by an apocalyptic fight for survival, the kind dramatized fantastically in science fiction films.

Something has gone wrong on the planet. The struggle for survival among equally blessed beings is no longer fair game. The eyes of a beached whale tell the sad tale. Her bloated body was found in Sardinia. Inside, she carried 50 pounds of rubbish and a dead fetus. Plastic bottles, plates, tangled fishing nets, shopping bags, detergent containers – enough digested waste to suffocate the fetus and deny her the sensations of the cool water. Cockroaches

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have a better outlook than most of the animal kingdom. They have adapted well to conditions that have otherwise marked the rapid decline in species on the planet, such as radiation. In their case, evolution can count on return from its investment. Let's follow the cockroaches down into the pipes that run under the same Roman street where a pregnant woman strolls, and we will reach a subway station which points to something far-reaching about today's world.

Smack! It's morning and the platform is teeming with people. Their faces give apt prophecy for the future of the child held in limbo in her mother's womb 30 meters above. The miraculous phenomenon of attention does not connect the people. Where is their attention gone? Almost every set of eyes stares dispassionately at a handheld screen. The indistinct figures type, scroll, browse, play mesmerizing games. We do not see smiles. The faces have tuned out all senses with the exception of sight – an imbalance that research shows to be debilitating towards well-being. A human being feels "healthy" when utilizing the bodily senses evolution has equipped it with, all five cooperating harmoniously, each in moderation.

Sight colonizes and conquers reality, wrote philosopher Martin Heidegger. We inspect the world with the vision interested in retrieving something that will give us benefit or pleasure. Overusing vision, we separate ourselves from the world. We become interested in *how* things are. Objects, people, and events serve as tools for the conquering of reality. We have forgotten the ontological way of being in the world, as Heidegger calls it, a way in which we are amazed *that* things are.

The eyes on the subway people are cast downward, fixated by the play of light on their screens. Their hearts are filled with desire and their heads with the interrogative How? How to get to the next game level? How to respond to a rude Facebook post? How to frame and caption a holiday photo? They have little contact with the rhythms of nature, tantalized by millions of pixels, designed to satiate while leaving them chronically hungry. Ancient philosophers would say these people are ill-equipped to flourish, as flourishing, or philosophical conversion, can only happen when in harmony with the universe, in participation with its natural rhythms. The flattened world of pixels, in the context of such a conversion, is a desert. It is no coincidence that as many as 55 percent of IT specialists in the US suffer from mental health issues … more than in any other profession.

But look – something is happening! A young man in a tailored suit – slim and otherwise self-sufficient – slowly slinks down against the wall and kneels on the floor. People gather around him, their sense of seeing not stolen by devices anymore. They gently dab at his neck and shoulders. A neighbor props him up at the elbow. The prone man gathers his senses and slowly gets to his feet, supported by the other passengers. He takes a deep breath and glances at his benefactors with an embarrassed expression of gratitude.

Have you witnessed this? When we come into contact with a person in need, when danger lurks and reminds us of our mutual fatality, we instinctively take our eyes off the screens and express something that connects rather than separates – a gentle touch. And in response, we do not offer stiffened body language, a desire to colonize the world, but rather a grace that is soft and full of gratitude. Here, at a Roman subway station, we can observe at once the flaw in human evolution while also reckoning its repair: by replacing hedonistic desire with the joy of compassion.

Anhedonia, the inability to experience happiness, deprives three hundred million people of the joys associated with the senses and human contact. Today even preschoolers are diagnosed with forms of depression. To fight such alarming trends, humanity resorts to armies of psychologists and containers of drugs. But anhedonia is not our enemy. It only indicates the state of the spirit, just as fever indicates the state of the body. While there is something dissonant about human progress producing so much sadness, there is also a logic behind its eventuality. We should feel unhappy when we consider that our emotions reflect the tyrannized state of the planet. It is madness to demand happiness for one species when the mass of others suffer in agony at our expense, like whales gorged with plastic or orangutans burned alive to make room for oil plantations. Over the past 40 years, 60 percent of vertebrates have gone extinct. We don't directly witness the agony, but it exists as a silent noise in our human drama. Human beings, participating in the same process of life as all other beings, lack connection. The rise in depression shows that at least we are still alive and kicking. A sick body, not giving in to disease, reacts with a violent fever.

We react to the prospects of impending catastrophe with reactive panic: demonstrations against neoliberal capitalism, journalistic disputes with Anthropocene deniers, adolescent speeches calling out corrupt politicians. All this happens within an unalterable and dispassionate "presence," a term I used to indicate the fundamental existential stance of humans, which I will elaborate on in this book. The protagonist of these actions is still ego. The demonstrators from Extinction Rebellion want a shift in political power; environmentalists demand protection of nature as a resource; Greta Thunberg exclaims at the seat of world leaders: "How dare you treat us like this!" Us, them, me, you. A person or a group fights another person or a group.

These actions are not radical enough. We did not arrive at the present catastrophe due to mechanized poor judgment nor an absolute failure in economic and political systems. We arrived here due to a fundamentally malnourished "presence." We have shifted the center of existence from the process of life felt by all senses to experiencing the world in the form of images, words, narratives, and interpretations, thus excluding ourselves from the primary force and power of being alive. This book's central theme explores the phenomenon and its consequences. I will explain how these images, words, narratives, and interpretations seduce our attention by promising fulfillment to our desire. Once desire gets transferred to mental

realms, it ceases to have a natural limit because it is no longer regulated by the intelligence resulting from the organism being immersed into the natural environment, which I call the "Open-source Intelligence." Limitless desire means trouble, which we can observe on both individual and planetary levels, as an individual's compulsiveness resulting in various illnesses and environmental catastrophe.

We must respond to the ecological disaster at hand at the metaphysical level, partly by returning to the guidance of the old philosophers who taught that there is a metaphysical basis for mental health, morality, and happiness. The disruption of harmony we see all around us is a signal to greater awakening, one that lives in rudimental being and the healing perspective that we are part of the greater process of life.

American philosopher William James described a good life as a "meaningful struggle." When that meaning is determined within the narrow confines of those with wealth and power, for whom meaning is "savings," "growth," "success," and "progress," the result of the struggle is ecological disaster. For ancient philosophers the pool was broader and close to the touch. Meaning was obvious, for it was made evident by the universe which, as Marcus Aurelius said, wanted humans to become attuned to the general harmony. To paraphrase James, I therefore suggest we seek that good life in "meaningful surrender." Surrender to what? To the planet, its laws, and its wisdom. To the planet intelligence.

The globalized civilization in which we live distracts us from the intimate experience of nature, shifting our attention towards digital representations and cultivating identity outside of the process of life. Rather than face this humbling fact, we search for greater opportunities of ego expansion, for example conceiving migratory routes to Mars. Still following our eyes, we want to touch another celestial body with our bad human touch. Do we need further evidence that we have severed intelligence from Earth's organic body, the tissue enveloping and encoding the living organism of our planet?

As we have settled our being in empty representations, the time has come to ask ourselves: Is there a redeeming knowledge that I can rediscover as a result of my intimate relationship with the planet? This is an important question. If our experiences are largely defined by other people or institutions, processed, explained, and fabricated, it means we lack an authentic life. We do not value intimate experience with nature and hence ourselves. We even love according to provided standards. We do not perceive nor intuit the sources of our own vitality.

I see our dependence on the planet not as a limitation but as a road to genuine freedom. Realization of this mutuality can free us from the cult of ego and transform competing factions into a community of co-existing beings. From this perspective, escaping Earth and moving to another planet to consume its resources ceases to be an option. We are not consumers of the planet Earth. We are the planet itself. The planet is the source of our intelligence. I have called this an Open-source Intelligence in contrast to the

limited types that we currently overvalue: intellectual, emotional, or social. *The Guardian* recently published an article about a Yale School of Public Health study, in which it was argued that polluted air causes a lowering of intelligence. If the concept of Open-source Intelligence is correct, it could not be otherwise.

The environment changes the way we feel, think, and perceive. On the Apennine path, along the Simbrivio river, my students and I come across the body of a wild boar torn to its remnants by a pack of wolves. The wolves ate the meat but left intact the blueish-purple stomach with dangling intestines. What a picture! Here was the process of life revealing itself to us, a perfect classroom setting for my eager philosophers. Now we could apply philosophical fascination, except that our first reaction was to close off our senses. We held our noses and turned our heads away. This revulsed "don't want to see" response explains why we love to pay attention to the more controlled pixel and narrative worlds. There are no putrid smells there, nor views of eviscerated intestines.

On our return home, after having meditated on the rocks over the stream, we looked again at the remains of the wild boar, this time with curiosity, although from a safe distance. Between the two encounters, I asked my students to attune their senses to the rhythms of our environment: water splashing in a small waterfall, waves spreading at the base, twigs twitching in the wind, various smells, the sun coming out from behind a cloud, sudden warmth on the back of the neck. We did not make any eco-friendly conversation. We listened to the Earth's conversation. The activation of our senses changed our attitude towards the boar remains, and perhaps something inside us as well. Not a surprise. Plenty of research, which I will refer to later in this book, clearly shows that exposing our senses to nature may cause a dramatic turn in our attitude. We are more calm, content, but also more creative and open to new ideas. The OSI hypothesis explains why.

To survive as a species, we need a new global education that studies attention itself and defines its pedagogical task as creating an elementary intuition of the coexistence of all living organisms. The purpose of such a pedagogy would be to disassociate from empty representations; to deprioritize pixel reality and its entangling narratives; to stop believing in thoughts as something existing independently of the bodies and environments, and being special as such. Thoughts are just forms of attention. Their intelligent juxtaposition may lead to amazing insights, but they themselves are very tight states of captured attention.

Apart from those moments when evolution demands we act on impulse and fight or flee, we always have a choice. We may choose to be aware of what we give our attention to. We may cleanse our attention from its greedy compulsions. This is where our freedom lies. This book is to point to the possibilities we acquire when we learn to use our attention intelligently, acknowledge that within the process of life, intelligence operates, which does not come from an individual organism but rather from the

whole of the process. It demands of us something other than producing, conquering, and pacifying, pushing us towards a good life of "meaningful surrender." We can attune ourselves to the process of life, like cats when they neither hunt nor play, but lie in a relaxed state, giving themselves fully to the massage of gravity and the lullaby of their own breathing. To survive, let's become a global republic of cats – animals living in society but faithful to nature.

I would like to present in this book an original idea, which is not an umbrella concept for a belief system, but a good hypothesis to explain the behavior of organisms in nature, as well as explain our direct experience of organisms placed in the tissue and the process of life. The Open-source Intelligence hypothesis will be presented against the measurable data drawn from scientific research and autophenomenographic description of the effects of such intelligence felt in our introspective landscape. Still, it will remain an approximation, like any hypothesis.

This book consists of seven chapters. In Chapter 1, "Contemporary Issues with the Human–Nature Relationship," I diagnose how attention operates in a typical contemporary human being, immersed in Western culture, who has inherited a Cartesian view of reality, including a strong metaphysical image of a split into mind and body. The reader will look at the omitted possibilities by our cultural paradigm of what is attention and how it can operate, based on philosophical works and recent research on human presence in nature. I will describe the process of life in terms of movement, investigating, among other things, the situation of being cut off from this movement, either by mental illness or in a torture room. This investigation will show what it could mean to wake up to life and start discovering what nature is, a phenomenon, which according to ancient philosophers, "loves to hide." Finally, I will introduce the OSI hypothesis, which opens a new route to understanding what attention is and explains why nature enhances our flourishing.

Chapter 2, "Dramaturgies of Presence," consists of describing and conceptualizing a mechanism within our attention that works to create various metaphysical landscapes we humans can experience. I will investigate the pedagogy of awakening to nature as proposed in the ancient Buddhist *Satipaṭṭhāna sutta* and consider the realms meditation opens on the subject of the human–nature relationship. Based on this, I will introduce the idea of the three dramaturgies of presence and, connected with it, the concept of sub-morphic mindfulness (a kind of mindfulness of the processes taking place under the surface of what seems for us to be stable things) to provide a new reference system for analyzing our experience and understanding and designing meditation practice.

Chapter 3, "Beyond Our Cognitive Tendency to Freeze Reality," continues investigation of possibilities of the OSI. I will demonstrate how such intelligence could operate through the dynamics of the rhythms of nature. This section will be followed by considering what I call "the intimate

embodiment of nature," which consists of making nature part of our identity. I will take the reader to the trip to ancient times when the concept of *oikeiōsis* (Greek) or intimacy with the universe was famous, at least among philosophers. This chapter will consider the possible strategies of attention for someone who has learned that there are much more ways of paying attention to the world than the one which we adopt in daily life based on the patterns provided by our society. I will also show the ways to enhance our health by attuning to natural rhythms and controlling the habit of engaging our senses to what I call "empty representations," pixels on our screens being one example.

Chapter 4, "Depsychologization of Experience," takes the reader to non-Cartesian territories of perception by providing their conceptual map. I describe the effects of the meditative approach proposed, especially what I call depsychologization of emotions resulting in the sense of living in a psychic bubble, as a separate monad, which is common in our world. I will analyze by means of the autophenomenography an experience that happened to me during a meditation retreat, which messed with my sense of self. I will indicate how to break from the bubble of the psyche, bringing to the table the philosophy of Martin Heidegger. I will also ponder on the concept of the "language of nature" and that of "environmental identity."

Chapter 5, "Non-dualistic Experience of Nature," presents to the reader various levels of seeing nature as an onto-ethical phenomenon and discuss the role of fear in how we define ourselves in relation to nature. I will describe and analyze my encounter with a wild animal and show how to attune to nature at a micro-level. I will also investigate the phenomenon of extinguishing dramaturgies of presence, described in Chapter 2, and describe with more details what the is the "new presence" announced in this Introduction.

Chapter 6, "Nature-based Flourishing," will summarize the investigation into the possibility of the existence of OSI and formulate its hypothesis. I will propose living metaphysics, derived from sensations experienced according to the rhythms of nature. By "living" I mean present in a moment-to-moment perception and determining our vision and actions. The OSI hypothesis, which I will formulate in full form in this chapter, describes a mechanism of intelligence, which operates both on the level of the environment and individual organism. I will show its explanatory possibilities, applying it to the present discoveries on nature and human well-being, especially to what we know about the working of the rhythms of nature. I will design the OSI-based system of navigating in daily life and present the practice of returning the body to nature.

As this book is written by a philosopher, it asks new questions rather than providing definitive answers to the old ones. Every chapter ends with a list of themes for contemplation. I invite the reader to ponder the problems considered in every chapter individually, slowly, by engaging emotions and being aware of bodily reactions, rather than rushing for answers. This book

is an invitation to direct an experiential feeling of nature rather than debating it from the positions of academic discourse belonging to sub-fields of philosophy, such as philosophy of mind or moral philosophy.

The autophenomenographic reports included in this book will consist of descriptions of psychosomatic states usually omitted in academic discourse. Such reports should be recognized at the philosophical level as a source of knowledge about the world and the self, as they describe real experience. Not recognizing them equals suppressing them. They fulfill a double role in this book. One is obvious – providing descriptions of experiences. The second is connected with the hypothesis central to this book – that there is no neutral application of attention. Attention, as I will show, "has its weight." It is a force, which changes everything it touches.

Typically, I will critically analyze auto-ethnographic reports before using them for my argument. Still, the analysis will not employ any particular method or tradition, even though my approach is close to the one applied by phenomenology. Specifically, elaborating on descriptions of meditative experiences and inquiring into their dynamics and logic puts me outside of the phenomenological tradition, which deals with ordinary everyday consciousness rather than consciousness transformed by methods designed to facilitate human flourishing, such as Buddhist or Stoic meditation techniques.

By writing the book, I would like to appeal to the academic reader and any reader interested in investigating existential issues, which, obviously, does not exclude a scientist. I would like to ask the reader: Within the enormous amount of information that our conscious mind processes every day, is there any bit of knowledge, which is ours, resulting from our intimate relationship with nature? A bit of knowledge that is our own discovery? I think that this is an important question. Because if there isn't – if everything that we know and use to navigate in the world was dissected for us by other people, social and educational systems, customs, or marketing of various kinds (economic, political, ideological) – how can we say that we live an authentic life? This book hopes to initiate or deepen the process of discovery of intimate, personal relations with nature for its readers. If it does, its function will be fulfilled.

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1 Contemporary Issues with the Human–Nature Relationship

Live Is Movement

The rusted gate is protected by an orange warning net, which seems to say: "keep yourself away, I am an unpassable barrier." But there are no unpassable barriers in the universe, and this is true also for this gate. When you stand close enough and look from an angle, you will notice a hole in the net, big enough to pass through. You can sneak through it and stand on the grounds of the Ospedale Psichiatrico di Volterra, created in 1888 in the former monastery of San Girolamo. At times there were 6000 patients here. Two toilets and twenty sinks for every 200 of them. They had no voting rights, could not possess anything, nor contact their families. When they died, they were buried in the hospital cemetery, no names on their graves.

This Italian hospital has been abandoned for several dozens of years. Nature has reclaimed large parts of this factory of normality: trees broke through the glassless windows inside huge buildings, and those that the wind seeded inside the buildings after the roof fell apart have put their branches from inside out. What heretic trees! Could there be a bigger insult to the order this place served, first as a monastery and later as a psychiatric institution than their chaotically curved branches, always hungry for light?

While the hospital still functioned, they brought people with depression, bad behavior, or the wrong political views. They attempted to heal them of all these symptoms by electric shocks, brain surgeries, poisons, anything which made them calmer. The doctors put the patients into a coma with insulin. Then they woke them up, 12 hours later, with saccharine. They treated patients with a specific medicine: that of malaria, which causes fever, stagnation, and consequently withdrawal of bad symptoms for a while. They grew malaria-infected mosquitoes for this reason. The nurses, all female, were recruited from villages of Tuscany and trained for just a few days before being sent to the patients. They did not have to know much about medical craft, but they had to be big and strong. Only a big and strong nurse could ensure that the most important hospital task – to keep the patients' bodies as motionless as possible – was done.

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From interviewing former patients and staff, I have learned that the body was here the most important thing. The patient's body. It should not cause problems. It could yell, howl, cry – this was bearable. Other things were not. The body could not beat, kick, or bite. It could get naked; nobody cared. There were many patients and few members of staff.

There is a wall in the Ospedale with inscriptions made by Fernando Nannetti, who was locked here for treatment because he offended a clerk. He was supposed to stay in the hospital for two years but was released after 15 years, in 1973. All this time, he talked with no one but a nurse. But he wrote passionately, using a buckle of his patients' vest, which resulted in a 180-meter-long text on the wall in an unknown language and script, similar to the one the Etruscans used, written from right to left, like Leonardo da Vinci's notes.

In one spot on the wall, his writing breaks the straight line and starts going up and down, forming a hill-shaped landscape, as if his tree-like letters were growing up from rising grounds of emptiness. The reason? He met catatonic schizophrenics sitting at the bench next to each other. They did not move at all, so he wrote around their arms and heads. His sentences outline even today three human beings who must have sat here for a long time. When he finished, he translated his writings into Italian for all of us who cannot understand languages such as Etruscan. "I have a butterfly for free. All the world belongs to me, all I dream about," he wrote. Or: "Glass, baking sheet, metal, wood, human and animal bones, eye and spirit are all controlled by beams reflecting the magnetic field." Or: "Light and sound have the same range and are subject to the same disruptions." He wrote about himself: "I am a mining engineer of aliens in the psychic system" (Collection d'Art Brut Lausanne, 2011). Many thoughts like these were running within his head. Were the thoughts of the three schizophrenics similar to what Nannetti wrote? We don't know.

Observing the strange beauty of the stone bench and the wall behind it, I realized that several separate cosmoses had met in this place: the dynamic cosmos of Nannetti's mental life; the cosmos of natural processes working in the trees around, which breath rhythmically and expand slowly in a way invisible to human perception; and the cosmos of objects such as the bench and the buckle. What did the cosmos of the catatonics sitting there motionlessly look like? Was there any movement in it? Did it have any dramaturgy? Can life be understood in terms of movement? All that I thought came to my mind while I was walking back towards the orange net on the gate and listening to the wind slumming shutters and peeling away still new pieces of plaster from the walls. These questions are the starting point of the book. On the pages that follow, I will investigate the touching points of the seemingly separated cosmoses of thoughts, objects in space, and processes, each of which reveals separate dramaturgies. I will look at life as a rhythmical occurrence and try to find out if there is any way we human beings, whose world seems to be rather a collection of solid objects and chaotically flowing thoughts and images, can attune to the process of

life in its rhythmical flow. I will invite the reader to explore dramaturgies of the various cosmoses we encounter in our daily lives or while traveling to places like Volterra. I will propose the Open-source Intelligence (OSI) hypothesis, which, among others, can serve as an explanatory theory for the recent realization of the science that merely being present in nature makes us happier and healthier.

Life is movement. It sounds like a pre-Socratic philosopher's statement, partly naïve, partly obscure, and too general to spark any insight, but it is a sequence of words worth arranging together. Why? Because it seems true. Life is growth and decay, and we can observe it both in our gardens and in our chests if we bother to pay some attention to our breath. How about catatonics, then? Does not their mental life consist of a frozen landscape? Even in their case, to which I will return in Chapter 4 of this book, mental freezing is only a reaction to movement and not an effective one. Should the freezing be effective, there would be no need for malaria-infected mosquitoes in the hospital. Investigating the existential position of the people suffering from psychosis in whose organisms motion of nature meets the motionless psyche will inform us about the rhythms of life and what life itself is.

However, let us start by looking at another situation with minimal movement and very little life: one of sensory deprivation, in which humans' contact with the rhythms of nature is cut off deliberately for the purpose of research aiming at creating an effective torture procedure. Both this situation and the catatonics' situation may be perceived as a kind of prison: the first prison inflicted from outside, the second from within the organism itself.

Devastating Cutoff

It started in the 1960s, when the CIA decided to research innovative ways of torture to inflict suffering on their enemies. To avoid problems with American law, the institution placed this project at the McGill University in Canada, in the hands of a brilliant researcher: Donald Ewen Cameron.

The ambitious researcher decided to use the opportunity to put into effect a Frankenstein-style idea of erasing all personality from the study subjects to the state of *tabula rasa* and recreate it anew, according to his vision of what human beings should be like. He used electric shocks, narcotics, and sensory deprivation, the last procedure being the most interesting one from the point of view of this book. I refer to this case because it was probably the most radical experiment in human isolation ever undertaken, impossible to recreate today without violating ethical norms. The nearly forgotten story of Cameron and his victims was recalled to the world by Naomi Klein's best-seller *The Shock Doctrine*. Klein had met subjects of Cameron's experiments decades later, and this is how she describes one of them:

> Gail greets me from a plush blue recliner. It has twenty positions, I later learn, and she adjusts them continuously, like a photographer trying to

> find focus. It is in this chair that she spends her days and nights, searching for comfort, trying to avoid sleep and what she calls "my electric dreams."
>
> (Klein, 2007, p. 31)

As we can see from this description, Gail spends her days with little motion. She tries to unsuccessfully find a static position, which would be painless, physically and psychically. She does not look for comfort in movement but in stagnation, as if, as a result of the tortures she went through, she had lost contact with rhythmical patterns of the process of life present in the environment and within our bodies. Right after Cameron's experiment, it was more evident than when Klein met her. Within a few weeks, Gail had changed from an intelligent, cheerful, and sociable young woman into someone who "showed childish behaviour, expressed bizarre ideas, and apparently was hallucinated [*sic*] and destructive." The notes report that this intelligent young woman could now manage to count only to six; next she is "manipulative, hostile and very aggressive"; then, passive and listless, unable to recognize her family members. Her final diagnosis is "schizophrenic … with marked hysterical features" (ibid., p. 35).

Cameron noticed that after the first phase of "depatterning," some of his subjects had lost the sense of space and time and even the feeling that there should be some space and time, just as he wished. They also lost the ability to walk or to eat by themselves. It seems that they had lost all mental and physical movement. Stagnation became a sign of their lack of vitality, a proof of their human withering. Half of the experiment was a partial success. Patients did not go into the state of *tabula rasa*, but at least their old selves were damaged. The other half – building a new brave personality on the ashes of the old one – failed. A picture of a plant comes to mind, which was unsuccessfully transplanted from one place to another.

Cameron's subjects were locked in an isolation chamber and deprived of sensory stimuli, sometimes for as long as 35 days. He soundproofed the room, piped in white noise, turned off the lights, and put dark goggles and "rubber eardrums" on each patient, as well as cardboard tubing on their hands and arms, so they could not touch themselves, which would have provided them with some sense of self. According to Cameron, this isolation from sensory input was crucial to destroying "the space-time image," which is a knowledge of who we are and where we are. It was indeed isolation from any natural environmental rhythms: night and day, cold and hot, windy and windless. Even meals in the chamber were served at different times, sometimes ten minutes one after another, dinner replacing breakfast and *vice versa*. However, one patient still managed to keep in touch with outside patterns by listening to the sound of a plane flying over the building every day at the same time. It could have been for him a basic form of attuning to a rhythm, even though the rhythm was as poor as we can imagine: one impulse every 24 hours.

When the CIA applied the technique later to prisoners, writes Klein, it proved itself to be effective. Not with achieving valuable information, however, but with destroying prisoners' personalities as they went into a regressed state and accepted interrogators as "father figures." Specialists from the CIA – who kept the prisoners in tiny, windowless cells for months and sometimes for years, exposing them to artificial patterns of pounding sounds and strobe lights – called this state "psychological shock" or "suspended animation." The prisoners became susceptible to suggestions, damaged, and unable to defend themselves.

When Naomi Klein met Cameron's patient Gail, the woman told her that she "had a very peculiar feeling in the head. Like I had a blob, not a head. Describing this, Gail seemed suddenly far away, slumped in her blue chair" (Klein, 2007, p. 56). What is striking in Gail's description of her head is the lack of movement, certain stagnation. The feeling in the head she experienced can be described as blindness of attention, which could not penetrate the area she directed it to. As we know, plenty of actions happen all the time within our heads, and normally functioning attention can easily catch them as sensations: pulsating temples, the pressure of the air on skin, tingling, feeling of heaviness. Although we do not differentiate them in daily life, as our attention is employed to fulfilling various tasks or lost in thoughts, these sensations consist of our general feeling of aliveness. When this feeling of aliveness is numbed, e.g., due to torture, a "blob" or blank non-felt spot appears within the territory of our experience, and we lose some of our capacity for critical thinking. The torturer becomes a father figure. Somebody else's ideas or commands meet no resistance within our mental world. When deprived of the rhythms of natural world, we replace it with mental artificial realms or have them replaced by others. Simultaneously, we turn into different kinds of beings: broken, unhealthy (whatever definition of health we assume), unable to flourish.

Attention is defined by Valenza and Simon (2002) as "a process by which some elements of sensory information are encoded and elaborated whilst other aspects of the sensory reality are neglected" (cited in Barbiero, 2011, p. 13). Seen in this light, what happened to Gail, was having installed in her, as the effect of a cruel experiment, specific, strong habits of neglecting various aspects of sensory reality. Het attention was unsensitized and conditioned by artificial stimuli and lost the ability to detect natural patterns. What is, for us, usual, everyday attention, fit to fulfill its daily tasks, such as typing on a computer in my case right now, driving, having conversations, shopping, etc., can be modified as a result of special training or procedures inflicted on human beings by, for example, torturers. *Attention is not a passive, unchangeable quality of a human being.* The opposite to the torture effect happens during philosophical training of attention, as proposed by many ancient schools. Pierre Hadot writes in his book *Philosophy as a Way of Life*:

> Attention (*prosoche*) is the fundamental Stoic spiritual attitude. It is a continuous vigilance and presence of mind, self consciousness which

> never sleeps, and a constant tension of the spirit. Thanks to this attitude, the philosopher is fully aware of what he does at each instant, and he *wills* his actions fully.
>
> (Hadot, 1995, p. 84)

Hadot refers in the above passage to the Stoic school, probably the least relaxed philosophical movement of antiquity. Other schools, such as Epicurean, Buddhist, or Daoist, suggest a more cool attitude. Philosophy, in general, was defined in ancient times as the ability to wonder, and the experience of wonder, as we all know, has an effortless rather than industrious taste. One of the fathers of modern psychology, William James, wrote about fascination as "a form of effortless attention, resistant to fatigue," which is regenerative for tired "directed attention" (cited in Barbiero, 2011, p. 18). Such a fascination has always been a philosopher's goal. She needed such attention in order to flourish or achieve perfect spiritual and physical health, an optimal state nature wanted her to achieve. According to many philosophical views, training and further employing this fascinated attention to reality leads to a unique state of a highlighted intelligence, by which the philosopher gets access to the reason that permeates all nature.

There seems to exist a type of intelligence recognized by ancient sages, which depends on the human organism being harmonized with the rhythms of nature. The story of Cameron's experiments and its follow-up in applying his methods by the CIA to prisoners demonstrates that a certain kind of intelligence is born from our relationship with the environment, not from an independent inner source located somewhere within our skin, in the brain, nervous system, or even the whole body. The story also strongly suggests that what we call personality cannot function in a healthy way without us being in touch with the environment and without synchronization with some kind of movement. We are not separated monads, but also not simple prolongations of the natural environment. Rather than that, we are processes that are neither chaotic nor entirely determined from the outside. We are processes that express, if anything, their particular rhythms. We are rhythmical beings.

Waking up to Life

Let us look at how these mechanisms work in less extreme, although not always easy, situations of our daily lives. How does our attention operate in the material and social environment of the contemporary world? How is its *modus operandi* determined by our needs, values, ways of thinking? Let us start, when the day begins, in the morning, with an autoethnographic description:

> *I woke up in terrible shape: Experiencing body aching, dull, devoid of energy. As soon as my brain's components turned on, producing what we call waking awareness, the first choice appeared of the range available for human beings – assessing the situation, making a judgment*

about it. This time I am aware of that choice. Two paths open to me. If I followed the Greek philosopher Epictetus' line of thinking, I would know that the body's state did not depend on me. It was someone else's property, a property of nature; judgment about the body state, however, was mine. I might have decided to feel disgusted with my body or disappointed that it is not perfectly healthy, fit, and ready for action. Should I choose so, at my own request, I would have fallen into a spiral of complaints, regret, anxiety, and hurling of curses, perhaps not at gods (as often happened in Epictetus' times) but genes or destiny. Epictetus would like me to function with this body as well as I can without falling into such a mental trap. So I try. I observe how my decision drags the body to the bathroom. I see the body as a corpse while it walks, and do not identify with it. I can feel a series of sensations of heaviness, aches, pressure, coldness as my feet touch the floor: I have a similar relationship with my body now as with my car while driving. It is an old Subaru, which also produces a series of sensations: engine noises, vibrations, the sound of the air in the drafty windows. It is a pleasant feeling as I realize that when I disidentify with usually unpleasant bodily sensations, they cease to be unpleasant. Only when I forget myself while brushing my teeth, the sense of possession of this old, impaired body returns. And together with it, the thoughts of complaint.

In this short description, containing one minute or so after waking up, I experienced two different perspectives: that of identification with my body and that of feeling the body as if it was something else than me. Within the second perspective, I could observe quite well the sequence of sensations within my body. My attention was sensitive enough to identify the sensations. This sensitivity brought me closer to the rhythms of nature. I switched to the second perspective by remembering the words of Epictetus and the decision to follow them. What I value – the Stoic attitude – determined the perspective of my attention. So the *modus operandi* of my attention was determined by both my values and way of thinking.

I was aware of being myself within both perspectives. It seems that the sense of I wakes up earlier than the senses, ready to cast its habitual reaction to the world. This reaction is not philosophical or "examined," as Socrates would have phrased it. The examined reaction requires working back to trying to experience the world without prejudice. A proper philosophical response to waking up would probably be amazement. Simone de Beauvoir woke up once feeling childish amazement and thinking of "why am I myself?" which put her into a fascinating state of "hyper-rich disorientation" (cited in Solnit, 2017). This is a state known to Stoics and Daoists, which is full of movement and awe. A state of pre-I, which, when experienced, demonstrates that "I" is just a habit.

The human I can be described as a specific habit, which organizes experience into some order (or some cosmos, as ancient Greeks would have said). Usually, it is organized into a realm of space filled with things, our

body being one of them, placing us in the world of medium-sized objects. That is what the human I does. The God of pantheists, should she have a human type of consciousness, would wake up to a totally different landscape than ours, that of galaxies and their clusters dancing dynamically *within himself*. But even if the habit of our attention belongs to the world of medium-sized objects, indeed co-creates it, we ourselves do not. On some level, we are happening as elemental processes; on another level, as a dance of empty sub-particles. Analysis of meditative experiences shows that our range of experience is much broader than it seems for a non-meditating person. As I will try to show, exposing our organism to the wild environment brings the same result. There are specific meditation techniques that can extract our attention from the medium-size world and direct it to more subtle micro-events and processes (of which more in Chapter 2).

When we wake up, our freshly regained aliveness, as might have happened to Simone de Beauvoir, stays in touch with the dynamics of micro-events, but it immediately gets frozen into the world of objects, including the object known as our own body and the question "why am I myself?" ceases to have meaning. I know myself now as a frozen piece of matter identified by a name and having a life story. I do not have to ask this question anymore. I identify with the two and with my body as if seen from outside, not even with my body as such. Why do I not identify myself with my large intestine, blood, plasma, or tribes of bacteria in my mouth?

Perhaps evolution has taken care of the "why am I myself?" question's disappearance, worrying about the survival chances of a being that ponders this question instead of taking care of getting food and prolonging the species. As if evolution was afraid that after careful consideration of this question, one might realize that identity is just a trick making single organisms behave in a way that increases their chances of survival, as in a situation described by German thinker Hermann Schmitz:

> Someone driving a car in the rain on a motorway with dense traffic, who only avoids an impeding accident by sudden evasion, breaking or acceleration, has to at once grasp relevant states of affairs, the problems of collision and of possible collisions in the case of evasion. This is achieved in an internally diffuse meaningfulness, since there is no time for analysis and an immediate appropriate reaction is called for. It is realised by an antagonistic encorporation into the situation on the motorway in front and (via the rearview mirrors) beside and behind them, as well as into the vehicle with hands, feet and the entire felt body which is receptive to the vibrations that communicate the road-holding and the structure of the road.
>
> (Schmitz, 2011, p. 251)

The author describes a situation that anyone could find herself in to illustrate his system of philosophy, which is complex and contains many

inter-related notions such as the above "internally diffuse meaningfulness" and "antagonistic encorporation." I will return to his system later in this book, but for now, let us treat this description as an example of the usefulness of I or self in the service of survival. "Internally diffuse meaningfulness" is one way of feeling, without which an organism's survival would be impossible. It enables intelligent and quick actions, which would not be possible through calculating. It results from an interplay of various elements, which are both external and internal to the organism when seen from the Cartesian point of view.

Allowing attention to be immersed in a vibrating aliveness of the process of life would mean the end of life, at least for the protagonist of this description. Instead, she effectively does her job as "a driver," which increases her life efficiency, especially if she is paid for it and supports herself and her family with the money. In this case, she may even define herself through her job, which only shows how the sense of self and the capacity of survival or being effective reinforce each other.

We can observe that the more a society connects the feeling of the self-value of an individual with her effectiveness in fulfilling tasks, the fewer chances such a society leaves for the individual the broader range of experience. Our society, valuing proactivity over contemplation, and built on the project of conquering the world given to us as a means for ego-gratification, is perhaps the most radical in this regard.

As a result, while planning our day after waking up, we lose touch with a broader range of experience and, connected to it, a sense of *primordial aliveness*. Our attention ignores the feeling of such aliveness because it was so programmed in the process of enculturation. From now until the moment of return to bed at night, we will measure our day by the number and significance of tasks fulfilled, instead of the quality of experience, which I think, and will try to demonstrate in this book, depends on the contact with this *primordial aliveness*. We will continue this way unless, at one point of the day, we use our attention creatively and undertake some philosophical or meditative intervention that employs mindfulness and meta-awareness. Why do we not usually do it? The efficiency of fulfilling tasks dictated by evolution and culture is one reason, keeping the sense of security or sense of living in a domesticated world another. These factors constitute what I call our specific "presence" in the world.

When we look at how we usually experience reality, we will quickly realize the existence of something different than middle-size objects placed in space. We may be facing a thing, have eyes open, and all other senses working correctly, but somehow not perceive it. It happens in a situation when our attention is seduced into the world of thoughts and mental images. Our everyday experience is, first of all, the experience of a thinking subject, which we take as an independently existing being, whose center we tend to locate a few centimeters behind the line of our eyes. This experience made René Descartes place identity into an autonomous thinking substance. *What if thinking is not autonomous? What if it is instead a peripheral*

synthesis of the process of life? Perhaps, from the moment we lose touch with the processual aliveness of life and thoughts, stories and images start interfering with our perception – which seems to happen within the microseconds after waking up – and we start abiding with our attention a periphery of the process of life, staying away from its central vitality. What if we dwell in what can be called "a second-hand" or "processed" vitality? What if situations like the one described by Schmitz bring us a little closer to the center of this vitality and further away from the periphery of thinking? What if the ancient philosophers attempted to arrive there by the methods of flourishing they advocated? And finally, what if exposing our organisms to the natural environment would be a way to get there?

Nature Loves to Hide

Staying with attention within peripheries, far away from the *primordial aliveness* of life, we voluntarily lock ourselves in a kind of prison. It is as if we closed ourselves in a conceptual isolation chamber, not as effective perhaps like the one Donald Cameron prepared for the subjects/victims of his experiments, but effective enough to influence our health, well-being, and ability to flourish, not to mention our intelligence, which functions at its optimum only when in contact with the rhythms of life. In order to flourish, we need to embrace life's vitality, embrace nature. How to do it was an obsession of philosophers who created specific practices for this task's sake. These practices were based on understanding humans as beings who are born, grow and decease within a broader context of nature. This context existed at least until the seventeenth century, when modern science was born, together with its project of describing the world objectively, as functioning outside of the observing subject, as if the intelligence needed for this objective description was operating solipsistically in separation from life. The perspective of *intelligence attuning itself into the process of life and changing as an effect of this attunement* was lost.

Pierre Hadot, in his book *The Veil of Isis* (2004), sees the whole history of Western philosophy as an interplay between mind and nature. It was Heraclitus who uttered in the VI century BC the famous statement: "Nature loves to hide." The philosopher's job was to find it. Should it happen, ancient sages made the promise that she would flourish. Nature (Greek: *phusis*) meant then "the constitution or proper nature of each thing" and "a thing's process of realization, genesis, appearance, or growth" (Hadot, 2004, p. 7). Understood in this way, nature was a process consisting of the appearing and disappearing of things. According to this vision, the very force that causes things to appear causes them also to disappear. All that has appeared will disappear at one point.

Consequently, there are no static, eternal entities. This statement is true about self as well (in this book, I use the term "self" simply as a concept for the navigation system by which we experience ourselves moving through

time and space every day). However, a stream in ancient philosophy, initiated by Plato, seemed to forget about the second part of the appearing–decaying equation and introduced the notion of an eternal soul, which since the advent of Christianity, effectively seduced the imagination of the people of Europe and became a crucial part of Western mental DNA. However, before Christianity became the state religion in Rome, a philosophy of change was dominant in Hellenistic schools both in Greece and Rome. Not as intellectual curiosity, but as the foundation for a way of life, which resulted in the full realization of human potential. Marcus Aurelius, emperor and Stoic philosopher, expressed it beautifully in his *Meditations*:

> Acquire a method for contemplating how all things are transformed into one another. Observe each thing, and imagine that it is in the process of dissolving, that it is in the midst of transformation, in the process of putrefying and being destroyed.
>
> (Cited in Hadot, 2004, p. 12)

Here ends Hadot's translation of this passage from Greek in his book: at the advice to seek flourishing in attuning of one's attention to movement and keeping it as far away from stagnation as possible. But if we follow the passage further (for which we have to turn to another translation, that by Martin Hammond), we will learn of the result of such a cognitive attitude. The one who exercises himself in such a way will "devote his entire self to justice in his own actions and to the nature of the Whole in all things external" (Aurelius, 2006, p. 98). Not just our thinking but also the way we act and live depends on realizing both elements of the Heraclitus equation. Perhaps in the isolation chamber prepared by Donald Cameron for the CIA, the biggest damage was caused to his patients not by the limited number of impulses they were getting, but by the impossibility to release the overflow of impulses, to let the impulses die according to natural laws. The "KUBARK Counterintelligence Interrogation" manual of torture used by the CIA, based on Cameron's experiments, suggests bombarding prisoners by never-ending impulses such as barking dogs, baby's crying, heavy metal music, or strobe lights on the visual side – so-called "continued sensory input." The result of such practices proved itself to be contrary to the ancient Greek ideal – human withering instead of flourishing.

The flourishing the Greeks talked about, and consequently its opposite – withering – are not precisely analogical to flourishing and withering of, let us say, a flower. An aging ancient philosopher will flourish by acknowledging the shortcomings and possibilities of her age rather than pretending to have youthful vitality or, even worse, being immortal, which would be a typical Stoic vice of acting against nature.

> Any one individual activity which comes to an end at the appropriate time suffers no harm from its cessation: nor has the agent suffered any

> harm simply because this particular action has ceased. In the same way, then, if the total of all his actions which constitutes a man's life comes to an end at the appropriate time, it suffers no harm from the mere fact of cessation: nor is the agent who brings this series of actions to a timely end exposed to any harm. The time and the term are assigned by nature – sometimes man's own nature, as in old age, but in any case by nature of the Whole, which through the constant changing of its constituent parts keeps the whole world ever young and fresh.
>
> (Aurelius, 2006, p.119)

When acting as nature wants us to act, we experience no harm and do no harm. I read this passage from Marcus Aurelius and many similar passages from his *Meditations* as a philosophical turn towards "therapy-based philosophy," which combines the sub-fields of ontology, epistemology, and ethics. In such a philosophy, the therapeutic effects in the form of harm and no-harm are more fundamental than ontological categories such as "existing" or "not existing." In other passages from the same book, the Roman Stoic emperor allows two possible ontological theories – materialistic, according to which after our death atoms that built up our body return to atoms outside, and pantheistic, according to which individual consciousness returns to its source – the cosmic reason. Both seem to be possible for him, and both are good for him. He does not have to decide in favor of any of them. Such a decision is important from the point of view of ontology-based philosophy. What Marcus Aurelius cares about is not the theory of everything. He just keeps himself on the path of flourishing, moment after moment.

An individual's death is at the same time a condition for the Whole's well-being, as the Whole needs "the constant changing of its constituent parts." It is only this Whole that exists eternally. Only the Whole has a status of being. We talk about humans here not as existing independent beings but as sub-systems that can use knowledge and morality to flourish or wither. Sub-systems that can place themselves closer or further away from the center of *primordial aliveness*.

Similar therapy-based philosophical approaches, as opposed to ontology-based approaches, reoccur later within Western philosophy in writings of, for example, Michel de Montaigne, Arthur Schopenhauer, or Friedrich Nietzsche. They are also present in many Eastern philosophical schools, such as Buddhism. And they make philosophy the art of living rather than metaphysical speculation.

Attuning to nature, a central theme of ancient philosophies, means for Marcus Aurelius attuning to the laws of nature or perhaps even to the reason that governs the laws. What loves to hide and what philosophers should be after is not nature understood as environment, but the reason that makes the environment intelligent. Nature is reason or *logos*. It is important to remember this point, as the word "nature" was understood differently by different people and in different periods. Also, today, this word has various meanings.

Today we do not define nature as Heraclitus did as "the constitution or proper nature of each thing" and "a thing's process of realization, genesis, appearance, or growth" (Hadot, 2004, p. 7). The concept undertook dynamic evolution during the 2500 years of Western civilization. According to Hadot, Plato was responsible for placing logos, understood by him as the essence, within the human body as a soul, which should be freed from corporality to find itself in an optimal environment (of ideas). Natural environments of all sizes, stones and trees, mountains and seas, stars and planets, have got suddenly deprived of the highest intelligence and became "blind, spontaneous processes" (ibid., p. 22).

The stream of philosophy seeking flourishing in attunement to the process of life has survived both Plato and the Christian version of Platonism (Nietzsche called Christianity "Platonism for the people"), and sprang up immediately when given some space. Leonardo da Vinci wrote in the Renaissance of force running furiously to its own destruction (Hadot, 2004, p. 13). This force was, for him, a kind of intelligence.

Da Vinci develops a highly original theory of force, which he defines as:

> a spiritual capacity, an invisible power, which, by accidental violence, sensible bodies have engendered and implanted within insensible bodies, giving them a semblance of life; and this life is wonderful in its actions, as it violates and modifies the place and form of every created thing, running furiously to its own destruction, and producing in its course effects that are different on each occasion.
>
> (Cited in Hadot, 2004, p.13)

We have just encountered a description of a force intercepted and trapped within an individual organism. According to Leonardo, this force is impersonal and belongs neither to sensible nor to insensible bodies. But it affects both of them dynamically. This view, to which I will keep returning in this book, will be lost in the process of mechanization of nature, which began, according to Hadot, at the beginning of the seventeenth century. The mechanical characteristics were ascribed in antiquity solely to things created by humans and were perceived as something violating nature. Starting with Galileo, nature itself becomes perceived as mechanical. This idea will soon seduce philosophers' minds. Descartes writes in *Principles of Philosophy*:

> When a watch marks the time by means of the wheels of which it consists, this is no less natural for it than it is for a tree to produce fruit. This is why, just as a watchmaker, seeing a watch he has not made, can ordinarily judge, from whichever of its parts he considers, what are all the others that he does not see; so, by considering the effects and sensible parts of natural bodies, I have tried to come to know what those of their parts that are insensible must be.
>
> (Cited in Hadot, 2004, p. 126)

Such a picture of nature also prevails in Western societies today. It is not entirely insensitive, but plants and animals are endowed, for us, in a kind of deficient sensitivity. They cannot, for example, suffer as much as humans do. Their lives are worthless, at least for the meat-eating majority of our population. We credit animals with some kind of intelligence, but unlike ancient Stoics, for example, we do not credit the whole environment or universe with it. Stars are, for us, chunks of dead matter pushed and pulled by gravitational force, and not beings moving intelligently through the night sky and responding to cosmic intelligence.

The word "nature" evokes different associations for contemporary people. Mcphie and Clarke (2018), departing from a conclusion of the great significance of the word "nature" in shaping our world, propose eight "performances" of the word:

1 Scary nature: "scary, useless or dangerous, inhabited only by wild animals."
2 Scenic nature: "an ordered, neat, picturesque, specifically designed."
3 Utopian nature: "romantically idealized nature."
4 Scarier nature: "earthquakes, strychnine poison, sulphur dioxide, methane, piss, tsunamis, scorpions, rotting cabbage, snot, bile, viruses …"
5 Artificial nature: "false teeth, a plastic lawn, a tube of toothpaste, books, computers, stilettos, scissors, electric wire, cars, a guitar, a knife, a plastic flower …"
6 Affective nature: "a tear, a frown, a whisper, a tender touch, an annoying cough …"
7 Conceptual nature: "free speech, 56, fascism, yellow, the alphabet, China, nature, culture, place …"
8 Abstract nature: "a unicorn, pixies, an Orc, fairies, God, Bambi, Shiva, ghosts, ray …"

(Mcphie and Clarke, 2018, pp. 7, 8).

According to the article authors' intention, this list is to show how artificial is the distinction between nature and culture since all the eight concepts are "ecological processes" (ibid., p. 11). Consequently, concepts such as "reconnection to nature" are fallacious. We can talk, however, about the process of "naturing" or "environing" within, say, the context of outdoor education studies. They propose breaking from the Cartesian dualism and creating in the future ecology without an agent and postulate emerging a new type of philosophers as physicians, who will "critically play with the everyday concepts" and "literally create new material-conceptual worlds" (ibid., p. 14).

One philosophical approach within the spectrum of the current Western thought that perceives nature similarly creates a "new material-conceptual world" and acknowledges the coexistence of various cosmoses in a very

elegant way is known as the "enactive approach." It is based on statements like these:

> Human cognition is not the grasping of an independent, outside world by a separate mind or self, but instead the bringing forth or enacting of a dependent world of relevance in and through embodied action. Cognition as the enaction of a world means that cognition has no ground or foundation beyond its own history, which amounts to a kind of "groundless ground."
>
> (Varela et al., 2016, loc. 238)

And:

> Although it may seem as if there is a single, abiding self that functions as the controller of the mind, cognitive science indicates that what we call "the mind" is a collection of constantly changing, emergent processes that arise within a complex system comprising the brain, the rest of the body, and the physical and social environment, and in which we find no single, abiding, and controlling self.
>
> (Varela et al., 2016, loc. 282)

The enactive approach differs from traditional phenomenology by exploring also the meditative experience. This additional field of interest allows the "embodied reflection," which is possible only due to applying mindfulness to our daily experiences. Reflexion, in this approach, is understood as a form of experience, just as in the scheme of the Three Dramaturgies of Experience I will present in Chapter 2 of this book.

When analyzing the phenomenon of meditation in their book *Embodied Mind*, the authors direct our attention to the fact that analyzing the activity of the neural systems is a limited way to grasp the complexity of this phenomenon and "the cognitive processes that constitute mindfulness as a meaningful form of human experience and that cannot be fully understood unless described phenomenologically" (Varela et al., 2016, loc. 398). The neural system does not process information in the way computers do, as it is part of the whole environment in which the human body is immersed. What we call in the cartesian spirit "Human–nature relationship" should be investigated as embodied experience. For them, the human body is a self-organizing system aspiring to survive and maintain its own homeostasis. It is not a mechanical device receiving input from outside and producing output. In line with this approach, I refer in the book to neuro-research on meditation in the way as "a heuristic handle on certain limited aspects of mindfulness meditation practices as they have been recontextualized in the cognitive neuroscience laboratory, not an exhibition of some underlying and objective 'biological reality' of meditation, let alone a determination of the value of meditative practice as a way of life" (Varela et al., 2016, loc. 456).

By referring to "groundless ground" as a background from actions emerge, the authors of the discussed book distance themselves from the subject-object dualism. However, the fact that they write, for example, that it is not the mind that perceives a pregiven world, but the enactment of the world and mind, shows how difficult it is to untangle from dualist categories and how our language naturally expresses the cartesian metaphysical position. This is true to all Indo-European languages, and perhaps the Buddhist authors demonstrate the best strategy to deal with the problem – by inventing two categories of the truth: *sammutii-sacca* (conventional or relative truth), and *paramattha-sacca* (ultimate truth), and with them two levels of the truth.

> Of the two, conventional truth is the truthfulness of the customary terms used by the great majority of the people, such as "self exists," "men exist," "devas[1] exist," "Sakkas[2] exist," "elephants exist," "my head exists," and so on. This conventional truth is the opposite of the untruth, and so can overcome it. It is not a lie or lack of truthfulness […] Ultimate truth is the absolute truthfulness of assertion or negation in full and complete accordance with what is actual: the elementary, fundamental qualities of phenomena.
>
> (Ledi, 1986)

To express ultimate truth the Theravāda Buddhism invented highly technical language, used in a phenomenological text called *Abhidhamma*. In this book, I would like to propose a particular conceptual system of reference, which will reflect the dynamics of the process of life and overcome Cartesian dualism referring to the therapy-based philosophical approach. This book thus will not provide a definitive definition of nature or will not try to mark the line between nature and culture. Such definitions are demanded only from ontology-based philosophies and ways of thinking. From the position of a therapy-based philosophical approach, it is enough to describe the therapeutical results nature causes. The ways it acts, the states it evokes within ourselves, but also the measurable physical responses it produces on human organisms. This seems to be a reasonable approach when we consider the fact that the most brilliant philosophers of the past ate their teeth on producing such a definition. Nature loves to hide. It is a mystery, and trying to unveil it by means of semantics does not appreciate its complexity.

Descartes divided reality into two substances – "extended substance" and "thinking substance." The first one constitutes the physical world, the second all mental phenomena. As a result of this operation, mind and body belong to two separate spheres, almost as hostile to each other as they were during medieval times. Such a worldview would seem strange for the ancient Greeks. For them, what we consider today as belonging to the psychic realm, was counted as belonging to the body. Perception, for example, belonged to the body, not to a separate mental realm. Greek philosophers

most often defined the psyche as a mind permeating body. Apart from the body and the mind, always bound together, a second realm existed for them – that of reason.

Such a perspective meant different geography of identity, which must have influenced the Greeks' way of navigating in reality. Ancient Greeks lived closer to nature not because they did not have air-conditioned cars and houses as sterile as ours, but because they felt the environment literally pouring into themselves and their bodies opening to nature, creating an equilibrium governed by the laws of harmony. Their selves were more open than ours, writes William Lovitt, referring to Martin Heidegger's view on ancient Greek metaphysics:

> The phenomenon of the "subject" is itself not new. It was present among the Greeks. But there subject, *hypokeimenon*, that-which-lies-before (for the Greeks, that which looms up, e.g., an island or mountain), meant the reality that confronted man in the power of its presence (cf. Sem. 7). With Descartes at the beginning of the modern period, this meaning of *hypokeimenon*, subject, was decisively transformed.
>
> (In Heidegger, 1977, p. xxvi)

The psychic processes, which for us, post-Cartesians belong to a separate realm, for some of the Greek physicians belonged to the same realm as bodily sensations. Consequently, emotions depended according to them on the environment. Anger was the effect of deregulation of the liver's fluids, and this deregulation was influenced by factors like food consumed and lifestyle assumed. Anger could, consequently, be healed by means of regulating the food and the lifestyle. Many Greek philosophers expressed less radical views, giving more autonomy to psychic life, but it was only Descartes who, in the seventeenth century, finally set emotions free, depriving them of their bodily dependence. He made anger, grief, and desire building blocks of the independent self. The self itself got freed from belonging to the bodily and environmental processes. As an effect, even today, we can pump freely into the self all our desires, projections, and neuroses. Our responsibility for our emotional build-up since antiquity has immensely increased. What increased together with it was the tendency for feeling guilt and self-accusation. We became easier targets for all people, institutions, cultural formations, religions, or traditions, which feed on our feeling of guilt.

Professor Philip van der Eijk, in a transcript of a public lecture at the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne (van der Eijk, 2007) says that even for Plato, who introduced the eternal world of ideas, nature meant creating, growing, and disintegrating according to predetermined laws. Nature was physical, corporal, susceptible to rotting. Many Greek physicians-philosophers examined the body, searching, for example, for physical causes of epilepsy, ignoring the popular opinion that it was a sacred sickness resulting from genius or a god's or demon's incarnation into a human body. They

found the causes of epilepsy in the brain, in heredity, or the lost balance of bodily substances. From treaties such as "On the Sacred Disease" (*c*.420 BCE), we learn that thinking, emotions, and perception depend on bodily substances and organs. The word "soul" ("Psyche") – writes van der Eijk – is rarely met in these texts. And if it appears, it is defined as something depending on physicality.

Aristotle believed that body and soul are the two aspects of the same phenomenon. Anger was, for him, an example of boiling of the fire in the heart region. He used the simile of attuning while describing works of sensual consciousness (according to Eijk). As with a lyre, in which each string produces a different sound in reaction to a musician plucking it, sensual organs of the human body react to the environment. Due to the capacity of imagination, we are capable of processing these impulses into thoughts and opinions. It is not clear if Aristotle places somewhere on his map soul as a carrier of unique identity. If he does so, the placement is not in consciousness but in reason (*noûs*).

Emotions such as love or fascination, for example, do not belong, according to Aristotle to reason, but to the body–psyche complex. On the other hand, Descartes puts both emotions, sensations such as the feeling of pain, and mathematical numbers into one bag, that of consciousness. Wallace Matson (1966) states that the Greeks had no interest in the border between body and mind, at least not before what came after Aristotle. If they did delineate the two, sensual perception was always on the side of the body. For the Greeks, each state of consciousness other than reasoning was involved with body and environment. Descartes had freed such states from this involvement.

Contemporary Descarteses

After meditative attuning to sensations during one of my workshops, I noticed unexpectedly two angry faces: one belonged to a young red-haired woman with shining eyes and the second to a middle-aged grizzled man. This was a strange view. Usually, contact with sensations makes people's faces happy, often smiling. I asked the two about the reason for their facial expression. Each of them gave a different answer. The woman said that the exercise we did was a manipulation. Yes, she felt relaxed after it, and her thinking indeed became clearer, but she was sure that it was not an effect of the exercise but of my suggestion. After a short conversation, she made her point more precise: "I disagree with what you say that thoughts do not come from me" – she almost spat out this key sentence.

I realized that the anger came from the fear of losing her identity. She identified herself with her thoughts, and even a subtle suggestion that they can be effects of impersonal processes and not fully her author's creation irritated her a lot. As the workshop continued, she managed, however, to become more comfortable with this option.

The grizzled man did not do the sensation attuning exercise at all. What was interesting was his reason to resign from this activity. "I am not interested in such exercises," he said. Asked why, he explained: "I am only interested in the process of reasoning because only this process is certain. Attuning to sensations might be pleasant, but it can never be certain." Here I was talking with a contemporary Descartes, who not only did not want to accept that he is not solely his thoughts but was unable to allow even considering such a possibility. Both the red-haired woman and the grizzled man had something in common. They both identified themselves entirely with their processes of thinking. All that was not thinking within their experience seemed for them not to be them.

The question is: Why do we identify so eagerly with thoughts and not with other aspects of our experience, like sensations or consciousness itself? What is special in thoughts that makes them so ideal as candidates for such identification? One line of reasoning would be considering how thoughts generate, enhance, and sometimes soothe our anxiety. They appear and disappear in our field of experience quickly and in concrete forms, ready to be consumed, like pills, as if they were summaries of emotions. As the ancient Stoics realized, they may radically change our mood in no time. I am having a gloomy morning after not sleeping well and realizing immediately after waking up how terrible the weather is and how much tedious work is left for me to do, but remembering my soccer team winning a game last night can elevate my mood in one second. Perhaps we treat our thoughts as pills, using them as an inner therapy when we can.

Thoughts differ from moods and emotions. They seem to be our products. Even if they are ours, moods and emotions do not seem to be entirely of our authorship; they seem to be "made" by other people or situations. Perhaps thoughts make us identify with them so eagerly because of the sense of agency they bring with them. It may also explain why we are drawn so powerfully to electronic devices. You can see so many people playing mesmerizing games on their phones in a subway station in Rome because they can influence the game's result but cannot make the train come earlier and not be overcrowded. The mode of being present in the world in which feeling alive depends on our efficiency in fulfilling tasks and achieving results and not on the direct contact with *primordial aliveness* becomes more and more problematic due to the problems it causes for the environment and our own health and sense of happiness. *Perhaps it is not nature that loves to hide from us, but us loving to hide from nature.*

We live in revolutionary times. We have realized the limits of the Cartesian vision and the negative environmental consequences of the attitude it causes. However, the critique of the Cartesian position started immediately after the French philosopher announced them in 1640s, by philosopher Pierre Gassendi and Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia. Shortly after the death of Descartes, Spinoza created a powerful philosophical system, proposing a metaphysical re-union of mind and body and a departure from Cartesian

dualism. He proposed one substance instead of two: "By substance I understand what is in itself and is conceived through itself," he wrote (Nadler, 2020). Opposition to Descartes resulted in some of the best writings within Western philosophy and keeps doing so. A relatively recent phase of the phenomenon produced thoughts such as these of John Dewey (1859–1952), who wrote:

> So it is not simply that we happen to have *an* organism drop down into *an* environment and then these two react upon each other. It is quite the opposite. Organism and environment are the two things which converge in the life process. We do not begin with the two things and have them react and produce the life process.
>
> (Cited in Skorburg, 2013, p. 68)

The practice of today's science and humanities, even if at the level of concepts it corrects Descartes's metaphysical stance, still often expresses Cartesian assumptions.[3] One interesting critique of these assumptions is the work of German philosopher Hermann Schmitz, whose ideas found their way to practical application in areas such as psychiatry. For him, the current view of human subjects is a result of a historical process. Our civilization has invented the soul, or as we call it today mind, as a "private, inner realm of subjective experience," which resulted in creating "a corresponding 'grinding down' of the world of live experienced to a meagre, value neutral 'objective reality'" (Shmitz et al., 2011, p. 241). As a result, our attention has lost its sensitivity. We cannot perceive nuances of reality, which could be perfectly felt by someone from outside of our culture, who perceives herself as a cell pulsating in life's tissue.

Schmitz's philosophical system offers an intriguing map of human beings, radically different than that of Descartes. He writes about the "abstraction base" typical for a culture in a given time. He defines it as "a set of fundamental ideas or concepts so deeply entrenched in common experience that they provide a deep framework of intelligibility in which all things appear in experience and that shape the terms in which everything is routinely understood and interpreted" (Shmitz et al., 2011, p. 244). Today's "abstraction base" is that of mind–body dualism.

Schmitz offers his philosophy as a means to regain this lost sensitivity. He evokes the concept of "felt body," or *Leib* in German, the notion of corporeal communication, and the theory of emotions as spatial atmospheres. *Leib* is a dynamic and rhythmical process, manifesting itself, for example, as vigor and languidness. The world outside *Leib* is a collection of dynamically changing atmospheric fields, fluctuating in various forms. The aim of a philosopher, or a new phenomenologist, to keep to Schmitz's vocabulary is to feel these dynamics. Only later can she employ theoretical thinking. Usually, we act the other way around. We infect dynamic reality with our "abstraction base." As stated by Müllan and

Slaby (co-authors of the article quoted above, which consists of both the outline of Schmitz philosophy and the first English translation of the passages from his work):

> The felt body with its characteristic corporeal dynamics between expansion and contraction and its sensitivity to surfaceless spaces and room-filling atmospheres forms the backbone of Schmitz's theory of subjectivity and self-consciousness. The key notion here is that of affective involvement: the conscious subject's constantly being affected by and involved with what goes on – an involvement both realized and mediated by corporeal feelings that in turn make manifest (disclose) goings-on in the environment. Affective involvement is an immediate, pre-reflective, not yet articulated self-consciousness – Schmitz calls it "self-consciousness without identification."
>
> (Shmitz et al., 2011, p. 245)

In the torture situation described in this chapter, sensual perception of a person locked in the torture chamber is limited almost to nil (headphones, blind goggles, etc.), expansion and contraction are limited to breathing in and out, and sensitivity to room-filling atmospheres impossible. Such a person cannot be self-conscious, which is precisely what Cameron wished in order to complete his project of implanting a new personality into his subjects' bodies. Schmitz's theory nicely explains what happened to Cameron's victims. It also explains to some extent the state of the catatonic schizophrenics sitting motionlessly on the Volterra Mental Hospital bench. Some psychosomatic mechanisms had produced in their case a similar effect of disconnection with the rhythms of the environment. A similar situation of disconnecting can happen to anyone experiencing states of upheaval or shock, which express themselves on the bodily side as freezing or excessive movement. The degree of our connection to the intelligence of the environment determines our presence in the world.

I define presence as a default metaphysical stance governing our actions, a psychosomatic state, and cognitive and affective sensibility at the same time that happens to us when we are awake and are not acting for gaining anything or escaping a danger (which does not mean not moving). This sensibility can be measured by the readiness of attention to respond to particular features of the process of life, producing what I call dramaturgies of presence, which I will describe in the next chapter. As we experience it while it is flying, the process of life assumes the form of such dramaturgies. The more sensible attention, the more subtle dramaturgies reveal themselves within the field of attention. Contemplative traditions teach us how to make attention more sensitive in order to attune to such dramaturgies, which I will demonstrate in the next chapter by analyzing Buddhist meditation. Presence is our starting point into life's adventures before we even begin conscious actions.

Today's psychology ignores presence. Economy and daily habits treat the possibility of attention to stay at high levels of sensitivity as a danger since it tempers human ambition to conquer the world. Pedagogy does not care much about it (the exception being what is called today "contemplative pedagogy") and art has little awareness of it. It is outside the borders of what seems to us today to be "normality." The economic, political, and social systems of contemporary Western societies are all blind to the contemplative ways of living.

As I will try to demonstrate, presence understood in this way is influenced by exposing our organisms to the natural environment. Such exposure changes our initial impulses to acting in the world, our values, and ways of acting. If our species is to survive and flourish, we need mainstream culture to learn to recognize and learn from this rhythmical presence of humans in the natural world. Human beings who transfer or have transferred by "specialists" on torture or marketing their attention to the unembodied psychic or digital realms are deprived of the intimate relationship with the rhythms of nature (which it is possible to regain through being active in nature), lose the sense of harmony, and risk self-destruction. Today's neuropsychology can more and more effectively estimate the price we pay for this disconnection with nature.

Thriving in Nature

It is surprising that today, despite all our science, we know so little about the relationship between us humans and the natural environment. In recent years, research from multiple fields has shown that this relationship has a serious impact on humans' well-being and health. We thrive in nature, but we are not sure why. Many ideas suggest the necessity of humans' reunion with nature, such as the Norwegian concept of *frilufstliv*, or wilderness therapy. There are also hypotheses explaining the fact of human's thriving in nature, such as Biophilia (Wilson, 1984) or Attention Restoration Theory (Kaplan and Kaplan, 1989), which are discussed and even applied to areas such as architecture. The Biophilia hypothesis suggests that we have a primordial connection with the natural world, and this is why we are predisposed to respond positively to the natural environment. The Attention Restoration Theory assumes that the natural world has the capacity to seduce our attention and reduce attentional fatigue acquired due to our lifestyle in artificial settings. The hypotheses are intriguing, but according to some critics, their explanatory power is limited and foundations fragile (e.g., Joye and De Block, 2011). They tend to be anthropocentric and, according to some studies, belong to a deterministic tradition as they are fastened on Cartesian dualism (e.g., Brymer and Schweizer, 2017). Most of their explanatory power depends on relying on the evolution theory, which is broad enough to support even contradictory hypotheses, as long as it is not complemented by empirical data.

In the case of Biophilia, for example, which in its classical definition proclaims the innate human tendency to focus on and affiliate with life forms and life-like processes (Wilson, 1984), even the very definition is not clear. Virtually all the keywords, such as focus and life-like, used in the definition are vague (Joye and De Block, 2011), and the word "innate" places this definition within the philosophical approach, according to which individuals are separate beings. However, hypotheses such as Biophilia indicate the direction of thinking of the scientists towards a new metaphysical description of reality, which would not be Cartesian in spirit. They also facilitated (and were facilitated by) exciting research on the human–nature relationship, which showed how even minimal exposure to natural patterns could positively influence human health and well-being.

The happy future of humanity depends on our relationship with nature, preaches Richard Louv, author of *The Nature Principle*. Only in nature can we re-encounter eternal patterns and rhythms of life, of which we have lost touch in the city, with its rigid cycles of shuttling between office and home (often, just a high-rise apartment), ignoring many biological demands. We live in mechanical time. And this heats up that hard disc we call our brain.

In nature, the brain gets reset. Literally, it releases excess information, cooling overheated neuronal circuits. There is quite a body of evidence that makes this statement scientific rather than romantic. In one experiment, urban dwellers were herded by researchers for two weeks to the unfamiliar environment of the woods, only to experience a new sense of calm and clarity, as well as increased creativity (Louv, 2011, loc. 485). The experiment also showed that when immersed in nature, it is best not to have any agenda. The control group, which was engaged in intensive climbing activities, had fewer such experiences.

But you do not have to go to the forest to feel the beneficial effects of nature. Twenty minutes of looking at green trees reduces the stress hormone cortisol in saliva by 13.4 percent, as shown in a study at Chiba University, which monitored 260 people from 24 different locations in Japan (Tsunetsugu et al., 2007). Our brain is happier when it is not employed to focus too much attention on specific items or tasks and instead is freely allowed to latch its attention onto whatever comes its way. What we experience, in the second case, can be called "fascination," a state of mind which was highly valued by the Buddhists, who created a technique of mindfulness meditation. Mindfulness meditation in the Buddhist tradition, by no accident, is often termed "choiceless" or "effortless awareness." The state of mind it brings is achieved by the complete opening of our attention to whatever appears in its field, without discriminating, rejecting, or clinging to anything. Being in nature provokes this state. On the contrary, try and find a digital gadget – be it a phone, a tablet, a notebook, or a game platform – that produces and sustains this kind of attention.

Here are some of the other research results collected in Louv's book, a small part of research contained in the book in general (Louv, 2011):

- After an hour spent in nature, the subject's memory efficiency improves by 20 percent, and their attention span extends significantly.
- There is a significant reduction of ADHD syndrome in children staying in nature.
- The bacterium *Mycobacterium vaccae*, which is present in the soil, when administered to mice, reduces by half the time needed by the animal to pass the maze successfully.

Patients in a hospital in Pennsylvania had recovered faster after the same surgeries when they saw the trees through their rooms' windows instead of a brick wall. They needed fewer pain-relieving drugs and made fewer negative comments about the work of the nurses. These results suggest that nature wants our good. And the best thing we can do is not to disturb it.

Since Louv's book was published, research confirming nature enhancing human health has rocketed. It must have been convincing since in Scandinavian countries, but not only there, therapy in open-air began to be prescribed by doctors to patients. Today we know that living in wild areas is good for our health – wilderness provides the healthiest set of rhythms for us. The more biodiverse the trail we choose to walk to heal ourselves, the more effective (Wood, 2017). Time is a factor: more prolonged exposure to nature brings better effects, which is bad news in the light of the fact that, e.g., in the United Kingdom, the average person spends 95 percent of her time indoor, including eight hours in front of the screen (Hamman and Ivtzan, 2016).

On the other hand, various forms of presence in nature are becoming more and more popular, such as *Shinrin-yoku* (forest bath), a practice that originates from Japan and has become popular in the USA and Europe. Research by Tsunetsugu et al. (2007) showed that saliva cortisol level decreases during or after a forest walk and blood pressure and heart rate lowers. I do not treat these data as saying anything about the ontological reality of the world.[4]

From the perspective of this book, especially interesting is nature's influence on what is named in contemporary literature "eudaimonic well-being" (described as the lasting sense of meaning, purpose, sense of self-development, and development of virtue), as this is a term close to what was known in antiquity as flourishing. One recent meta-analysis (Pritchard et al., 2020) shows that the more we are connected to nature, the greater our eudaimonic well-being and sense of personal growth. Connectedness with nature enhances our eudaimonic well-being much stronger than our hedonistic satisfaction does. The sense of the meaning of life is stronger due to this connection and is associated with the sense of belonging to a greater whole.

This eudaimonic well-being, so much enhanced by nature, has specific components. It is often measured with Ryf's scale of psychological well-being, which has six subscales: personal growth (being open to new ideas and experiences and realizing one's full potential), purpose in life (presence of goals in life and feelings of meaningfulness), autonomy (self-

determination and independence), environmental mastery (a sense of competence in managing the context in which one lives), self-acceptance (having a positive attitude towards the self), and positive relations with others. We can add to this list vitality, defined as having physical and mental energy and associated with feeling more alive, being engaged with the world, and being outdoors in the presence of natural elements. Connectedness with nature has the strongest association with personal growth and uplifting experiences (Pritchard et al., 2020), described as reaching a new level of awareness or self-transcendence. One result of being connected to nature is having metaphysically active experiences, which modify the usual, everyday sense of self and reality, changing borders between the two.

It is interesting that while familiar natural objects enhance our sense of tranquility, the unfamiliar ones invite us to such metaphysically active experiences stimulating new ideas and pushing us towards provoking even more new experiences. The most effective places for facilitating these experiences are mountains and vistas, storms, or "objects with infinite repetition such as fractals, waves and patterns in nature" (Pritchard et al., 2020, p.1162). They are directing our attention to what is much greater than ourselves, providing a contest, which, I think, can be fairly named "metaphysical."

Similarly, ancient Greek and Roman philosophers understood eudaimonia or flourishing in a broad metaphysical context of humans being a part of the whole universe. Flourishing was, for them, a process of growth. A philosopher needs to activate and carefully care about this growth, which consists of various practices, such as developing virtues such as courage, patience, and wisdom.

Exposing oneself to the natural patterns of nature, can be described as an advanced form of mindfulness. This aspect facilitates a complete awareness of what is happening in our field of experience (as in regular mindfulness) and involves conscious attuning to the rhythms of nature, which can be best achieved through physical interactions with the natural environment. Unlike interventions from the first category, these interventions do not employ thinking or visualizing, but utilize exercises based on sensory perception (Fabjański and Brymer, 2017).

I think that we should not waste this insight. Just as we need a new presence for our species to survive the environmental catastrophe, we need a new metaphysics in which such a presence is granted, one our neoliberal self is lacking. If cartesian metaphysics was designed to keep up with the discoveries of mathematics and classical physics and was accompanied by the crash of the theological model of reality, this new metaphysics – which is accompanied by the perspective of the end of the human civilization – needs to keep up with discoveries of new scientific fields, such as quantum biology. It needs to break with the present paradigm of thinking we live by. This new metaphysics should be based on the understanding of the rhythms in which life pulsates on our planet.

The OSI hypothesis (introduced in Fabjański 2014, 2019; Fabjański and Brymer 2017) tries to explain on the metaphysical level the mechanism of the human–nature relationship. It breaks with the default assumption of contemporary Western culture and social practice, as well as a large part of the contemporary philosophy that we experience the world from its center. Rather than that, it suggests that *specifically developed habits of attention place our experience in the peripheries of life*. We experience the world from a particular perspectival view. This realization is known to science and philosophy, at least since the quantum world was discovered (although the social life of the neoliberal cultural formation often does not recognize it).

To investigate the human–nature relationship, I will try to think of both humans and nature as processes, or to be more precise as one process. The second is metaphysically central, the first peripheral. Consequently, I will focus on the dynamics of the relationship and how the rhythms of nature come into attunement with human psychophysical reality, similar to what happens to a tuning fork. I will investigate the results of such attunement at various levels, cognitive not being the least important. I hope this will help better understand the mechanism of the beneficial influence of nature on us, humans.

Apart from arguing for purposeful, embodied action as a support for the practice of reunion with nature that recognizes humans as part of the process of life, I want to present in this book metaphysics, ethics, and a method of meditation, which will make possible developing intimacy with nature by attuning to its rhythms and acting from such an existential position.

Themes for Contemplation

1 Here is an old introspective theme undertaken by various thinkers, from the Buddha to David Hume, as well as some contemporary philosophers of mind: Is there anything in my experience I could call self? Is there a core, a nucleus that I can extract from the stream of my experience?
2 For a while, put into a bracket the mechanical vision of the world. Think of mountains, soil, and water in rivers, seas, and oceans as living phenomena. Imagine them breathing and having some kind of awareness. You can follow Leonardo da Vinci's intuition of mountains as bones, soil the muscle, and rivers the planet's veins. Observe how this new vision influences your thinking about yourself and your relationship with the planet Earth.
3 Whenever you have a chance, observe the behavior of wild animals. How do they interact with the environment? How do they know the ways of interacting with the environment they live in? Does the intelligence beyond this interaction seem to come from the animals' brains or hearts, or does it appear to be orchestrated as if from outside, animals and the environment being equal parts of it?

Notes

1 Beings belonging to the so-called fine-material sphere of existence, invisible to people untrained in meditation.
2 Kings of the devas.
3 For an excellent discussion on the historical background and consequences of the Cartesian dualism see Westphal (2016).
4 I do not mean to assume reductively materialistic positions or uphold the Cartesian vision of reality by referring to them. Just as "endorphin" and "cortisol" are ways of interpreting living organisms and not simple natural realities, all the neurological and neuro-psychological research is simply used in this book as a system of reference that allows measuring the intensity and direction of changes taking place in organisms.

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2 Dramaturgies of Presence

Meeting of Cosmoses

Within the astonishing richness of life, various sub-cosmoses meet in unexpected places like the abandoned psychiatric hospital in Volterra, Italia. Human consciousness – frozen as in the case of catatonics or overactive as in the case of artist Fernando Nannetti, who sculpts philosophical statements in a language unknown to anybody else – meets the buzzing vitality of trees and bushes, and the seemingly dead cosmos of an old stone bench. In Chapter 1 of this book, we made an initial inquiry into how these sub-cosmoses coexist. *We discovered that being cut from the pulsating rhythms of the planet Earth is devastating, at least for human consciousness and bodies, and puts both of them into a state of stagnation, in which instead of flourishing, they wither*. This was demonstrated by the results of experiments on people put for a prolonged period of time into an isolation chamber by a scientist or torture chamber by the CIA.

Our perception of the world is determined by a habit of attention that places us in the realm of the medium-size objects in space or in the spaceless realm of thoughts, images, and other mental phenomena. Putting our attention in these worlds cuts us from the vibrant vitality of *primordial aliveness*, to which, for example, trees in the ruins of the psychiatric hospitals seem to have complete and unlimited access. We have reasons to think that our life's quality depends on access to this *primordial aliveness*. Existing far away from this aliveness, at its periphery, within a second hand, processed vitality is typical for contemporary persons with their style of living and perception of the world built from dead matter and organized mechanically like a classical hand-watch. Leonardo da Vinci described the human organism as a trap for an impersonal spiritual force acting in both sensible and not sensible bodies. Born just 77 years after Leonardo's death, René Descartes holds a totally different picture of two substances – thinking and extended – which meet in the human organism but hardly touch each other. He locates the human center in consciousness, more specifically in the process of thinking.

Since then, thinkers such as Spinoza have tried to free us from this picture, but it seems that the Cartesian vision suits well the contemporary

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ego, which likes placing the center of the cosmos within itself. In our times, we need philosophers such as Hermann Schmitz to remind us of the pulsating nature of reality if we want to uncover the secret of nature, which, as Heraclitus declared, "loves to hide." In order to do so, we need to look at thoughts not as the building blocks of our center but as results of the process of exchange of our organism with the environment, even if we are not consciously aware of this exchange due to our cultural determinations. We are a dynamic presence in the process of life, of which thoughts are only a tiny part.

Our presence on planet Earth – which I define as a default metaphysical stance governing our actions – is not given. As ancient schools of philosophy teach, we can influence this presence to activate and mature the process of flourishing, which leads to eudaimonia or the highest happiness. For these schools, eudaimonia is, among others, a result of attuning to the rhythms of nature. To make this return from the peripheries of life to the vital center of primary aliveness possible, new metaphysics, ethics, and pedagogy are needed, ones that will renew our intimacy with nature and allow us to act in accordance with nature's laws.

If right now, while writing this book, I would like to describe my world, this description would look pretty much like this: "I'm sitting in a room with white walls, a battered plank floor, behind a white table with red legs from Ikea, and I tap the keyboard of my Dell laptop." In this sentence, I seem to stick to the facts, and yet I can challenge each of the small particulars that make up this one-sentence description. And I don't mean the fact that, at the quantum level, everything I have described is a void in which sub-particles circulate. I can question this description entirely without even leaving the realm of classical physics.

The static act of "sitting" consists of thousands of micro-movements. "Room" is a pure concept. I could seal and lock the door, pour water inside, let goldfish in and call it an "aquarium." Had I some artistic talent, I could turn the floor into a musical instrument because it creaks when I step on it, producing different sounds in different spots, making the room "a musical instrument." The fact that its boards are worn does not mean anything because each board is worn – none is untouched by the decay process. A white table with red legs from Ikea will also not resist such an analysis. What does Ikea mean, for example? Is it a logo, a material basis for shops and factories, or maybe people working in this company? The reader can tell if I really am "tapping the Dell laptop keyboard."

When we stop seeing the environment as a composition of objects and see it instead as processes in various phases of decay, the world may become less attractive. The satisfaction drawn from possessing objects evaporates to some degree, together with the realization that they depend on natural processes rather than on us and that the processes are "cruel" – whatever appears is destined to die. Now it becomes more challenging to see the world as a means of satisfying our lusts, which only means that we are

attached to concepts rather than to phenomena themselves. Various eudaimonic pedagogies, such as Buddhist or Stoic, promise us that as a result of perceiving things as expressions of the process of emerging and decaying, our emotions will change, and we will become more equanimous. It is easier for me to get attached to my laptop than to a combination of plastic, metal, and silicon.

I have just made one simple conceptual operation, shifting a bit my perspective, and it affected cosmoses that had met in my room: the cosmos of things themselves, which have lost some of their compactness, and the cosmos of my emotions, which become more spacious and equal. What has changed radically is the territory of what is me and mine. However, I did not even begin meditation as prescribed by various philosophical schools, known as introspection. The world we live in changes much more fundamentally if we direct our analytically disposed attention to within, below the skin that seems to separate us from the environment. We know that from many philosophical traditions, which employed meditation as a cognitive tool.

The Buddhist insight meditation tradition is one of them. It invites our attention to leave the metaphysical landscape of objects in space and spaceless thoughts and travel to different terrains. Following the theory behind this practice may provide us with a new insight into how we construct the metaphysics of our presence in the world. The Buddhist tradition of insight meditation is, at the same time, a tradition from which the popular term "mindfulness" has been extracted. Let us start with this popular concept.

Mindfulness and Beyond

Do we really know what mindfulness is? Jon Kabat-Zinn defines it as "the awareness that arises from paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally" (Kabat-Zinn, 2017, p. 1127). This definition, which is widely used in academic writings, clinical settings, and popular literature, grasps the essence of the practice of mindfulness meditation in its static form. However, the Buddhist *Satipaṭṭhāna sutta*, the most important text from which the concept of mindfulness was imported into the Western world, describing various ways of applying mindfulness, proposes *a sequential practice* directed towards a conclusion which is, among other things, the overcoming of suffering. The model of the Three Dramaturgies of Presence (3DP), which I would like to propose now, expands Kabat-Zinn's definition by describing in a simple way the dynamics of mindfulness practice.

Kabat-Zinn refers to clear comprehension (Pāli: *sampajañña*; Kabat-Zinn, 2017, p.1133) as a concept connected with mindfulness (*sati*), using the two together to broaden the understanding of mindfulness practice. The 3DP model clearly demonstrates how *sampajañña* works, which I will show later in this chapter. The model also opens up, both for mindfulness practitioners

and researchers of mindfulness, a dimension of meta-mindfulness attention, named by Langer "second-order mindfulness" and defined by him as "choosing what to be mindful about" (in Lundh, 2020, p. 501).

Why is meta-mindfulness important for our way of thinking? Because it can accelerate what in Buddhism is called insight. And insight, in this tradition, is what takes us from the familiar landscape of middle-size objects in space into different realms, modifying metaphysical constants present in the perception of a person who is not trained in meditation. From this perspective, what happened to Cameron's victims described in the previous chapter, would be the opposite of insight. Still, it had involved the exact mechanism of modification of metaphysical constants: space and time.

Petitmengin et al. (2017) found that even advanced meditators recognized that the microphenomenological post-interview that followed meditation sessions helped them to become aware of unnoticed elements in their experience. The authors concluded that the interview "has a learning effect: the increased awareness provided by the interview brings more clarity and precision in subsequent meditations and even outside of meditation sessions" (ibid., p. 193). Recognizing previously unnoticed elements and especially the correlations between them is a precondition of any insight. The 3DP model aims at the same effect of providing clarity, but unlike the microphenomenological interview, which follows practice, it could be applied *a priori*, as a conceptual framework organizing meditative experience.

Defending today's mindfulness practices in the West from those who accuse them of being rather shallow as compared to ancient Buddhist meditation, Anālayo writes that Buddha taught meditation also for the purpose of improving the health[1] of his students, and "since the beginnings of Buddhism there has been a scope for employments of mindfulness that are not explicitly aimed at progress to awakening" (Anālayo, 2020, p. 474). However, as the design of the *Satipaṭṭhāna sutta*, some research (to which I will return later in this book), and my students' practice all show, even initial engagement in mindfulness meditation may activate dynamics that go far beyond relaxation effects. *It is not always up to the practitioner of mindfulness meditation to clearly define the practice's confines and to shut off what was traditionally known as the process of awakening as soon as the desired relaxation results are achieved*. The cognitive processes activated by mindfulness meditation may lead to modification of what we can call the metaphysical constants of premeditative states, such as the usual perception of space and time, which may cause confusion or fear in an unprepared practitioner.

During my experience as a meditation teacher, I occasionally meet students who are amazed or even frightened by experiencing changes on the fundamental level of perceiving reality. A certified teacher of mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), who was also a participant in my workshop, asked me during a retreat if she should stop teaching MBSR courses on

ethical grounds. She herself had experienced changes in her perception of time and space as a result of the practice, could not comprehend them, and as a result, felt fear. She did not find a sufficient explanation for such changes within the theoretical framework of the MBSR and was doubtful whether she should keep teaching practices that she did not fully understand.

I do not think that meditative activities, even as "innocent" as practices of mindfulness, could be used solely for achieving relaxation or a better mood. For these goals, there are different effective techniques. Applying mindfulness in meditation initiates a revolutionary process of destroying metaphysical constants and moving towards *primordial aliveness*. It will not open for the practitioner access to the world as she wishes (e.g., relaxed and happy), but to the world as it is, the truth, nature, what is called in Buddhism the *dhamma*. As healthy as this process is on the existential level, it does not consist of collecting only pleasant experiences. Some research shows that mindfulness meditation practices can be accompanied by adverse events, particularly anxiety and depression (Farias et al., 2020). The anxiety may result from the fact that practitioners do not understand the logic and the ultimate aim of the *Satipaṭṭhāna sutta*-based meditation, as they are not sufficiently explained in the contemporary context. The critique of mindfulness practice, which points to, for example, inconclusive studies on this subject and the fact that researchers, popular book authors, and journalists ignore the negative effects of the practice, can be an impulse to better understand what mindfulness is. And this may lead to further insight into human existence:

> To improve the quality of research into mindfulness we first need clear and comprehensive theories of how it works that acknowledge the range of experiences people can have when they meditate.
>
> (Farias and Wikholm, 2016, p. 331)

The 3DP model is designed to provide an easily grasped picture that shows the dynamics and consequences of mindfulness meditation and, more generally, of our contemplative involvement in the tissue of life. The model demonstrates two aspects of the *Satipaṭṭhāna sutta*-based meditation: the logic according to which it unfolds (the dynamic aspect) and its ability to modify the metaphysical constants usually present in the perception of reality of an untrained person. The term "*Satipaṭṭhāna sutta*-based meditation" refers to all meditation practices that are inspired by that sutta, which cover monastic practices popular in Buddhist Asian monasteries (such as Mahasi Sayadaw, U Ba Khin, and Shwe Oo Min styles of practice), similar practices used in secular contexts (e.g., Goenka style),[2] and mindfulness practices such as MBSR.

Pedagogy of Awakening in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*

Like other schools of ancient philosophy, the Buddhist schools aim at what can be summarized as human flourishing and provide an active

practice leading to this goal. The practice Buddhism proposes fundamentally changes the practitioner's existential position to the extent that he or she starts to be called a "noble one" (*arya*). The *Satipaṭṭhāna sutta* was designed as an aid to accompany the process of gradual practice that leads towards "awakening" or "abandoning suffering" or "knowing *nibbāna*" (all these terms often appear in Buddhist publications). The goal of the meditation practice the sutta advocates is precisely to destroy false metaphysical assumptions of the existence of a separated self or being. Without realizing awakening, the pedagogical goal of the sutta is not fulfilled. Understanding the sutta's pedagogical ambition has practical implications, especially in the light of the popularity of the concept and the practice of mindfulness in today's world. Some research shows that mindfulness-centered meditation practices can be accompanied by adverse events, particularly anxiety and depression (Farias et al., 2020). The anxiety may result from the fact that practitioners do not understand the logic and the ultimate aim of the *Satipaṭṭhāna sutta*-based meditation, as they are not sufficiently explained in the contemporary secular context.

The practice is structured according to the four applications of mindfulness (*sati*) – to the body, feelings, consciousness, and the nature of the process of life – arranged in a logical order, according to the degree of sensitivity of the student's attention. I propose a different translation for the fourth application – *dhammānupassanā* – than is usually used, not "insight into mind-objects" (as in Bodhi, 2009), but "insight into the nature of the process of life," to indicate its function. The fourth application consists wholly of that use of the conceptual framework during the process of meditation, which inclines students' attention in a specific way, which helps them to grasp the universal characteristics of conditioned reality as being unstable, unsatisfactory, and non-personal (the only unconditioned reality being *nibbāna*, which we cannot conceptualize).

Eviatar Shulman states that the sutta goes far beyond proposing non-partial attention to what is present. As he writes, the very term mindfulness (*sati*), which is fundamental to all contemporary mindfulness-related practices, has another function to being present in a non-partial way, which is "shaping of vision so that it will correspond to the contents of a specific Buddhist 'memory'" (Shulman, 2010, p. 402). "Memory" is one of the possible translations of the term *sati*, and from the sutta content, we can conclude that it means functionally what I call "attention inclining conceptual framework" or to put it in Shulman's words: "structuring of awareness, intended to produce a particular way of generating experience" (ibid., p. 403).

While applying *sati*, we do not only observe our experience, but we also shape it. We want to modify our experience, or perhaps the better expression would be to retrieve the truth from experience as if we were trying to persuade nature that loves to hide to reveal itself. From the description of the effect of the training in the sutta as "ignorance abandoned" and "no longer clinging to sensual pleasures" (Bodhi, 2009, p. 163), we can assume

that the sutta not only suggests replacing one conditioning by another, as Shulman observes (Shulman, 2010, p. 404) but eventually a radical de-conditioning of the habits of attention. As an effect, attention finds itself in full adherence to nature (*dhamma*), which is a state of total freedom from any conceptual framework. From the philosophical perspective, based on the analysis of various practices present in ancient schools of both East and West, such as Stoicism, Daoism, and Buddhism, the flourishing or mind-developing process aims at becoming fully attuned to nature (Greek: *oikeiôsis*) and the destruction of any conceptual filters.

Such a fundamental auto-pedagogical endeavor is designed as a lifelong practice, for which the sutta or a patient teacher offers the student intelligent instructions, which are different at different stages of the process, just as is happening today in Theravāda Buddhist monasteries across Asia as experienced by the author. The pedagogy behind such a project must start logically with the ordinary stream of consciousness of an untrained person (for which I suggest the term "ambient consciousness") and continue with providing an effective way of refining it.

The *Satipaṭṭhāna sutta* suggests that the student (monk or *bhikkhu*) start this process by practicing mindfulness of breathing up to the point when "mindfulness that 'there is a body' is simply established in him to the extent necessary for bare knowledge and mindfulness" (Bodhi, 2009, p. 146). Then the sutta suggests proceeding with applying attention to a class of obvious and easily grasped objects of attention – the postures of the body.

It is an interesting introductory passage that shows that establishing mindfulness does not happen based on a simple change of perspective into one that is non-partial and present-focused. From the very beginning, the practice asks the adept to carefully choose a suitable object of attention.

Imagine that you have just arrived in Asia with an intention to meditate intensively. After a day or two, when you no longer have jet lag, you present yourself to a teacher at one of the monasteries in which training is modeled after the *Satipaṭṭhāna sutta*. After a few days/weeks/months of observing the various qualities of the breath, depending on the progress of your meditation, the teacher-monk asks you to switch your attention to the postures.

> When walking, a bhikkhu understands: "I am walking"; when standing, he understands: "I am standing"; when sitting, he understands "I am sitting"; when lying down, he understands "I am lying down"; or he understands accordingly, however his body is disposed.
>
> (Bodhi, 2009, p. 146)

You have practiced diligently, and again, after a period of time, the teacher, realizing your progress in sensitization of attention, modifies the instructions. This time you are supposed to attune your attention to more specific objects: the actions of your body, such as looking ahead or

extending limbs. According to the logic of the sutta, a student proceeds to this stage when her attention registers the positions of the body easily, almost effortlessly, or as the text puts it, "acts in full awareness." The student knows that he or she is sitting, walking, standing, or lying down and is also aware of most of her bodily actions. Now, the student's attention is stronger, and in order to continue the training, it demands more subtle objects. The pedagogy of the *Satipaṭṭhāna sutta*-based meditation satisfies this need, offering the student the exercise known as "contemplation of the foulness of the body," designed to weaken her attachment to the body. After this is done successfully, the student's attention is not only more sensitive but also less attached to the metaphysical landscape of space filled with separate objects, including objects known as human bodies. Now the time has come to leave this familiar metaphysical landscape. The teacher gives new instructions for applying attention to the four elements: earth, water, fire, and wind.

> Again, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu reviews this same body, however it is placed, however disposed, by way of elements thus: "In this body there are the earth element, the water element, the fire element, and the air element." Just as though a skilled butcher or his apprentice had killed a cow and was seated at the crossroads with it cut up into pieces; so too, a bhikkhu reviews this same body … by way of elements thus: "In this body there are the earth element, the water element, the fire element, and the air element."
>
> (Bodhi, 2009, p. 148)

When we incline our attention to the elements, a significant metaphysical turn happens. The physical landscape of objects in space our attention is immersed in gets replaced by a new one: a landscape of processes. For more details on elemental meditation, we can turn to the contemporary teacher Pa Auk Sayadaw's instructions (Pa Auk, 2000), which are based on the *Maha-Satipaṭṭhāna sutta* (a longer version of *Satipaṭṭhāna*), and medieval Buddhist scholar Buddhaghosa's commentary to the *Maha-Satipaṭṭhāna sutta* entitled *The Path of Purification* (*Visuddhimagga*). Pa Auk Sayadaw suggests "discerning" various characteristics of elements, such as pushing, hardness, heat, or flowing. Such characteristics reveal themselves only in their dynamics, as processes. Inclining one's attention to them means entering a new reality, which is void of compact forms.

The analysis of the *kāyānupassanā* (insight into the processes of the body) sequence of the *Satipaṭṭhāna sutta* so far clearly demonstrates that the pedagogy of the sutta aims at a gradual sensitization of attention by directing it to more and more subtle objects. When attention is sensitive enough, but not before, the text suggests an even more subtle class of objects to pay attention to. The practice consists of a constant interplay between attention and its objects. It is always dynamic. Concentration (one factor of

awakening) within the *Satipaṭṭhāna sutta* pedagogy is developed naturally and achieved by paying attention to this interplay and not to a single object, as in certain other meditation techniques.[3] What the student learns is not a knowledge of objects but of the interaction between attention and more and more subtle phenomena. She learns the dramaturgy of the process of life in a different way than it is done by a contemporary scientist. The student of meditation learns a dramaturgy of which his or her own self is a part. *The science of meditation does not exclude the subject from the territory of observation*. I call such a dramaturgy a "dramaturgy of presence," and based on the *kāyanupassana* sequence of the *Satipaṭṭhāna sutta*, I can distinguish three kinds of it.

Three Dramaturgies of Presence

Merriam-Webster Dictionary (www.merriam-webster.com) defines the word "dramaturgy" as "The art or technique of dramatic composition and theatrical representation." *Oxford Dictionary* (www.lexico.com) defines the term in a more passive way as "The theory and practice of dramatic composition." By applying the term to describe the theater of experience unfolding within the practice of *Satipaṭṭhāna sutta*-based meditation, I would like to distinguish two aspects of the *Satipaṭṭhāna sutta*. Its active aspect can be seen as art or technique or practice (as in the above definitions), and its passive aspect as the way phenomena display themselves within the field of experience when we are present. A particular dramaturgy can seduce our attention, as it actually happens during *Satipaṭṭhāna sutta*-based meditation.

What follows are definitions of the dramaturgies. *We can say that our cognitive apparatus simplifies the richness of experience so that we can survive in an ever-changing environment. The richness of experience is synthesized into one of the three dramaturgies: hypermorphic, morphic, and submorphic (*morphê', *meaning "form" or "shape" in Greek). These are what I call "the dramaturgies of presence."*

We are present within the hypermorphic dramaturgy when our attention is in the realm of concepts, words, storylines, mental images, and memories. We can walk for many minutes or even drive a car but still be almost fully immersed in the story being played in the theatre of our mind, follow its dramaturgy, be seduced by it. I call this dramaturgy hypermorphic since it contains pure forms devoid of any materiality. It is played independently of body and environment, although it certainly is influenced by the two. I am sitting right now behind my desk in a small stone house in the Apennine Mountains. Through a small window, I can see the highest summit in the neighborhood, Monte Viglio, through the sheets of heavy rain that is falling. My attention, however, is most of the time in the hypermorphic realm of thoughts, produced for the sake of the text I write.

From time to time, my attention enters the morphic realm, and I realize that I am in space filled with objects – the notebook on which I type being one of them. My mind sticks on each of these objects an invisible label: "desk," "mountains," "keys" on "notebook keyboard," even "rain." It puts a label on myself as well. I have my name just as the summit I am staring at has its – "Monte Viglio." To my mind, both of us are objects, two single entities. But how is the rain an object? It is not; it is a process. So am I. So is Monte Viglio, even if it is much less evident than in the case of rain. All that appears to us as objects – animated or not – is just a process, an ongoing transformation.

Having made this reflection, I direct my mind towards sub-morphic dramaturgy. The cold air entering the room through the open window ceases to be an object. My attention attunes itself to its processual changeability – it touches my skin harder or softer; it is colder or warmer, more or less humid. It changes constantly. Is a feeling of fullness, the effect of the *cornetto* I have just eaten, an object? Dramaturgies of presence change into each other, bringing with them changes in mood and the level of body tension.

Let us refer this scheme to the process of awakening as designated in the *Satipaṭṭhāna sutta*: while in a state of ambient consciousness, before meditation practice even started, often we allow our attention to be seduced by thoughts and mental images of various kinds, placing ourselves within the hypermorphic dramaturgy.[4] After beginning meditation training and after gaining a degree of mindfulness by exercises of breathing, we invite our attention to be present with the morphic dramaturgy, directing it towards a gross and easy object of experience – body postures. Now we are in a dramaturgy of compact shapes or forms, which reveals to us a phenomenal world of separate things placed in space. It is evident in the case of visual perception but also present in other senses, including proprioception, which can be synthesized by our cognitive apparatus into the form of a single body.

We remain in morphic dramaturgy while following the sutta instructions and attuning our attention to body actions. Finally, our attention becomes sensitive enough to let itself be seduced by the sub-morphic reality of the elements and the dramaturgy of processes. There are no shapes or stability in heat, liquidity, and hardness.

Further sensitization of attention, according to the instructions of the *Satipaṭṭhāna sutta*, makes it possible to become attuned to amorphic territories of feeling (*vedanā*), consciousness (*citta*), and the nature of the process of life (*dhamma*), to which I will return later on in this book.

The conceptual framework of the 3DP model is general enough to prevent our covering experience with concepts and thus losing the ability to perceive the subtleties of the experienced phenomena, but precise enough to help us to orient ourselves quickly where we are in a given moment, within the *kāyānupassanā* sequence of the *Satipaṭṭhāna sutta*. It helps us to design a

long-term meditation strategy, as well as to understand meditative experiences as they reveal themselves during formal practice or daily activities. And this is of enormous help on the road to flourishing.

Adepts of meditation report to me that this ability to evaluate the current inclination of their attention towards one of the dramaturgies helps them to choose a proper theme for meditation and makes the practice of meditation more effective in the long run; a finding which, of course, is open to further research. They find practicing sub-morphic mindfulness relatively easy, interesting, attention-restoring, and vital, and they often use the metaphor of traveling to exotic places when describing the practice. It is interesting to compare these anecdotal accounts with studies of the effectiveness of nature walks – a practice that enhances well-being through stress reduction and attention restoration (Pasanen et al., 2018). Wandering in nature and practicing sub-morphic mindfulness have common features: they produce "soft," effortless attention and give the students the impression of being in a whole other world, as well as being mentally detached from everyday worries and concerns. It would also be interesting to investigate the effectiveness of sub-morphic mindfulness practice, as compared to regular mindfulness practices, in light of its ability to enhance various parameters of health.

I also think that the 3DP model, and especially the concept of sub-morphic mindfulness, open a route to a new way of understanding how humans communicate with the natural environment, which may be a factor in preventing climate catastrophe. For example, a famous German female teacher of meditation, Ayya Khema, has advocated in talks (available on various sites on the Internet, e.g., www.dharmaseed.org) using the practice of the four elements as a tool to break barriers between the meditator and the natural environment in which she is meditating. In the meditation routine she suggests, we incline our attention first to the qualities or characteristics of elements within ourselves, and in the second step, we investigate if the element's qualities in the environment are the same:

> Gaining insight into ourselves as consisting of these elements helps us to realize that we are no different from our environment. No matter where we look, we find the elements of earth, fire, water, and air. As we fix our attention on this reality, our feeling of separation will diminish, giving us a greater sense of being part of the whole manifestation in this universe. We can feel embedded in this totality and no longer threatened by other people, or by natural or man-made catastrophes. We are part of the whole, the whole is part of us; there is no separation, no alienation.
>
> (Khema, 2000, p. 108)

The Realms Meditation Opens

The *Satipaṭṭhāna sutta* offers a pedagogy of traveling with attention to less and less anthropomorphic worlds. It is designed to lead the student safely through the process of deconditioning her attention in order to directly

grasp the truth, which is the same thing as nature (*dhamma*). One of the meanings of the word *dhamma* is, according to the Buddhist Dictionary by Nyanatiloka, "constitution (or nature of the thing)" (Nyanatiloka, 1997, p. 57). The journey towards the realization of dhamma begins with the very first attempt to meditate according to the sutta. Even being simply with whatever presents itself within our field of experience in a non-partial way has its consequences, and even merely following initial mindfulness instructions may initiate far-reaching processes. Murray et al. (2006) estimate that eight percent of meditators have had out-of-body experiences.[5] Another study shows that "Intentionally paying attention with a nonjudgmental attitude leads to a significant change in perspective, a so-called decentering" (Hölzel et al., 2011, p. 538). The authors conclude that mindfulness practices result in "self-reported changes in self-concept" (ibid., p. 539). Their article also describes instances of advanced meditators experiencing what the authors call "meta-awareness," a state in which they perceive their sense of self as "repeatedly arising" (ibid., p. 547).

> A cross-sectional study on the effects of intensive and long-term meditation reported that over 60 percent of individuals had at least one negative effect, which varied from increased anxiety to depression and fullblown psychosis. Qualitative research on mindfulness meditation shows that it may increase the awareness of difficult feelings and exacerbate psychological problems. … It can be argued that the emergence of difficult emotional material from mindfulness practice may be a positive, rather than an adverse circumstance. This will, of course, depend on the context in which these feelings and memories emerge – if it happens in a therapeutic context, it may very well be; but if the person is alone or doing mindfulness in a group setting without a trained mental health clinician, a positive outcome is more unlikely and it may simply result in unexpected distress.
>
> (Farias and Wikholm, 2016, p. 330)

The therapeutic clinical context seems to be necessary to avoid adverse reactions to meditation. This context, however, does not make irrelevant the original *Satipaṭṭhāna sutta* context, which includes the intention of modifying the fundamental perception of the world and overcoming the self by meditation practice even if this intention does not agree with how the meditation practices are often presented today as the means of self-improvement.

Here is an autoethnographic report, taken after an individual meditation session:

> *A spring night. The snow from Monte Viglio reflects the moonlight. Lying in bed, watching it through the window, suddenly I feel that something strange happens: the world around me starts to vibrate, and I become a silent observer of what is happening, a witness to the most*

> *minute movements of life, who does not have to care about anything. My attention, with no effort, attunes itself to sensations outside and within my body. Vibrating objects fill all my field of experience and become clear and pronounced. I myself – in contrast – being reduced to something barely existing. It feels as if reality extricated itself from my neurons and stood in front of what was left of me, naked, fully revealed. As if I have squatted down at the edge of existence and watched the process of life, almost breathlessly, so I would not frighten it.*

The dynamics of this experience originated from the tension between the subject and objects of experience. It showed at the same time that the two were co-dependent and could not exist separately, an issue to which I will return later on in this book while applying the method of autophenomenography to meditative experiences. Bizarre meditation experiences, such as the described above, are probably better understood and assimilated when the practitioner acknowledges the possibilities of the plasticity of the self, as suggested by the 3DP model. At the same time, the model is general enough not to create expectations, which may be hindrances to meditative progress.

The other functionality of the model originates from its depicting the meditation process as a sequence. Research demonstrates that mindfulness meditation unfolds in a stepwise succession of states: (1) executive attention heightens; as an effect of this (2) body awareness increases and (3) emotion regulation processes start, which results in (4) abandoning habitual reactions and (5) a new perspective on the self (Hölzel et al., 2011, p. 549).

In the progression of meditation expertise, the different mechanisms might play different roles. For example, it is possible that an improvement in attention regulation evolves first and helps facilitate other processes. Conversely, the change in perspective on the self might develop rather late, following the establishment of increased body awareness and improved emotion regulation (ibid., p. 551).

The 3DP model summarizes in a simple form various phases of mindfulness meditation, as they organically unfold according to *Satipaṭṭhāna sutta* logic. In the real meditation practice, there is a possibility of regress and progress, which can be measured, among others, by the sensitivity of the student's attention. Finally, bringing dramaturgy into the picture underlines the significance of fascination in practice as essential fuel for practitioners who do not have to rely solely on strict discipline. This, in a sense, places the Buddhist meditative practice in the field of philosophy, as fascination is the basic impulse of the philosopher. By applying the system of reference in the form of the three dramaturgies of presence, the practice becomes philosophical.

The Perspective that the 3DP Model Opens

In this section, I will briefly outline how, in my opinion, the 3DP model could contribute to the philosophical and practical understanding of

meditation, health, and human flourishing, subject to further consideration, discussion, and research.

In the field of philosophy in general, the model could be used in exploring the topic of the modes of existence or the way we encounter life. Reality reveals itself to us at least in two ways, writes Martin Heidegger: as "challenging" and as "bringing-forth." A contemporary person challenges nature or "puts on nature the unreasonable demand that it supply energy that can be extracted and stored as such" (Heidegger, 1977, p. 14). Such a person has lost touch with the second mode of revealing, known to ancient Greeks as *poiēsis*, which seems similar to the mode of revealing the truth as understood in the *Satipaṭṭhāna sutta*'s pedagogical project. Thus the *Satipaṭṭhāna sutta*-based meditation could serve as a way to redefine the human relationship with nature into a more friendly type of relationship, which is crucial today as we face environmental catastrophe. I hypothesize that the less compact and more processual our perception is, the higher is the chance of a spontaneous occurrence of the "bringing-forth."

Heidegger accused contemporary philosophy of neglecting fundamental metaphysical questions of what it means to be and focusing instead on the question concerning how we function. Nowadays, the metaphysical realm has disappeared from the philosopher's horizon, not to mention a person who does not do philosophy. We deal with things and people that we encounter, and we forget about existence itself. According to the German philosopher, even existentialists forget about existence and keep occupying themselves instead with the problem of subjectivity, as if they were enchanted into the Cartesian realm of the thinking substance. However, this cognitive stance has its roots in Plato's thought, as the Greek philosopher was the first to propose that we experience being as a constant presence.

This attitude is the opposite of the Buddhist and Greek pre-platonic metaphysical approach, with its fascination with life as a process, emerging and dying instantly. Awareness of this constant flux naturally takes the focus of any philosophy from the subject itself (and from attempts to prove its objectiveness) to a process in which the subject is just an element. The experience becomes a dynamic interplay, in which subject and object are only changing parameters and not substances of a different nature. Mind and body are now conceived of as activities and not as separate entities. This perspective also opens the vast realm of philosophy as therapy as it brings into the picture the possibility of attuning or detuning from such a process. I will return to this Heideggerian intuition in the later parts of this book because it helps to understand today's existential position of someone who takes oneself as a master of being and who exploits the world for her goals. And this has enormous ecological consequences.

By extensively referring to meditatively modified consciousness, I would like to shift the investigator's focus from static to a more dynamic picture of the experience, which includes abilities of consciousness to reveal themselves only in the process of meditation or similar training.[6] Being mindful is in

Buddhism one of the factors of everyday experience, but it is also a platform to a revolutionary transformation of the perception of self and environment and provides us with completely new knowledge traditionally described in Buddhist teachings in various ways (e.g., as a sequence of insights). Only these insights, and not the analysis of the ambient, not trained in meditation consciousness, provide us with fundamental truths of existence. Which does not mean that meditative technique is necessary to achieve them. Meditation is not something exotic and belonging to a niche, such that it could be ignored in the process of investigation into the human–nature relationship. Quite contrary, meditation happens spontaneously in nature, and I think that understanding this relationship is impossible without inquiry into the heart of meditation. This realization opens a new perspective of perceiving *nature as a phenomenon seeking to awaken organisms*. On the other side, investigating nature may teach us a lot about the very process of awakening.

Meditation is a necessary ingredient of flourishing-oriented philosophies and their pedagogies. It is revelatory of the metaphysical construction of reality. Only after exploring meditative possibilities of consciousness being an effect of training (Buddhist *bhāvanā* – the cultivation of mind; Greek *paideia* – philosophical training), the ancient philosophical schools, such as Buddhist or Stoic, acquire metaphysical perspective and formulate their multidimensional theories about what consciousness is. The broader context for this endeavor is usually human flourishing, which amounts to attuning to the process of life and thus realizing the truth.

The 3DP model suggests that meditation does not happen to *an individual. It happens* as *a dramaturgy activated by an attention habit or inner attentional quality. The self is a peripheral part of such an event. Satipaṭṭhāna sutta* pedagogy aims at erasing this self-centered perspective. This erasing is a gradual process: the more profound the insight and the more advanced the sensitization of attention, the more elusive the self, which presents itself clearly in actual meditation experience, as in the experiences described in the report quoted above. This perspective resonates with several contemporary positions within the philosophy of mind and biological sciences. Krakauer et al. propose that "Individuality can be continuous, with the possible surprising result that some processes possess greater individuality than others" (Krakauer et al., 2020, p. 211).

Jonardon Ganeri (2017) presents the intriguing concept of priority of attention over self, which he calls the "Theory of Attentialism," a middle way between "strident individualism" and "impersonal holism." Attention structures experience and action:

> There is no need to introduce any more robust distinction between self and other than the one implied by a conception of persons as beings with a characteristic capacity for attention. In particular, there is no need to conceive of the distinction as having its basis in a phenomenology of interiority or in an authorial conception of self. There is nothing

> that could be described as the invariant core of a human being, such as a set of fixed character traits, but one effect of attending is to make some elements more central, at least for a short period.
>
> (Ganeri, 2017, loc. 266)

Analyzing Pāli Buddhism attitude, Ganeri ascribes to attention many functions, making it a central existential category as he tries to avoid cartesian dualism. For example, while according to contemporary Western description, attention is both endogenous (depending on our will to direct it,) as well as exogenous (involuntary and automatic, reacting to stimuli), the Buddhist view is free from this dualism:

> Buddhaghosa formulates the above distinction with exceptional clarity. With reference to focal attention he says: Bringing-to-mind (manasikāra) is a mode of work, working in the mind. It makes mind, so to speak, different from the previous mind. It is of three kinds: that which regulates (paṭipādaka) the object; that which regulates the [onset of] processing (citta-vīthi); that which regulates the "running" (javana) of mind. Of these, (a) that which regulates the object is called bringing-to-mind because it make [the object] in the mind. It has the characteristic of driving associated states towards the object, the function of joining associated states to the object, and shows up as facing the object (ārammaṇa-abhimukkha). It is included in the aggregate of constructing activities, and should be regarded as the charioteer (sārathi) of associated states because it regulates the object. (b) That which regulates the [onset of] processing is a synonym for the turning (āvajjana) of mind towards [one of] the five sensory doors; and (c) that which regulates the "running" (javana) of mind is a synonym for turning (āvajjana) at the mind-door …
>
> (Ganeri, 2017, loc. 1519)

The way Ganeri describes attention as bringing "a world to view" corresponds to what we conclude on how attention operates in *Satipaṭṭhāna sutta*-based meditation.

> Attention is the selective placing and focal accessing that brings a world to view and provides orientation within it. The attentional structure of consciousness itself explains how we are situated in a world and how we have reasons for what we do and think.
>
> (Ganeri, 2017, loc. 753)

The meditation training in a Theravāda monastery can be seen as the pedagogy of attention, in the result of which attentional structure changes and, together with it, changes our Spatio-temporal situation in a world. At one point during my training in Shwe Oo Min monastery in Myanmar, I experienced clearly and directly how parts of my body disintegrate and

disappear in a way similar to a dry sandcastle disintegrating and disappearing as an effect of a strong wind blow (an experience to which I return later in this book). It had to be an effect of the change of the structure of my attention since for someone observing me from outside, no doubt, my body would remain intact.

A question may appear in this moment of consideration of who is in power to change the structure of attention. Buddhist position is clear: there is no transcendental ego standing behind such activity. In the spirit of this statement, I would like to propose a hypothesis that *living beings are not the producers of attention; they are its users*. I hypothesize that attention may be considered an impersonal power that equals the *primordial aliveness* but tends to get trapped on the periphery of this aliveness. In the sub-morphic dramaturgy, introduced to a meditator in the phase of contemplating the elements, her experience becomes less personal. The very process of deepening the insight during *Satipaṭṭhāna sutta*-based Buddhist meditation leads to more and more impersonal perceptions. Bhikkhu Bodhi writes in his introduction to Nyanaponika Thera's *Abhiddhama Studies*:

> For wisdom or insight to arise, the meditator must learn to suspend the normal constructive, synthesizing activity of the mind responsible for weaving the realms of immediate sensory data into coherent narrative patterns revolving around persons, entities, and their attributes. Instead, the meditator must adopt a radically phenomenological stance, attending mindfully to each successive occasion of experience exactly as it presents itself in its sheer immediacy. When this technique of "bare attention" is assiduously applied, the familiar world of everyday perception dissolves into a dynamic stream of impersonal phenomena, flashes of actuality arising and perishing with incredible rapidity.
>
> (Nyanaponika, 1997, pp. XXVI–XXVII)

The situation of the attention intercepted in a periphery is powerful enough to create a perspectival view resulting in the deception of individual, separate existence, and cause actions within the existing universe. Identity can be seen as just a trapped focus of attention. And the *Satipaṭṭhāna* pedagogy as a proposal of escaping from the trap. The final insight the Buddhist meditative training happens when the mind has *nibbāna* as its object. This particular object is not a thing: in the moment of realizing awakening, the dualism of the perceiver and the perceived is overcome.

Perhaps Buddhist meditation proposes a process opposite to what Schmitz called self-ascription (Schmitz et al., 2011). He allows the possibility of self-consciousness without self-ascription and states that the separated mind is an invention of some sub-streams of Western intellectual culture, which again started with Plato and which have been dominant up to the present. Such a picture has practical consequences, as shown by the psychiatrist-philosopher Thomas Fuchs, who himself was a student of Schmitz:

> I will describe depression as a disturbance of intercorporeality and interaffectivity. I will argue that depression is not an "inner", psychological, or neurobiological disorder, as it is considered in western psychiatry, but a "detunement" (*Verstimmung*) of the resonant body that normally mediates our attunement and participation in the shared social space. Instead of expressing and connecting the self with others, the depressive body turns into a barrier to all impulses directed to the environment, resulting in a general sense of detachment, separation, or even expulsion.
>
> (Fuchs, 2013, p. 222)

Seen from the perspective of the 3DP model, this description may serve as an insightful expression of the attention intercepted by a strong perspectival view. Depression is a social ailment. I think that it would be helpful to see depression as an environmental ailment as well. It is a function of the environment. It is also widespread in the contemporary world. However, perhaps we should not expect humans to be happy if the state of the environment is rightly called "a catastrophe." Depression is a barrier created in the dynamics of the process of life, a disconnection or "detunement." In depression, just as in the isolation chamber, our co-playing with the rhythms of nature is obviously disturbed.

Fuchs characterizes the depressive states as "congealments" of the human body, which is numbed and unable to get into resonance with the environment, which brings to mind the words of Gail, the woman who survived Donald Cameron isolation experiments described in Chapter 1, as having "a very peculiar feeling in the head. Like I had a blob, not a head" (Klein, 2007, p. 56). As the 3DP model shows, this exact type of compactness is dissolved, step by step, in *Satipaṭṭhāna sutta*-based meditation, possibly indicating the usefulness of applying sub-morphic mindfulness to dealing with various forms of anhedonia.

One particular area of a possible investigation by using the 3DP model is the area of human technology and the human–nature relationship, to which I will return in more detail in Chapter 3. My hypothesis is that the insight facilitated by the *Satipaṭṭhāna sutta* would be impossible to achieve if the student's attention were applied to artificial objects, which is also a reason for which nature enhances human flourishing. The essential commentary to the suttas, the *Visuddhimagga*, gives such objects a limited capacity to bring forth the meditation insight, even if they are *kasinas* (discs of various colors) specially prepared for meditation. Kasinas are helpful only in the training of concentration. This could mean that it is impossible to learn about the nature of things and processes from what is not natural. Such a suggestion, in turn, could mean that engaging one's attention with artificial patterns, such as pixels – as many of us do through most of the day – is an obstacle to developing insight into the nature of reality, as well as to human flourishing.

Ecological conclusions, even if not present explicitly in the Pāli canon, can easily be drawn.

Both Buddhist and Stoic schools of philosophy put significant trust in nature's intelligence as the facilitator of the development of virtue ethics. Moreover, meditative practice, as described by various authors, shows that from a certain point, insight enhancing processes unfold spontaneously, as if driven by some external force, independent of the will of the meditator. The concept of the three dramaturgies of presence allows us to identify similar phases of meditation in, for example, Buddhist and Stoic approaches, which in turn, suggests similar aims of these two schools of ancient philosophy. Marcus Aurelius, for example, clearly describes sub-morphic mindfulness in his meditative notes known today as the *Meditations*. As if he was a faithful student of the *Satipaṭṭhāna sutta*, he applies to himself instructions very similar to the instructions one finds in the sutta's phase on foulness, as well as in the phase known as "Charnel Ground Contemplations" (which within the *Satipaṭṭhāna sutta* follows the stage of meditating on elements):

> How good it is when you have roast meat or suchlike foods before you, to impress on your mind that this is the dead body of a fish, this is the dead body of a bird or pig; and again, that the Falernian wine is the mere juice of grapes, and your purple-edged robe simply the hair of a sheep soaked in shell-fish blood! And in sexual intercourse that it is no more than the friction of a membrane and a spurt of mucus ejected. How good these perceptions are at getting to the heart of the real thing and penetrating through it, so you can see it for what it is!
>
> (Aurelius, 2006, pp. 47–48)

On other pages of the *Meditations*, there are frequent passages referring to the ever-changing elements, which are both of the world and the individual. We find Marcus Aurelius applying to himself sub-morphic mindfulness. The technique of meditation based on breaking the compact world into fluent micro-events has for him therapeutic meaning, which is clearly seen in passages like this:

> Adopt a systematic study of the way all things change into one another: pay constant attention to this aspect of nature and train yourself in it. Nothing is so conductive to greatness of mind. One so trained has divested himself of his body: recognizing that in almost no time he will have to leave all this behind and depart from the world of men, he has devoted his entire self to justice in his own actions and to the nature of the Whole in all things external.
>
> (Aurelius, 2006, p. 98)

Marcus Aurelius trains himself to perceive reality as non-personal transformation, which is an equivalent of the Buddhist universal characteristic of the

reality of non-self (*anatta*); detaches himself from objects (such as roast beef) to avoid suffering (*dukkha*); and, in passages such as the one below, gradually directs his attention to what in Buddhism is known as the universal truth of change (*anicca*): "Consider any existing object and reflect that it is even now in the process of dissolution and change, in sense regenerating through decay or dispersal" (ibid., p. 99).

In doing this, the Roman emperor deconstructs and reconstructs his emotional mindscape in accordance with Stoic philosophy. A similar effect can be achieved by insight practices, which lead to a type of emotion regulation based on mechanisms of reappraisal and extinction:

> Garland et al. … described mindful emotion regulation as "positive reappraisal," or the adaptive process through which stressful events are reconstructed as beneficial, meaningful, or benign (e.g., thinking that one will learn something from a difficult situation). A very recent self-report study showed that mindfulness practice leads to increases in positive reappraisal, and these increases mediate an improvement in stress levels …
>
> (Hölzel et al. 2011, p. 543)

The similarities and differences between the ancient Stoics and Buddhists' meditative practices are yet to be carefully studied, but on the first approach, they are striking. It seems that both these meditative pedagogies were designed to facilitate similar cognitive processes, and also – at least in theory – aim at bringing similar results: in the case of Stoicism *ataraxia* and attunement to the process of life (*oikeiôsis*), and in the case of Buddhism equanimity and awakening (realizing *dhammas*).

Map and Territory

Analysis of the fundamental Buddhist manual of meditation, the *Satipaṭṭhāna sutta*, shows that early Buddhist metaphysics, unlike classical metaphysics of the Western philosophical schools, was not based on the assumption of a stable ontological being. In Buddhism, the metaphysical construction of reality is continually changing, depending on attention's activity. In a way, the metaphysical construction is secondary to attention, which is a force capable of creating various metaphysical landscapes endowed with different dramaturgies, such as the hypermorphic dramaturgy of thoughts and mental images, the morphic dramaturgy of objects placed in the space, and the sub-morphic dramaturgy of the processes.

A model is just a map, not a territory. There is no field where this remark is more accurate than Buddhist meditation, a personal practice that results in experience far exceeding what can be expressed in words. But each map has its function, and I hope this to be true also for the model of the Three Dramaturgies of Presence. I hope that meditators will find it helpful to make

sense of their meditative experiences and as a conceptual tool to help them design effective meditation strategies. I hope that further research will confirm the effectiveness of sub-morphic mindfulness and that this kind of mindfulness practice will find a clinical application. I also hope that the 3DP model will be criticized and refined and that eventually, it will prove to be useful as a conceptual framework within various philosophical and educational sub-disciplines. Further on in this book, I will use the model to investigate the human–nature relationship.

Suppose we forget for a while about the technical description of meditation. In that case, we will realize that meditation is a tender concern for the impulse to seek the mystery beneath everyday events' surface. During meditation, we are aware of where our attention is and what its qualities are. This awareness usually leads to the weakening of desire and awakening of a state of fascination. While meditating, we allow our attention to be seduced by more and more subtle phenomena, from the breath or the feeling of the whole body as a solid block to the slightest vibrations of the body and mind. The more subtle the details, the clearer and stronger our attention is. The sense of separateness from nature weakens. At this stage, meditation shows us for the first time what awaits us when we flourish up in it: freeing attention from the self, abandoning the belief that we are something separate and that we must defend ourselves from the world or conquer it.

Each of the three dramaturgies of presence tastes different. Hypermorphic dramaturgy, a situation when sensations are bound into thoughts, and senses process the impulses from the environment without us being aware of it, is often hedonistic, shaken, originating-from-self, a dance of desires and fulfilments. Sometimes (e.g., during contemplating a spiritual theme; remembering the good thing we did to other people, animals, plants, or environment; or recalling a memory of being with friends, as Epicurus did just before he died in a tube with hot water), we can use the hypermorphic dramaturgy for facilitating tranquility, joy or awe. Morphic dramaturgy is relational and spacious, with its awareness of objects in the space. The feeling it gives depends on how we label these objects, whether they are to us beautiful or ugly, friendly or hostile, lovable or disgusting. The sub-morphic dramaturgy is a free display of processes in our field of attention, which can awake strong fascination in us and partly dissolve the sense of self as if self-started, reflecting its fluid nature. Sometimes it may seem tedious, as it does not bring with it hedonic promises. Yet, I have never come across any report of my students experiencing anything ugly or hostile in it (their resistance comes from interpretations of meditative exercises, as in the case of the red-haired woman described in the previous chapter). Rather than that, it often awakes the overall feeling of freedom.

For the sake of the book, the 3DP model will serve as a departure point from Plato's project of experiencing being as separate monads, which is also a departure from the Cartesian topography of human beings. Presence can assume various forms, and a cognitive and affective effort present during

meditation, as well as ethical efforts such as cultivating virtues, can influence how we are present on the planet Earth, both individually and as a species. Analyzing Pāli Buddhism, Ganeri writes:

> Presence, a basic form of engagement, is enabled by any of the five sense modalities, and is already minded: not a mere bodily state or motor instruction, it refers to the minded condition of being in touch with the world that a body's presence in the world sustains. When disengaged, the mind is unresponsive to world; when engaged it is open to it. Engaged presence is thus an initial expression of intentionality, itself to be distinguished from a richer ground for intentionality, which one might term "involvement" or "involved mindedness" (Pāli: nāma).
>
> (Ganeri, 2017, loc. 1599)

"Initial expression of intentionality" is perhaps a very accurate and elegant description of what I call presence. I think that such an understood presence cannot be influenced by subscribing to a specific opinion or set of opinions but by meditative effort, which reorganizes our metaphysical starting point into living. According to Theravāda Buddhism, what is called full enlightenment, happens in a sequence of four fundamental insights. The first stage is described as entering a stream (of *nibbāna*). A stream-enterer, called *sotāpanna*, fundamentally changes her presence or "initial expression of intentionality." She won't be able, for example, to believe in the separateness of the soul. Such a presence, being an effect of a default metaphysical stance based on the intuition of not being separated from the environment, determines to a great extend her actions.

When the soul's separateness is replaced in our vision of life by the dynamics of changing elements organized by attention, a new space opens for our relationship with nature. We begin to understand that nature itself is a dynamic ocean of processes and not a constant entity. It is an unconscious prejudice of Western metaphysics and science to imagine that the natural processes magically happen outside of ourselves, leaving untouched the capsular I, the self, or soul alone. Realizing this mistake can actually result in an optimistic picture. After losing contact with the vitality of life and staying with our attention within processed reality taking place in the hypermorphic dramaturgy within our heads, we can choose to return to life itself and realize a new presence on planet Earth. We can realize that human flourishing can only happen in attunement with nature and that it does not have to be perceived as a lofty ancient ideal, proclaimed by Aristotle, Epicurus, or the Stoics. We can see flourishing as an adventure and a personal, intimate possibility of opening a new dimension in our life, omitted by our culture obsessed with hedonistic self-satisfaction.

The ancient philosophical schools, both Eastern and Western, teach their adepts some independence on cultural conditioning. The system of reference for our good life ceases to be tradition, customs, or religion. Instead of

listening to the dogmas and codes of these systems, we can listen to the lessons taught by our own experiential reality.

This is how Martha Nussbaum defines the stoic pedagogy, based on the idea of human being's adjustment to the whole of the universe or *oikeiôsis* (Greek):

> The Stoic idea of learning is an idea of increasing vigilance and wakefulness, as the mind, increasingly rapid and alive, learns to repossess its own experiences from the fog of habit, convention, and forgetfulness.
>
> (Nussbaum, 2009, p. 340)

The 3DP system can be applied in a very practical way as a navigating tool in daily life and as a system of reference for the individual's flourishing. One can learn to estimate the energy expenditure which one uses in each dramaturgy.

> An experimenter asks someone to recall a memory: "What did you do last Sunday?" Quickly, the two prefrontal lobes consume energy. This neurological foundation of anticipation will seek information. When it is found, images "light up" the two occipital lobes that process visual information. "I was fishing by boat," says the subject while the limbal circuits turn red, revealing that this evocation provokes an emotion. Further, when the subject says, "I was fishing by boat," his left temporal lobe also gives off energy.
>
> If then we ask, "What are you going to do next Sunday?" we can see that almost the same circuits light up in the same sequence. This means that the memory of the past requires an effort close to that of the imagination of the future.
>
> (Cyrulnik, 2021, p. 104)

It seems that when our attention is seduced by sub-morphic dramaturgy, our memory bank does not have to be accessed. The energy needed for such access is saved. This could explain why the capacity of attention is restored in the natural environment. Managing energy is the basic capacity of caring for well-being. It is a part of care about vitality and health. The 3DP model, when applied practically, brings together the fields of well-being, self-awareness, cognition, and health. As I will show later in this book, it also is significant morally. When applied to daily life, the model allows developing what could be called metaphysical or existential agility, resulting in freeing oneself from dogmatism and attachment.

Themes for Contemplation

1 While observing the world around you by all the senses at your disposal, try to consciously change your perspective from that in which

you are interested in how things are to that in which you wonder that things are. Look at the reality as if for the first time. Forget the usefulness of the small things around you, on the table, or in your kitchen. Look at them as if they emerged from emptiness right now.

2 Direct your attention to some impersonal force or phenomenon operating within the field of your experience: it may be the force of gravitation felt as heaviness, the coldness of the chair felt in the place your back meets it, or the sensation of touch resulting from clenching of your teeth or delicate touching your inner lip with your tongue. Keep your attention gently on those objects for some time and observe if it changes your emotional state.

Notes

1 Understood colloquially as the state we are in if not forced to visit a doctor's office, and not as flourishing discussed by philosophers, which is attaining the full potential in agreement with nature.
2 For an excellent source on the origin of various Buddhist meditation methods popular today see Kornfield (1996).
3 The single object may be for example mantra, or a post in the body where a meditator experiences breath or contact with some surface.
4 The expression "allowing attention to be seduced by," which is extensively bused in this book, was carefully coined, as I wanted to express that in the act of giving attention, there are present activities ascribed by the Cartesian perspective to a subject and objects separately, without following this dualist perspective. Thus subject "allows" and object "seduces." In my intention, the words "allow" and "seduce" underline action that takes place in the space of tension between what is traditionally understood as subject and objects rather than activities of the two, as they do not exist separately.
5 The expression "out-of-body experience" follows the cartesian optic of strict separation of the mental and the physical, however, at the same time, it indicates that the optic is not sufficient to describe subtleties of meditative experience.
6 Evan Thompson (2016) advocates the necessity of including meditative states into academic research with an argument with which I fully agree: "We don't yet have a cognitive science informed by results that come from studying individuals who devote some significant portion of their lives to contemplative practice. So one thing individuals with meditative training can offer to cognitive science is new and potentially richer data about the range of developmental possibilities for the human mind. It also stands to reason that such individuals may be able reliably to generate and maintain precisely specified states of attention and awareness, making such states easier to investigate. Finally, the working hypothesis of neurophenomenology is that individuals trained in mindfulness meditation practices may be able to give more precise self-reports about moment-to-moment subjective experience, and that such reports can be used to uncover more fine-grained information about the shifting, dynamic patterns of brain activity associated with cognition across the wakesleep cycle."

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3 Beyond Our Cognitive Tendency to Freeze Reality

Life or Prejudice

The ancient Stoics told us (as well as their contemporaries) to trust nature and distrust human prejudices. This advice might sound trivial, but it is not. It can save your life. Need an example? In 2010 two men, a Russian and a Finn, had reached the final round of the Annual World Sauna Championships in Finland. They came into a 110°C (230°F) sauna for their final duel and stayed there for six minutes, towards the end of which the judges realized that something was going wrong inside and dragged them away, both with severe burns. The Finn, who was defending the title, did not want to leave the sauna even then. They forced him out and brought him to a hospital. The Russian man died, and the 12-year-old tradition of the competition died with him.

This is an example of the consequences of being detuned from nature. Consequences of listening to the commands of ego, which wanted to win a title and was deaf to nature's rhythmical voice, which must have demanded, by the signals in the organisms of the two men, to leave the sauna immediately. The two dramaturgies have met, and, as often happens when we do not listen to ancient sages, the ego dramaturgy won. Morphic and submorphic dramaturgy were not as attractive to both men as the hypermorphic one.

One wonders what is happening to human attention in situations as described above. It is safe to assume that, in the sauna incident, attention was doing its job and registering the painful sensation of burning frantically, perhaps running to and away from them in a panicked, pulsating rush. We know that on the physiological site, signals are sent to the brain that damage is being done, and the brain sends signals back to the injured place to produce painful sensations and to the organs connected with locomotion, forcing the organism to stand up and leave the place immediately. In the sauna incident, all this frantic movement was met with a strong mental determination of the ego of the protagonists to stay and win the tournament. This case illustrates how attention may be trapped on the periphery of the *primordial aliveness*. It deprived the organism of conscious contact with

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the rhythms of nature, blocking the organism's awareness of what is going on and its ability to react accordingly, and interfering with the Open-source intelligence, which is born from the organism and the natural environment working together within the same system of life.

I propose that if in the sauna case the contact was weaker than usual and the perspectival view more narrow, in the situation of meditative presence in nature, the contact is stronger than usual, and the perspectival view is wider. This is why the research on the human–nature relationship shows that while in nature, we experience the sense of enlarged perspective, the more profound meaning of life, and a strong impulse of self-development. The moral sense understood as care about life (our own life in particular), which also originates from this contact and manifests itself through enlarged meaningful perspective, in the sauna case was no longer there. The Russian man would not have died if it was present and working, and the Finnish man would not have hurt himself badly.

Analyzing the situation reveals that there are two ways we can follow the impulse for self-development, so much enhanced by the presence in the natural environment. Either, as the ancient sages teach us, referring this development watchfully to natural laws by constant attuning to the process of life (by way of thinking, in particular, moral intending called *prohairesis*, and meditating or *prosoche*), or allowing the process to be captured by the demands of the ego. The first path is more eudaimonic (directed to ego-overcoming meaning), the second more hedonistic (directed to achieving immediate satisfaction).

Analyzing the sauna tragedy, we can also discover a pattern that connects different cosmoses of which we think, after Plato and Descartes, as existing independently. Some of the cosmoses are the vitality of the environment; consciousness; and the interplay of elemental powers of heat, moisture, hardness, and pushing. They correlate with each other in synchrony of rhythms. From the perspectival view of the men involved in the sauna incident, this connection must have been non-detectable. The sauna situation, unlike the situation of, for example, quiet meditation or walking under the canopy of trees, wasn't conducive to insight into this inter-connectedness. Analysis of the sequential unfolding of the meditation, made in the previous chapter demonstrates clearly: *The deep meditative insight manifests itself as an experience of a temporal freeing of attention from the trap of perspectival view, often reported as a wider perspective*. Buddhist insight meditation sensitizes attention in such a way so it can perceive more and more subtle objects and relationships between them, which results in the perspective broad enough to reveal hidden characteristics of life: constant change, dissatisfaction, and its impersonal nature. Ancient philosophers deliberately exercised such a perspective, to only mention Marcus Aurelius with his call to imagine that he is flying high above the continents and observing from this position how "all things are tiny, quickly changed, evanescent. All things come from that other world, taking their start from their universal

governing reason, or in consequence of it" (Aurelius, 2006, p. 53). The philosopher-emperor, through the phenomena, experiences their interconnectedness, which includes himself.

What increases the chances of such an experience is the contemplative mood of fascination with the fact that things exist, which of course would be unlikely to happen in the dramatic circumstances of the sauna competition, but also is unlikely to occur in our daily life, which depends on the demands of the contemporary society that are keeping us busy with tasks. Mobilizing ourselves constantly, we are unable to switch to a more contemplative way. We never have conscious access to our presence or the "initial expression of intentionality," to use Ganeri's expression (Ganeri, 2017). In daily life, we ignore the natural rhythmical pattern that connects different cosmoses. How can we know then that such a pattern exists at all?

We can start by considering the very possibility of the rhythmical, attention-borne correspondence between the environment, the human body, and consciousness. There exist a body of research that stands behind such a possibility. Neuro-research shows that our consciousness is an effect of the continuous work done by regions of the prefrontal cortex, which update five to eight times a second (Hanson and Mendius, 2009, p. 33). Zalta et al. (2020, p. 1) write: "That attention is a fundamentally rhythmic process has recently received abundant empirical evidence." They add to the picture their own discovery, based on six independent experiments, indicating that even temporal attention, which seems to be stable because it is focused in time, has a rhythmic nature. They write that "an underlying rhythmic neural mechanism is unknown" (ibid.), which is not surprising if we abandon the cartesian perspective and allow the possibility that neurons are only part of the rhythmic pattern, which unfolds itself far beyond the human body and thereby disappears from the radar of neuro-research. Chakravarthi and VanRullen (2012, p. 10,599) state that conscious updating is a rhythmic process: "We conclude that conscious updating is not continuous; rather, it follows a rhythmic pattern." In another article, on visual perception, the second author writes:

> Vision involves constant exploration of the environment by eye movements. Recent evidence suggests that a rhythmic form of exploration also occurs under covert attention, in the absence of eye movements. Sustained attention naturally fluctuates, with a periodicity in the theta (4–8 Hz) frequency range.
>
> (VanRullen, 2013, p. R1110)

Vision is a question of consciousness. Attention, which "naturally fluctuates," works in "rhythmic form," updating consciousness. This biologist's observation agrees with Buddhist phenomenology based on meditative experience. We can conclude both from biological research and Buddhist philosophy, which talks about minute mental states appearing and disappearing, that consciousness itself is rhythmical. "Even when the visual

scene is entirely static, visual perception is dynamically re-established with every eye blink, saccade and micro-saccade" (ibid.).

Another possibility to picture this dynamic, proposed by Buddhist philosophy, is in the form of waves:

> So the stream of consciousness is a wave, each wave rising up to capture an attended view on the world and then sinking to a default status before rising again in an oscillation between the untasked state and tasked activity … The process of consciousness describes the wave-like rise and fall of awareness, the way it is drawn into a moment of conscious attention which then fades out. Between these moments there is a reversion to the default state (bhavaṅga), a discontinuous mode of consciousness that is out-of-sync with the stream of conscious attentiveness.
>
> (Ganeri, 2017, loc. 1097)

To advance the argument, let us assume that it is rhythms that connects separate cosmoses of consciousness, environment, and body. And it is rhythms that pulsate within cosmoses themselves, even if our eyes say something else. A certain old philosophical puzzle involving watches, which was solved recently by scientific research, confirms the existence of a rhythmical sympathy between separate, lifeless objects in space.

> Huygens (himself a pupil of Descartes), who was the inventor of the pendulum clock … had been ill in bed, and while lying there had noticed that the pendulums of two clocks mounted in one case always ended up synchronized, though in opposite directions ("antisynchronized") irrespective of their starting points, displaying what he called an "odd kind of sympathy." The clocks were somehow regulating one another, but just how remained a mystery until 2002. In that year a team of scientists from Georgia Institute of Technology were able to explain the phenomenon with a sophisticated mathematical and physical model based on small vibrations in the case that interfere with one another.
>
> (Westphal, 2016, loc. 581)

We can see that rhythms synchronize both within consciousness and perception and between what we post-Cartesians perceive as a dead matter. In the case of lifeless objects, the rhythms assume a form of "small vibrations.", which are also often experienced in certain states of meditation when attention reaches a degree of sensitization, like the one I described in Chapter 1. Certain recent concepts (Hunt and Schooler, 2019), searching for a new theory of consciousness, recognize the rhythmical nature of reality and propose terms like "shared resonance" as a framework explaining the functioning of both consciousness and non-living structures. What we call non-living, e.g., an electron can enjoy some tiny amount of consciousness in a rudimentary form, which manifests as the human psyche due to greater

resonant interconnections. According to this line of thinking, the complexity of consciousness is a result of the sophistication of certain rhythms, and the complex psychological life experienced by humans during ordinary waking consciousness is possible due to "large-scale shared resonance." From the point of view of the economy of thinking, such a type of vibrational theory of everything is much more elegant than the metaphysical dualism of Descartes or metaphysical materialism.

The processes involved in the functioning of the various cosmoses described above are active all the time: micro-movements of our body keep happening, thoughts come and go, lifeless objects, organs, and consciousness itself resonate on a certain level, and today's science describes these movements more and more precisely. *But it is the habit of our attention that wakes up and puts asleep particular dramaturgies of presence within our field of experience, creating some kind of interference on rhythmical reality. It seems that determining how the two meet lies outside the domain of the present paradigm of science, as science tries to describe reality as if it existed independently of the mind of the investigator.*

The natural environment influences the habits of our attention in a specific way. Under this influence, attention tends to be fascinated (just as the Attention Restoration Theory describes) by the landscape and go to it, displaying an "odd kind of sympathy," to use Huygens's words. If (1) human consciousness is a "large-scale resonance," and (2) all that exists pulsates rhythmically, then this resonance does not happen within our head or body but reaches out to the environment. Whether this environment is natural or artificial matters a lot. In nature, attention puts hypermorphic dramaturgy to sleep and wakes up dramaturgies of morphic and sub-morphic worlds. This, in turn, results in changing the general feeling of being in the world. We feel that we are in co-existence with it. Some research indicates that even 15 minutes of walking in nature increases our ecological sensitivity, specifically the parameter known as "nature connectedness."

In nature, our hypermorphic dramaturgy, on which, as daily experience persuades, the self feeds more than on any other dramaturgy, is diminished. Its cosmos gets penetrated by the powerful and fascinating (awaken perhaps due to evolutionary design as the Biophilia hypothesis proposes) cosmos of the natural phenomena. What happens in such moments of meeting different cosmoses within the field of attention when the self's hegemony is questioned? In two words: free exchange. Assuming that this is exclusively an exchange between separate monads, touching each other and exchanging locally whatever they have to exchange – our skin with air, air with trees, nerves endings in the nose and the smell in the air, eye receptors and stream of light (or wave) – is very risky, based on the knowledge contemporary science provides. As many studies similar to those mentioned above show, this meeting is possible only due to rhythmical synchronization. To better describe this meeting of seemingly separate frozen cosmoses, I propose the term: "intimate embodiment of nature."

The Intimate Embodiment of Nature

When we watch a movie that seduces our attention, we wake up to our consciousness the hypermorphic dramaturgy of the screen characters falling in love with each other or escaping dangers. This results in an intimate embodiment of the narration (I call it "intimate" partly because a person sitting next to us can embody the story in a completely different way, coldly and cynically, for example). Our body reacts to the unfolding of the story told in the movie: the heart starts beating a little bit stronger, muscles get tenser, we may even tighten our fists. Now the story assumes a second life to its first dramatic life written by a screenplay writer. It unfolds as a sequence of our bodily reactions. These two lives are tied, sometimes in a deadly way, shown by the increase in heart attack statistics during important international soccer games transmitted by TV.

The same mechanism works when we expose our bodies to the natural environment, for example, while walking in the forest or sitting quietly on the riverbank. In situations like these, storylines are not interfering or are hardly interfering with attention, and the clash between stagnation they bring up with themselves, certain blindness to rhythms, and the rhythmical presence of nature within our field of experience is weaker. A synchronization between our organism, our emotions, and the environment takes place on a larger scale. We feel better and healthier. We experience nature's enhancing health work. This work of nature on our organism is better understood when we assume the Greek map of the human territory, in which body and sense of aliveness are two sides of the same coin. If Descartes was right, separating extended and thinking substances, enhancing health and well-being by exposing our organism to nature would not take place.

The question is how being in nature influences our sense of presence on the planet Earth, which I have defined as "the default metaphysical stance governing our actions, a psychosomatic state and cognitive and affective sensibility that happens to us when we are awake and are not acting for gaining anything or escaping a danger." Research shows that being in nature enhances our health and subjective sense of well-being, although we do not know why. Being in nature could be described as *shifting our zone of intimacy from the conceptual realm towards the natural environment* by changing the habits of our attention and thus modifying our presence in reality. When we are intimate only with our mental world, we are deprived of the sense of space. Such intimacy is more than engagement. It is, among others, allowing whatever its object is, to be part of our personal life, which means defining one's identity by the object. This is true about intimacy with nature as well. Opening our senses to the environment around us modifies our self-definition, adding a new dimension to it, as compared to the state of involvement in thinking. Redesigning our presence might be a question of proportions: how much of our attention is given to the order of nature and how much to the order of self. Referring to the sauna case, it would depend on the extent to which we subdue our organism to the governance of nature and what extent to the conceptual world.

The crucial word is "our," as it defines the range of intimacy. We can feel being a part of a whole creation on one side of the scale or being totally separated from it on the other side, as in the case of a catatonic. In the context of the human–nature relationship, intimacy would mean perceiving the natural world as a part of our identity. If such an identity was expressed on the business card, my card would not bear an inscription: "Marcin Fabjański, Philosopher," but instead "Marcin Fabjański, Apennine Valleyer," referring to the place I spend most of my time and which I feel as if were a part of me. Some family names, let us say "Frank Underwood," bear traces of such an identification. However, the sense of environmental identity (of which more in the next chapter of the book) would probably not give us an impulse to print any business cards or call ourselves by any names. In the state of attuning to the process of life, such conventionalities tend to become meaningless. On the other hand, immersing in the conceptual world brings forth its packet of emotions and detunes us from the environment.

The intimate embodiment of nature is more an activity than an attitude. While walking a mountain path near the place I live, I recognize familiar odors of plants and soil as mine. This sense of belonging is taking place on the conceptual level, within the hypermorphic dramaturgy of presence. I propose that there could be possible a much stronger intimacy with nature in both morphic and sub-morphic dramaturgies. Therefore, in order to rhythmically immerse in nature – for whatever reason (e.g., for better health) – we should employ attention that wakes up these dramaturgies. Or, to put it simply, we should keep our attention natural. Let it operate freely instead of overusing it as a means to fulfill tasks. Usually, we employ concepts for performing tasks, except simple ones, which can be done mechanically, but after the task is done, we are left with the concepts, as our attention habitually stays in the hypermorphic realm. Then we walk on, with sensual perception blinded by the concepts.

Increased sensitization of attention means seeing movement, where we saw stagnation and allowing processes to unfold where there seemed to be compact objects, operating with opening attention (i.e., being inclined to see the change) rather than concluding one (being inclined to freeze reality). Many ancient schools of philosophy, both Eastern and Western, suggest a particular philosophical way of paying attention, which employs a quality of discovering rather than confirming.

Open Systems

One interesting theory assuming the constant exchange of our organism with the environment on various levels is that of twentieth-century psychiatrist Antoni Kępiński, who wrote:

> A feature of life is dialectics of changeability and conservation. Life consists of constant change, which is an effect of its metabolic

> character – living beings are so-called open systems, i.e., they live due to continuous exchange (the metabolism) of energy and information with the environment, without which they cannot exist.
>
> (Kępiński, 2007, p. 6)

Kępiński thinks of consciousness as an activity mixing the conceptual with the biological. He writes that we constantly fill our experience with certainty in places where the right thing would be thinking in terms of probability. We do it in order not to feel uncertain. We want to negate change and, consequently, death, but we negate the aliveness of experience by doing so.

Certain structures die only to be replaced by others within all the cosmoses due to the rhythmical nature of life. Old models of reality are destined for destruction, so in their place, new ones can emerge.[1] What I call "attuning to the process of life" in this book can be termed the rhythmical synchronization of the consciousness with reality itself. Kępiński, as a psychiatrist who has observed for dozens of years what he calls different models of reality employed by his patients, formulates an intriguing thesis: in delusional syndromes and delusional personalities, the typical rhythm of death and resurrection is being disrupted. A paranoid person fears the death of his or her models of reality, clings to them, and, as a result, new models cannot be created.

Here is, based on Kępiński's considerations, a definition of mental health, which I think also applies to physical health*: the closer your attention is attuned to the rhythmical process of life, the healthier you are*. The more detail with which you experience the rhythms of life, the fuller your life. Such understood health, as a fulfilled flourishing, is a function of the Open-source Intelligence. From this point of view, it is healthy to get old and die, as long as the pace of the process is dictated by nature. And it is unhealthy to artificially prolong life against what nature means for a given organism. Health is an embodied nature, and decaying is one of nature's wishes, necessary – as ancient Stoics and Buddhists realized – for the process of life to continue.

Kępiński's definition of living beings as "open systems, which means that they exist thanks to the constant energetic-informational exchange with the environment" exposes several illusions we humans live by. Firstly, the illusion of permanence: Each change in the environment challenges the order of the structure of our informative metabolism. This metabolism is then under a constant process of building and destroying, a pulsation, with a side-effect of constant anxiety. Why, then, in a diverse natural environment, do we feel less anxious? Perhaps, because such an environment forces us to constantly adjust to changes, making our attitude more elastic. And the more elastic we are, the less need to cover reality with concepts and, consequently, less fear.

The natural environment can increase our adaptability to change in a gentle way. Walking with my students through the paths of the ancient primeval forest in Białowieża, I usually observe that their first reaction is mild

anxiety, which they try to cover by talking a lot as if they wanted to recreate around themselves the "safe" environment of concepts. When they relax into the wilderness, which happens after two or three hours, they tend to get more silent, both individually and as a group, which, I think, means that they feel safer. On the second or third day of the workshops in the primeval forest, the students stay mostly silent, and when encountering people that talk on theirs way, they report a sense of awkwardness. They feel like the environment demands silence from people. This is how the ancient forest affects us. It would be interesting to compare this situation to the situation of being placed in an artificial environment of equal diversity, like a factory with a complex production process.

The second illusion, of those detected by Kępiński, is the illusion of objectivity: A person is certain that she perceives reality as it is. The third and the most fundamental is the illusion of separateness. As an antidote, he proposes a "more pantheistic perspective" of the "spatio-temporal whole," which functions in the rhythm of opening and closing, appearing and disappearing of the phenomena in the field of attention, contraction and release, constant movement (Kępiński, 2002).

The fact that the self constantly expands and contracts due to some rhythm is hardly recognized in our social life. Our life dynamics require us to always be the same subject and have "what is mine" as a major object of our actions. Our value in society is counted in numbers: ciphers on a bank account, achievements numbered in our CV, number of years of diligent work. The numbers are units, and we think that we are built of them, as buildings are made of bricks. There is no place for rhythms in this picture.

From such an existential position originates our biggest metaphysical horror: reality built up from units, including the self as a unit. A horror recognized by some philosophical schools and independent thinkers. Arthur Schopenhauer called it elevating personality to the status of a thing in itself and warns his readers against making such a mistake, perhaps himself being warned by Eastern philosophy, for which it is a central theme. The Buddha enumerates clinging to self (Pāli: *attavadupadana*) in his list of unhealthy identifications. Laozi teaches a priority of situation over agency. "That is, agency is itself an abstraction from the complex web of constitutive relations that locates one within specific, concrete situation" (cited in Ames and Hall, 2003, p. 128). Yet, according to Daoism, we invest a lot into this agency: "One of the central themes of the *Daodejing* is how the human need to own, to get, to possess, throws the natural rhythms of life into convulsions" (Ames and Hall, 2003, p. 149).

Why does the adherence to concepts end up with convulsions? Kępiński answered that already: because such a stable metaphysical landscape produces a tremendous amount of fear. A psychotic of the catatonic type, for example, fears either explosion or implosion: exploding and disintegrating or having the whole universe imploded into herself. Both the options mean the death of a separate personality.

What Kępiński writes in the context of psychosis can be applied, one to one, to the context of metaphysics. The dynamics he describes, however, may work for our sake. In Buddhist meditation, for example, we provoke a controlled implosion. When we stop filing our world of experience with a strong sense of ourselves, life starts to pour into us by itself, washing out our fear and diminishing the power of desire for reality to be different than it is. The same process can be described in terms of a controlled explosion, as our self extends its narrow territory.

Oikeiōsis, or Intimacy with the Universe

The process of constant adjusting of our models of reality to the process of life, within energetic-informational metabolism, was a subject of pedagogy of not only Buddhist but also Western philosophers. The Stoic school, for example, perceived the process as leading to a total adjustment to the whole of the universe. They called it *oikeiōsis*. Martha Nussbaum defines the term as "the human being's complex adjustment to the design of universe" (Nussbaum, 2009, p. 332). We have summarized it as follows:

> The adjustment entails an experiential relationship with nature or going into nature in an open manner which, if successfully achieved, results in a conversion. Errors of thinking attributed to human culture in all its manifestations are considered to be the main barriers to achieving this conversion. The notion of *oikeiōsis* refers to the original stoic notion that humanity's highest aim is to live in accordance with the nature of the universe. This also means living in accordance with virtue, understood as building essential features of character, such as courage or temperance.
>
> (Fabjański and Brymer, 2017, p. 3)

The term *oikeiōsis* is often translated into English as "belonging" or "affinity." According to the Stoics, the most important tool that allows humans to attune to what they sometimes call the Allnature is reason. It points to the path leading to such an attunement. But reason for the ancient Greek philosophers is not just intellect. It is a cosmic force present both in the universe and in an individual. It is present on both sides of the Cartesian metaphysical equation: the thinking and the extended substance. However, Stoicism was not an attunement to what today's physics calls nature. Rather than that, the ancient Stoics strived to attune to that nature which Heraclitus described as one which "loves to hide." This procedure was not sense-centric and definitively not sight-centric, as we could suspect based on how w experience excursions to the forest. It required the engagement of all the senses, including the sense of reason. The expression "sense of reason" (as analogous to the sense of sight or smell) does not make sense only after the Cartesian split. The ancient Stoics pointed to the strict cooperation of the senses with the mind, which worked on "material" provided by the

senses. Even more easily, the expression "sense of reason" would be accepted by the ancient Buddhists, as in their philosophy, the mind is counted as the same kind of sense as sight, smell, or touch. Writes a Buddhist master from a Thai forest tradition:

> Don't try to latch onto the things you know – your preoccupations – as yours. Don't try to latch onto the knowledge that has come from within you as your own. Let these things be, in line with their own inherent nature. … Put your mind at ease.
>
> (Dhammādharo, 2000, p.14)

From this perspective, the knowledge does not come from "that has come from within you" but from everywhere around. When we are in a wild environment, such knowledge comes from all directions. As if we were a tree with its root system spread to large distances in all directions under the soil. But we are not a *tabula rasa* bombarded with sense impressions. Uncovering nature, which loves to hide, involves engaging the deep structures of the mind. Both in Stoicism and Buddhism, to accelerate this process, we should avoid the habit of filling with certainty, using Kępiński's language, places in our experience that are uncertain.

The Buddha and the Stoics give us a piece of simple advice: act as nature would like you to act – immerse yourself in nature, understand its patterns, and you will be well; your neurosis healed; your moral purification initiated. The reason is simple: The patterns which we absorb with our senses in our immediate surroundings are not unlike the patterns governing the whole universe. Living by them is the only path to harmony and sanity. Reality itself is your best teacher of both wisdom and ethics, as well as the best psychotherapist available, say both the Buddha and the Stoics.

According to the theory of *oikeiōsis*, when not disturbed, an organism attunes to the process of life spontaneously, as it is designed in such a way by the universe. What we need to do, is to incline it to attune, which is a complex life-long activity and includes the development of virtue, concentration, and insight. The most fundamental virtue in Antiquity was fortitude or courage. Applied to the second-by-second presence in the world, courage would mean relaxed permission for the dynamics between what we conventionally call "us" and "environment" to happen. In a way, courage is the question of attention. Courage also results in prudence or wisdom (another ancient cardinal virtue) and justice or fairness (also a cardinal virtue), which corresponds to what was discovered by the research on the human–nature relationship: Allowing the environment to act on us increases our intelligence and decreases egocentrism.

Oikeiōsis describes a type of human beings' fundamental presence on the planet Earth. Such presence can be philosophically modified. Read from this perspective, ancient philosophy, both Eastern and Western, can be defined as

a method of shaping our presence in such a way so our organisms attune to the rhythms of nature, which is another term for flourishing.

We are filling the universe with certainty, but when, due to philosophical practice, we realize that this certainty is a self-created product, we stand eye to eye with the process of emerging and disappearing, which is exactly how Heraclitus defined nature. However, we can talk with the universe only with its language, which is a language of emerging and disappearing. We can learn this language within our living and sensing bodies, pulsating in the rhythms of gathering tension and release. When the body attunes to nature and absorbs the rhythms of the non-artificial environment, we do not attune only to trees, air humidity, and breezes – we attune, at the same time, to the pulse of the whole universe.

A Stoic chooses her actions to be determined by her organism entangled with cosmos, and not with cultural fiction. She allows "a second life" to grow up within her field of attention, a life independent to self. She engages in life by giving space to the rhythms of nature.

Strategies of Attention

Taken to the level of daily life, the metaphysical scheme connecting individuals with the universe can assume a simple form of caring about how our attention works. It may include a proposal of a physically active, purposeful, meditative approach to activities in nature, which enables connection to the energy called the Open-source Intelligence, and gradually changing the perspective on reality from perceiving life as a collection of objects in space to perceiving it as a combination of various processes, which are governed by specific laws and independent of our will.

What changes on the way is the sense of possessing. We cannot possess processes in the way we possess things. Things seem to be passive and compact: we can pack some of them and take them with us for a journey, or label them in thoughts or by placing our names on them, if you think about, say, a cup or a notebook. Processes have their inner dynamics, which itself gives the impression of their independence. Even if we can possess a forest in terms of its conventional belonging to us (e.g., after we buy or inherit it), we cannot possess the forest phenomenologically. It has an independent life, does not follow our wishes, and overwhelms us by its size, vitality, and complexity. In nature, it is much easier for us to comprehend the ancient Stoic idea that we can at best "borrow" and not "own" things.

This idea is straightforward in terms of grasping at things or experiences while we are walking. During a walk, we cannot collect the fragments of the landscape we enjoy and take them with us. Walking through a natural landscape, especially for long distances, seems to be a natural way to enjoy things without getting attached to them. And as the dynamics of the *Satipaṭṭhāna sutta* and Buddhist philosophy in general show, less attachment to things means less attachment to self. Walking embodies the water strategy,

which, as Leonardo da Vinci wrote, passes through the landscape and borrows the views but does not take them with it.

During my six-week walk on the steps of German philosopher Johann Fichte from Leipzig (Germany) to Kaliningrad (Russia) in 2014, I have learned that the rhythm of paces easily seduces attention, bringing it back to the body and away from the hypermorphic dramaturgy. After about a one mile walk each morning, thoughts used to start appearing more rarely, my perception got sharper, and the feeling of tranquility and joy appeared. This psycho-physical state used to last for several miles until a level of tiredness and pain got stronger (when you walk long distances, you are destined to abrasions), achieving intensity, which naturally seduces attention, making the thoughts of worry appear.

Rebecca Solnit, in her book *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*, described in detail what happens in such situations:

> Walking itself is the intentional act closest to the unwilled rhythms of the body, to breathing and the beating of the heart. It strikes a delicate balance between working and idling, being and doing. It is a bodily labor that produces nothing but thoughts, experiences, arrivals....
>
> Walking, ideally, is a state in which the mind, the body, and the world are aligned, as though they were three characters finally in conversation together, three notes suddenly making a chord. Walking allows us to be in our bodies and in the world without being made busy by them. It leaves us free to think without being wholly lost in our thoughts....
>
> Moving on foot seems to make it easier to move in time; the mind wanders from plans to recollections to observations. The rhythm of walking generates a kind of rhythm of thinking, and the passage through a landscape echoes or stimulates the passage through a series of thoughts. This creates an odd consonance between internal and external passage, one that suggests that the mind is also a landscape of sorts and that walking is one way to traverse it (Solnit, 2002, loc.: 203, 204, 208, 209).

Here are my observations: When you walk long distances, especially in the natural environment, due to some kind of synchronization, you become more a function of the environment you pass through than a mobile bubble called the subject, moving through landscapes like a train compartment. Walking gives a chance to separate the pressure of gravitation in the body from the pressure generated from thinking. The two pressures – one self-driven, the second environment-driven – feel different, although they are similar in the sense that they are both acting forces. The force of gravitation when feeding attention calms us down by its smooth acting. The force originating from the thinking process, also felt as a pressure in the body, may cause different emotions, depending on what we think about.

While walking, you can detect subtle sensations in the body. Attention also easily soaks in sensations from the environment, naturally escaping the situation of entrapment. Thoughts are not directed to the practical management of the situation at hand, and emotions of ease and relief appear. Ancient philosophers used that state to direct their thinking to explore the truth. Peripatetics and philosophers like Rousseau, Kant, or Kierkegaard walked while pondering issues or discussing philosophical problems because the movement was contributing to their insightful thoughts.

However, when you walk long distances, a time comes when you suddenly find yourself again lost in thinking that is focused on solving the problem at hand, especially when tiredness or pain starts appearing more clearly in the field of experience. Attention has decided to wake up this type of hypermorphic dramaturgy because of the habit of solving problems. The last observation is confirmed by a study on the effects of walking in nature:

> Wayfinding was difficult for some. Those who reported problems with wayfinding (n = 15) systematically reported lower levels of restoration and valence after the walk. … The fact that the trail included several crossings (which, nevertheless, were marked with yellow ribbons) and required looking at a map to spot the signposts irritated some participants. Furthermore, taking an incorrect turn and having to return was a nuisance for some, although some found minor wandering around in a new environment inevitable. Most, nevertheless, thought that the trail was well marked and easy to follow.
>
> (Pasanen et al., 2018, p. 27)

There are two factors, quite obvious in the light of the argument in the book, that negatively influenced the well-being of the participants: attention waking up the hypermorphic dramaturgy while looking at a map, and returning from untasked to tasked activity. The same study showed that using phones for finding the path was highly disturbing and counter-productive to well-being. When we walk controlling our route on a cell phone, dramaturgies: hypermorphic and morphic with elements of sub-morphic, fight with each other within our field of attention. Our attention switches itself between dramaturgies of presence. Let us say we went for a spring walk in the park, and we experience it as a pleasant experience, enjoying the mild warm wind, the smell of the soil waking up to life after winter, and the sound of the birds singing in trees. Our body relaxes, our attention gets restored, thoughts are rarer and rather pleasant. Suddenly we meet a friend on the path and engage with her in a casual conversation. She says something important is happening to our mutual friend. Such an event will immediately soak our attention into the hypermorphic world, and we will likely feel the emotion of sadness and the sensation of heaviness if the news is tragic and *vice versa*. Our senses will collapse. When asked after coming home how the spot we learned the news looked like, we would have little

memories, as our attention was not in touch with the environment, being sucked instead into the hypermorphic world. Attention in times of such arousal is not suitable to produce a sense of connection with nature. It ceases to be sensitive. It is intensity, diversity, and the rhythm of impulses in all three dramaturgies that build sensitivity of attention.

Let say that, while walking the park, instead of an old friend, I see a group of teenagers running their skateboards straight on me with great speed. I notice that they are immersed in conversations with each other. I can suspect they do not really care about what is in front of them, which includes myself, and something in me detects the danger. In less than a second, my attention is not anymore with subtle sensations and rhythms of my steps or breathing. It is now interested not in the comforting feeling of gravitation massaging my body, but only in one task: how to avoid the clash. Attention acts now as a radar traveling to the object of danger and back. It has lost its expanding, atmospheric character and its ability to free itself from the situation of entrapment. The process was described in more detail by Hermann Schmitz's co-authors in a paper focusing on Schmitz's thought:

> According to Schmitz, the often nonspecific, diffusely localised corporeal feelings operate most of the time in the form of a pulsating rhythm in the felt body constantly oscillating between corporeal expansion and contraction, regularly at work already in breathing. This oscillation he christens "vital drive." Corporeal expansion is a marked widening of the felt space in the region of one's body, most notably occurring in states of relaxation. Characteristic examples of corporeal expansion are the experience of beholding of a wide, beautiful landscape, the first breaths outside in fresh air after having been locked inside a cramped and stuffy room, or the pleasant relaxing of the felt body when gently gliding into a hot bathtub. The opposite pole of corporeal contraction is a marked narrowing of he felt body, often in states of sudden, unexpected change to one's bodily orientation – such contraction occurs in states of shock, in panic or moments of great focus and concentration. Usually, expansion and contraction are dynamically related – Schmitz speaks of a "dialogical character" of the vital drive.
>
> (Schmitz et al., 2011, p. 245)

Switching between expansion and contraction may be caused by the need for compensation or escape. Sometimes we may find the contracted state an asylum, as this autoethnographic report demonstrates:

> *I am walking up the steep streets of Subiaco in the afternoon heat to deal with some boring administrative stuff. I feel the sweat on my back. I stick to the medieval buildings every time I hear the sound of a car approaching from behind: there are no sidewalks here, and if they do exist, they are ridiculously narrow. I start losing my breath, and my*

> *heart starts hammering. I am not delighted with the state of affairs, and my mind gets filled with aversion. In my mind appears the memory of me leaving my house in the mountains and meeting the coolness of the morning and the chirrup of the birds. Even if this is just the past replayed in the theater of my mind, it seems that a more nourishing chemical mixture starts to circulate in my veins. A shadow of relief appears.*

My attention was not interested in what was happening around me, so it got immersed into the hypermorphic dramaturgy. There may be a reason for which we stick so passionately to our storylines. Even though they are pure forms, they have worked out trails carved out in the body, signed by pleasant and unpleasant sensations. They can seduce our attention and cut us off from the reality of the situation. This is why *we humans are tragically free to immerse in mental worlds producing pleasing bodily chemistry: this immersion brings us temporary relief but traps our attention in a non-existing, rhythmless realm, which is detrimental to our health in the long run*. In the long run, the hypermorphic dramaturgy does not deliver its promise to place our attention in a happy world. Both accessible and intense mind-wondering result in dysphoria, the opposite of euphoria (Smallwood et al., 2007, p. 836). The hypermorphic dramaturgy is arhythmical, thus unhealthy. However, thoughts can also free attention from the situation of entrapment. They are just a form of presence of attention in the body, but they have a self-transcending quality – their content can remind us of returning to the senses. They make the philosophical activity possible.

Long walks, like the one from Leipzig to Kaliningrad, create tremendous opportunities to observe the rhythms of nature. Unfortunately, they are exceptions: it would be difficult to lead a nomadic life in the context of the present civilization, in which we are stuck in one place, alternating between our apartments and offices for most of the day. However, moving can be realized not only by long-distance walks. I propose the idea of a new *átopos* (Greek; non-place, out of place, or unusual): living life with attention inclined to movement as an expression of natural rhythms. If the Buddha and Kępiński were right, it could enhance our mental health and health in general.

The Desert of Pixels

We are back at home from the walk – already at the desk, the computer switched on, ready to fill the empty spaces in Word or Excel files. What happens to our attention now? It is drawn to an artificial realm of digital technology, which is devoid of natural rhythms. It is pushed into empty representations, transferred into the world of artificial patterns (digital and imaginative), which prevents our participation in the tissue of life with its rhythms, fluctuations, and vibrations. It seems that we become perfect Cartesians, having our minds completely taken outside of the process of life.

Now, with our eyes moving on the two-dimensional screen of pixels, our experience is limited almost entirely to what brings us the sense of sight. The process of drifting further and further from what is the real source of human vitality – active participation in the alive organism of our planet is completed.

Is the pixel world a desert from the point of view of conversion? A place where flourishing and awakening are not possible? There exists a body of research on the influence of digital technology on well-being. A *Nature* article summarizes the research in the following way:

> Digital technology has been blamed for a multitude of nasty effects, from mental-health problems to a decline in cognitive faculties. … Some fear that the digital environment is shortening attention spans – certainly, diagnoses of attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) have become more common in recent decades. It has been shown that the mere presence of a smartphone lowers performance on cognitive tasks, presumably because mental resources are tied up by the effort required to ignore the phone. The quality of face-to-face interactions has similarly been shown to decline around digital devices. So far, these results seem to be temporary: leave your phone in another room and it all goes away. But some researchers believe that the multitasking encouraged by digital technology might have lasting effects on attention. One study compared the performance of light and heavy multitaskers in attention-control tasks. It found that heavy multitaskers were less able to filter out distractions, and fared worse on task-switching tests. This effect is open to dispute.
>
> (Makin, 2018)

The research on the impact of digital technology use on well-being is not conclusive. A recent study suggests that "the general effects are on the negative end of the spectrum but very small" (Dienlin and Johannes, 2020). Pixels seduce attention. They trap it. I hypothesize that they, like any artificial creations, deprive attention of the ability to follow natural rhythms. In a sense, they are reversing the process of sensitization, which happens during *Satipaṭṭhāna sutta*-based meditation. If the general argument in this book is sound, the effect they make on attention prevents the process of human flourishing. To flourish, one needs to be well attuned to natural rhythms.

"Info blitzkrieg" – a catchy term referring to the bombardment of our brains by millions of bits of digital information – leads to a state of consciousness which, in psychological literature, is known as "continuous partial attention." If anything, this state seems to be the antithesis to the meditative states brought up by Buddhist practice, during which the mind is immersed in a series of meditative states, known in the Pāli language as *jhānas*, and in English as absorptions. One major factor of awakening is *samādhi or* concentration, and part of *samādhi* is "sustained concentration."

To develop this quality, one needs to teach her mind to return to a chosen object, be it the breath, candlelight, or any other among the 40 suitable ones enumerated, for example, in the *Visuddhimagga*, a classical Theravadin manual on meditation.

An architect, Juhani Pallasmaa, who investigated the consequences of the way we use our senses, diagnosed a perceptual situation that takes place while we use our computers, tablets, and cellphones:

> The ceaseless bombardment of unrelated imagery leads only to a gradual emptying of images of their emotional content. Images are converted into endless commodities manufactured to postpone boredom; humans in turn are commodified, consuming themselves nonchalantly without having the courage or even the possibility of confronting their very existential reality. We are made to live in a fabricated dream world.
>
> (Pallasmaa, 2008, p. 34)

Notebooks, tablets, and smartphones ignore our sense of smell, make little use of our sense of touch and vibrations, and employ mainly our eyes and, to some extent, ears. In effect, we rely more and more on the sense of sight, and this is not what nature meant when it brought us to life endowed with not only eyes but also ears, tongue, nose, and sensitive skin. Being in the woods is so beneficial for us also because it causes the simultaneous use of all the senses. By employing all the senses, we achieve an optimal state of learning, which is also an objective of Buddhist mental training. One hour in the forest and our attention span increases by 20 percent (Louv, 2011). Our memory and abstract thinking ability improve as well. Being cut off from nature, we lose more and more of the capabilities that evolution has equipped us with through the millions of years of its action. Nowadays, we make decisions and navigate the world under our ego's dictation, driven by desires imprinted on us by our culture, with its false notions and prejudices.

How, then, does virtual reality influence complex entities like ourselves, immersed in the environment with each breath and each micro-movement? It seems that when we reduce ourselves to avatar-like, purely conceptual, and virtual beings, we fail to acknowledge our complexity. And in so doing, we certainly neglect the advice of ancient sages. Instead of expanding ourselves to the whole universe – as the Stoics would like us to do – we constrain ourselves in tiny, handheld machines. Instead of allowing nature to reveal to us the chain of cause and effect by which it is governed (known in Buddhism as *paṭiccasamuppāda*), we live by the artificial patterns of the limited ego-self. And this only leads to confusion and immoral behavior. The Roman thinker Cicero defined good as what is entirely according to nature.

We will certainly not be able to sharpen our senses by staring at the laptop screen or watching TV. Spending our days in shopping malls will not help us either. Some data (in Louv, 2011) indicate that such environments are conducive to sensual dementia. American researchers spent 18 months figuring out

what kind of soldiers make the best minesweepers. Their conclusion? Residents of villages; people who often hunted in the past. They possess an ability to combine the depth of field, peripheral vision, and other currently unexplored factors, which for the time being, have been placed under the umbrella term "instinct." Soldiers from the city who spent their childhood playing computer games tend to see the world flat as if reality was displayed for them on a screen. For them, this is bad news; the real-life mines that the army deals with are unlike those from the *Call of Duty* computer game.

We cannot immerse ourselves in the patterns of nature by playing games. Louv writes:

> A computer game has plenty of loose parts, in the form of programming code, but the number and the interaction of these parts is limited by the mind of the human who created the game. In a tree, a woods, a field, a mountain, a ravine, a vacant lot, the number of loose parts is unlimited. It is possible, then, that exposure to the loose but related parts of nature can encourage a greater sensitivity to patterns that underline all experience, all matter, and all that matters.
>
> (Louv, 2011, loc. 584)

It might be possible that games, and all digital creations, by the mere fact of having inbuilt simplified patterns, do not offer us the possibility of conversion or achieving meditative states. Louv seems to seek the difference between natural and artificial patterns in their complexity; for me, the more crucial difference lies in the presence or lack of rhythms of contraction and expansion. I speculate that our consciousness, which contracts and expands itself, meets a similar pattern in the natural environment, which results in healthy synchrony, but not in the steady pixel patterns. This is why in nature our attention gets restored; while sitting behind a digital screen brings to it fatigue.

Simplified, rhythmless virtual reality presents yet another set of dangers. They are precisely described by psychiatrist Elias Aboujaoude in his pioneer book on how the Internet influences our sanity, titled *Virtually You: The Dangerous Powers of the E-personality*. Here are some of his claims:

1. By living an online life, many people assume brand new personalities, usually disturbed ones. E-personalities are characterized, among other things, by an exaggerated sense of abilities, superior attitude to others, specific moral code, proneness to impulsive behavior, and a tendency to regress to childlike states.
2. These features of E-personalities are quite universal. It is caused by the fact that the Internet provides anonymity and immediate fantasy fulfillment.
3. The E-personality often emerges unintentionally and, in a way, takes us over. When it happens, the return to offline life with all its codes and limitations is usually painful.(Aboujaoude, 2011)

This is hardly a surprise if we consider what the Buddha and modern neuroscience say about the self being an ever-changing process with no stable entity at its core. The self can be in disharmony with the body and with reality. Given the plasticity of the self, we should not wonder why computer technology is able to steal it from the body (just as some psychiatric illnesses do) and install it into virtual worlds. And this provides us with reasons to consider the concept of preserving experience as a moral value. Working towards such preservation is, at the same time, working towards the health and well-being of both individuals and society as a whole. The qualities of the E-personality, as described by Aboujaoude, are clearly contrary to the qualities or virtues of the Stoic ideal of a philosopher. The Stoics emphasize the urgency of achieving *ataraxia* – a tranquil mind, independent of events and the impulses they cause. Perhaps Aboujaoude's patients' failure to achieve satisfaction in virtual reality is due to the absence of a moral foundation underpinning the virtual environment's design.

One fascinating insight Aboujaoude offers in his book concerns the different nature (and thus treatment) of compulsive behavior online and offline. One of the most efficient methods we have developed to fight obsessions is cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), in fact, often recommended as a first-line treatment for compulsive behavior. However, it did not help Aboujaoude's patients, who were compulsively shopping online. The reason was simple: The patients could find unhealthy thoughts, core beliefs, and actions in their offline lives and correct them, but could not do it in their lives online. "[The E-personality] was some virtual extension [of the offline personality] – a foreign entity, one much more difficult to reach than the person sitting in my office" (Aboujaoude, 2011, loc. 296). The only treatment he came up with was suspending the patients' Internet subscriptions. It seems that E-personality is not able to develop virtues effectively.[2]

There is only contraction and no expansion when attention immerses in pixel worlds. This entirely contracted state of consciousness is opposite to the state activated while we are in nature. We can speculate on the phenomenal imprint of the pixel worlds as compared to a natural phenomenon, which has an entirely different pattern: flowing water. Many ancient philosophical schools use the picture of the water flowing in a river as a model of a proper attitude to life. Observing the water flowing in a river or waves in the ocean is one traditional spiritual practice, which helps to incline our attention in such a way to understand the fluent nature of reality. For example, in the short text of the *Daodejing*, we find several references to the water. *Dao* itself, a cosmic principle, is described as the water. Laozi wants us to learn the truth of existence from the natural rhythms of life and avoid throwing the rhythms into convulsions of artificial patterns. The reality, for him, is not a reality of compact forms. It has no borders. Dao "blunts the sharp

edges" (Ames and Hall, 2003, p. 83). The digital world seems to sharpen the edges instead.

While teaching my students elemental meditation described in Chapter 2, I realized that very often, paying attention to the element of water (felt, e.g., in its characteristics of liquidity) gives them a sense of comfort during the process of abandoning old models of reality and developing new ones. Water psychologically provides the feeling of safety because it has the feature of cohesiveness, opening us to the environment at the same time. It frees meditator attention from the situation of entrapment in a safe way.

Attention Loves to Escape

Let me summarize the picture of the human–nature co-existence unfolded so far in this book. By what I call The Open-source Intelligence Hypothesis, I propose that attention which is a feature of the process of life and which may be present in a rudimentary form even in electrons (according to Hunt and Schooler, 2019), is a rhythmical activity, which can be trapped within arising and disintegrating perspectival views. A specific method –Buddhist insight meditation – is aimed at freeing attention from the situation of entrapment. *Satipaṭṭhāna sutta* pedagogy facilitates this process. Attention's tendency to free itself from limited perspectival views manifests stronger and stronger as the meditation based on this sutta progresses. In accordance with Buddhist philosophy, freeing of attention can be understood as a parameter of health understood as flourishing. The process of attention's escaping the interception of perspectival view is also enhanced by merely exposing our organisms to the patterns of the natural environment, as more and more research indicates (see Fabjański and Brymer, 2017). Some schools of so-called Theravāda Buddhism (e.g., the Thai forest tradition) were perfectly aware of this phenomenon.

My hypothesis is that we thrive in the rhythms of nature because within the system of organisms immersed in the natural environment operates a kind of intelligence, which I call the Open-source intelligence, which manifests itself by freeing attention from the situation of entrapment in a perspectival view. This is why we have fewer thoughts in nature (as thoughts produce a thinker-centered perspective), and the seducing power of the hypermorphic dramaturgy is weaker there than in the city. This is also why – as the research mentioned above shows – our clarity of thinking increases in nature. This hypothesis is based so far in this book on the recognition (both by Buddhist philosophy and based on meditative experience) that in the process of deepening the insight, meditation experience becomes less and less personal. I will investigate this phenomenon in more detail in the second part of the book.

The main function of Open-source intelligence is to overcome dramaturgies of presence. It drives attention from the most stagnant states, such as auto-hypnotic catatonic state, to much more fluent situations, for example,

states in which attention perceives the dynamics of elements in our body or rapid dramaturgies of mental micro-movements (the last state one can observe only in advanced phases of meditation – more about which in the chapters to come).

Attention picks up different qualities depending on the dramaturgy it is engaged with. The more subtle the experience, as the *Satipaṭṭhāna sutta* demonstrates, the more sensitive attention becomes. Attention is most heavy in the hypermorphic dramaturgy. When we are lost in thoughts, Open-source Intelligence is almost shut off. Even simple directing attention to gross objects, such as postures of the body, strengthens attention's agility. It becomes lighter and operates to a bigger extend from the position of the Open-source Intelligence. Sensual attuning to the richness of the natural environment, even in a simple form of exposing our organism to nature, results in an increase of attention agility. Subjectively, people feel like being more tranquil and thinking more effectively:

> They [researchers] followed participants in an Outward Bound-like wilderness program, which took people into the wilds for up to two weeks. During these treks or afterward, subjects reported experiencing a sense of peace and an ability to think more clearly; they also reported that just being in nature was more restorative than the physically challenging activities, such as rock climbing, for which such programs are mainly known.
>
> (Louv, 2011, location 485)

In the woods, just like during sub-morphic meditation, attention becomes lighter, quicker, and more sensitive. But if, after returning from the woods to our office, we place it back within the hypermorphic realm of our thoughts or on the screen of pixels, which is not composed of natural patterns, and makes our experience monopolized by the sense of seeing, attention returns to its heaviness and low level of sensitization.

Can we describe in detail the mechanism of the human–nature co-dependency and answer the question: "Why do we thrive in the rhythms of nature?". I think that this question may not be answerable within the present paradigm of our thinking. Perhaps we cannot describe in the language of contemporary science (or in the everyday language saturated with the metaphysics of cartesian type) the exact nature of the human–nature relationship, which covers the detailed dynamics of the interrelation of what was traditionally perceived in the West as the physical and the psychical. But we can learn a lot by trying to do so. We can also employ a specific philosophical language or create a new one, which will be more effective than the language of natural sciences in giving us some insight into the issue. In the next chapter of this book, I will employ, among others, Martin Heidegger's language and propose some new concepts and arguments for the sake of answering the above-mentioned question.

Themes for Contemplation

1 Can you feel the kind of intimacy with nature you feel with another person?
2 Can you distinguish situations in your life when an old model of the world does not fit the reality of what is going on and blocks you from the intelligent response to it?
3 What is the difference between the sensations, emotions, and thoughts you feel after some time spent in the natural environment versus spent behind a computer at your desk? How do you act in both cases?

Notes

1 Kępiński might have thought of models of reality as representations mediating between reality and mind. But they can also be seen, and I prefer this picture, as repeatably occurring attunements or detunements to what was defined by Hunt and Schooler (2019) as "large-scale shared resonance."
2 My position is not against technology, which in an obvious way makes our life much easier and more effective when it comes to fulfilling tasks. I am simply expressing an opinion that immersion of attention in technological patterns through most of our days may be counter-productive to the process of flourishing as understood by various schools of philosophy.

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4 Depsychologization of Experience

Mysticism and Psychology

Attention is rhythmical and can be more or less contracted. It acts as if it wanted to free itself from the situation of interception within what I call a dramaturgy of presence, and which constitutes a perspectival view. As the Buddhist pedagogy teaches us, there are several such dramaturgies, in particular: hypermorphic (of thoughts and mental images), morphic (of compact objects perceived in space), and sub-morphic (of elemental processes). Giving attentional preference to the hypermorphic dramaturgy makes us stay on the peripheries of the process of life, the richness and vitality of which we cannot feel.

Exposing our organisms to the natural environment enhances attention's power to escape from the situation of interception, which manifests itself – as research to which I referred in previous chapters shows – in various parameters of well-being: enhanced feelings of meaning and personal growth, a feeling of co-dependence with the rest of the process of life, a relaxed attitude, restored attention, a sense of connection with a greater whole, etc. (e.g., Pritchard et al., 2020). We can incline attention towards such an escape, which results in an intimate embodiment of nature (i.e., shifting our zone of intimacy in such a way that it includes more of nature around us).

An ancient ideal of the Stoic school, among others, assumed the ability of such a shift to the extent of being intimate with the whole universe and acquiring a completely new picture of life. To put it in terms of a Polish psychiatrist Antoni Kępiński, this new perspective would overcome the illusions of permanence, objectivity, and separateness, which are effects of the functioning of informational metabolism.

We can teach our attention to distinguish forces operating in our body as forces born from the hypermorphic dramaturgy or mental life (such as pressure/heaviness in my body when I am told of a tragedy of my friend) and forces born in the environment (such as gravitation). I call them respectively self-driven and environment-driven forces. They feel different within the field of experience. In a specific case of attention immersed in

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digital technology devices, such as screen pixels, attention is trapped in an environment devoid of natural rhythms, which, as studies referred to in the previous chapter show, may result in negative consequences for well-being.

We need a new language different than the post-Cartesian language of the natural sciences if we want to grasp the essence of the human–nature relationship. However, we can still use our conventional language (even have to, due to the lack of other options) to describe particular fragments of this relationship's complexity. Meditative experiences that happen in nature are often analyzed in the language of psychology or language borrowed from mystical traditions within the contemporary science and humanities. For example, an article titled "Mystical Experiences in Nature: Comparing Outcomes for Psychological Well-Being and Environmental Behaviour" (Snell and Simmonds, 2015), following the earlier tradition of the psychology of religion, counts "loss of self," "sense of oneness," "loss of sense of space and time," or "acknowledging that the experience provides a new sense of knowledge or reality" as mystical experiences. We learn from the article that the natural environment provokes mystical experiences more likely than urban settings. Research conducted on a group of 307 people showed that they usually rated their mystical experiences in nature higher than similar experiences in human-built environments. Additionally, when such an experience happens in nature, it positively influences the pro-ecological behavior of the research participants. Mystical experiences significantly predict their psychological well-being as well.

This article was published in the journal *Archive for the Psychology of Religion*, which makes natural the blend of religious and psychological language the authors employ. But similar language is employed by the subjects of other studies, not just by academics that perform them. A participant of another research project, a trip of women hiking or canoeing in the wilderness for a week, describes her experience in the following words:

> I remember the way the moon rose up over the canyon wall and then cast shadows over the entire canyon floor. I loved just lying there and staring up at the stars and being able to pick out Orion's belt and being filled with this sense of infinitude. It made me love going to bed at night to experience this feeling all over again … I felt a complete merging with the surrounding environment. Instead of sitting back and observing it, it's like I was moving into it in some way, or rather it was moving into me… It was pure shadow-play, being at peace with the night sky and the big, beautiful desert silence that simply held us all in a trance.
>
> (Grand Canyon trip participant, age 50, in Frederickson and Anderson, 1999, p. 31)

We learn from this study that solitude in a natural environment inclined participants to contemplate deepest life questions. Heightened sensory awareness was, for them, a parameter in defining what is spiritual. The authors of the

study discovered that "the way in which individuals react to and interpret the natural environment is a multi-faceted phenomenon, and the ways in which various individuals derive or attach meaning from various landscapes is equally complex" (ibid., p. 35). However, this partly mystical and partly psychological language the participants and researchers employ makes it difficult to discover new features of experience, on top of what was discovered and described as early as the nineteenth century by authors like William James or Henry David Thoreau, who used similar language. Later in this book, I employ approaches like autophenomenography to retrieve and analyze the details of the meditative experiences and experiences in nature as a means for enriching the hypothesis of Open-source Intelligence, making it more plausible.

Self is Longer than Events

Below is my autoethnographic description of an experience during a Buddhist meditation retreat in the Czech Republic led by Burmese teacher Sayadaw U Tejaniya. I recreated this experience from notes taken immediately after it happened:

> *Late night. I am sitting in a chair in an empty living room and watching my mind. Everyone else is asleep. Silence. I notice I am mindful and observe the sensations effortlessly. My mind does not push itself into thinking as usual. My equanimity is also superb – I do not want to change my experience at all. Body sensations and sounds present themselves clearly, removed from the usual fog of thinking. I am filled with a sense of freedom. Suddenly there is an impulse to go to sleep. I choose not to do this – why would I waste such a great awareness? I decide to see what will happen and continue sitting.*
>
> *Seconds pass. The impulse to go to bed comes again. But now I can see that what wants to go to sleep is not me. Seconds earlier, I would have sworn that I wanted it. Suddenly it becomes clear: the first "I" was a lie, a mask, a trick by which the life process (body and mind in the environment) wanted to achieve its intended result – to put the body to bed. But the thought impulse was just a message from the life process to my conscious self. It wasn't me.*

Ideally, it should be a pure description. But authors like Jacquelyn Allen-Collinson realize that pure description is not possible; interpretation is already a part of how we describe our experience (Allen-Collinson, 2011, p. 8). The report above demonstrates it. What follows is the autophenomenographic analysis of the experience according to how Allen-Collinson interprets the method of the founder of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl:[1]

1 Personal information focused on my conditioning as a meditator: while having this experience, I was 38 years old. I had been

meditating in the Buddhist tradition for about 18 years, which included approximately 1.5 years of intensive retreats of various lengths in monasteries and meditation centers in Asia, Europe, and the USA. My longest and by far most exciting and effective retreat took place in Shwe Oo Min monastery in Myanmar, under the same teacher I met in the Czech Republic – U Tejaniya, six years prior to the experience. I was raised in a Catholic family in Poland and turned to Buddhism in an effect of intellectual seducing by its philosophy and fascination with the idea of meditation. I went for a week-long retreat in the Czech Republic with an agenda to deepen my meditation which became shallow in daily life. I had a strong trust in the qualification of the teacher.

2 Analysis of the experience in a spirit of *epochē* or phenomenological reduction, which aims "to suspend as far as possible the researcher's 'natural attitude', her/his preconceptions, presuppositions, attitudes toward, and interpretations of the phenomenon, including so-called 'scientific' ones" (Allen-Collinson, 2011, p. 8):The experience came to me unexpectedly, in a moment of relaxation, not during a session of formal meditation. The description does not include it, but I remember a feeling of the lightness of my body. I was not trying to achieve anything, being happy with the pleasant state of effortless equanimity. I was satisfied with myself and the state of the world around me. I did not want to change anything. The realization of the fact that my equanimity was superb, sensory awareness heightened, and thinking scarce did not produce a thought either of wanting an insight or wanting to keep the state longer. My decision to continue meditation was based mainly on the curiosity of what would happen next if I continued. This curiosity proved itself crucial in deciding not to follow the impulse to go to bed and see the results of such inaction.

The situation was characterized by: lack of effort and a lack of expectations, which I probably had during formal sessions based on my opinion about the good qualities of the teacher. The very context of the Buddhist meditation retreat was not pronounced as well as a sense of being a long-term meditator who "achieved" high levels of meditation in Asian monasteries. Quite contrary, during the experience, I was sitting at a chair, as I used to sit at home and not at the meditation cushion as I used to sit during the formal sessions of meditation. It happened in the living room and not in the meditation hall.

The insight that followed consisted of two phases: the direct feeling that it was not me that wanted to go to bed and the intellectual realization that there were two "I"s and that the first I was a mask, a kind of disguise. The insight was characterized by a strong sense of novelty and significance of what was happening. A category that describes this sense best would probably be "unusualness."

3 Retrieving an essence or *eidos* of the content of the experience, "something without which the phenomenon would cease to be recognizable to the perceiver as that particular phenomenon" (Allen-Collinson, 2011, p. 9): The moment of insight was the state of no concerns, filled with the sense of wonder, novelty, and significance, and resulting in clear realization, and later thought of the existence within my field of experience of a narrow I, which is not real. The realization and its formulation were clear and immediate and provided me with the truth about life, which I consider valid even today. The experience was also a clear example of a meta-awareness defined as the situation in which meditators "perceive their sense of self as 'repeatedly arising'" (Hölzel et al., 2011, p. 547).

Autophenomenography is interested in the very experience of the phenomenon and not so much in its cultural context.[2] I cannot, however, omit a methodological remark about phenomenological reduction. It seems that the physical setting in which the experience happened was accidentally supporting this reduction. Finding myself suddenly in a home-like environment, even if it was in the middle of the Buddhist meditation retreat, "took in a bracket" (which is a phenomenological postulate) my conditioning as a meditator. It seems that the very equanimity present during the experience not only facilitated the insight but also reduced cognitive and affective bias, which phenomenology would like to get rid of. Perhaps resisting the impulse to go to bed was at the same time a momentary suspension of a habit that separated me from perceiving clearly what was going on. Buddhist meditation is designed to overcome a self-centric view. As such, it combines the advantages of personal participation with a non-biased attitude. The Buddhist equivalent of *epochē* is perhaps *viveka* (detachment), particularly *citta-viveka* (mental detachment) and *uppadhi-viveka* (detachment from burdens), defined in a Buddhist dictionary as "detachment from the substrata of existence" (Nyanatiloka, 1997, p. 240). Other authors (e.g., Buddhadāsa) write of *uppadhi-viveka* as solitude on the spiritual level.

When analyzed from the point of view of the Three Dramaturgies of Presence (3DP) model, the retreat experience reveals the work of the dramaturgies, as well as the fact that we cannot say that the insight was purely mental. Let's look at it in this light. The equanimity I felt before the insight had both mental and physical character if looked at from the Cartesian positions: mind not pushing into thinking, body at ease, and experience of the clear sensations. I experienced it as a single quality present both on the side of the mind and the body, an "internally diffused meaningfulness," to use Schmitz's words (Schmitz et al., 2011). Attention did not get seduced by the hypermorphic dramaturgy, and I saw thoughts as if from outside. My attention was partly in a morphic dramaturgy, when I felt a sense of my body, placed in the space of the

room, between other objects, and partly in the sub-morphic when sounds and body sensations presented themselves clearly in my field of experience. I felt the specific meditative pleasure, known in the Pāli language as *passaddhi* (tranquility) that got me out of the three dramaturgies of presence to the amorphic dramaturgy of feelings (Pāli *vedanā*), which are the concern of the phase of the pedagogy of *Satipaṭṭhāna sutta* not yet discussed in this book and which I will discuss in the following passages. It is possible to speculate in the light of this sutta that when the impulse to go to bed appeared for the second time, my attention was sensitive enough to realize a phenomenon of the disguised I because it operated having *citta* (consciousness) as its basis. What does it mean?

We left analyzing the *Satipaṭṭhāna sutta* in Chapter 2, after the second last phase of contemplating the body as an elemental phenomenon. Let us see how the sutta's pedagogy unfolds afterward. Let's return then return to a Theravāda Buddhist monastery and see how the process of further sensitization of attention deepens. Let us see the geography of the amorphic territories of feelings (*vedanā*), consciousness (*citta*), and the nature of the process of life (*dhamma*) and introduce us to amorphic dramaturgies.

After the phase of meditation on the elements, the sutta suggests what to today's Western audience may seem like the darkest area of Buddhist meditation and what is called "the Nine Charnel Ground Contemplations." The adept is supposed to go to a charnel ground and observe the bodies thrown there as they decompose in various stages of decay. I have never experienced this practice, but its goal seems obvious: to further detach from the body and strengthen equanimity. The adept should contemplate in this way:

> Again, bhikkhus, as though he were to see a corpse thrown aside in a charnel ground, one, two, or three days dead, bloated, livid, and oozing matter, a bhikkhu compares this same body with it thus: "This body too is of the same nature, it will be like that, it is not exempt from that fate."
>
> (Bodhi, 2009, p. 148)

From my experience, I conclude that this phase is usually skipped in the Buddhist monasteries in Theravāda countries, and the adept is supposed to proceed directly from meditating on elements to meditating on sensations-feelings in their characteristic as pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. She enters an amorphic dramaturgy of the affective tone. The feelings she contemplates have both bodily and mental aspects. The category of *vedanā* covers both sensations and emotions, which reflects perhaps the way people felt the world in pre-Cartesian times and non-Cartesian cultures.

After successfully completing this phase, the student of the Buddhist insight meditation contemplates consciousness or mind (*cittānupassanā*). This is sometimes presented in Buddhist monasteries (e.g., in the Shwe Oo

Min monastery) as contemplation of the mood, a name justified by passages we find in the *Satipaṭṭhāna sutta:*

> And how, bhikkhus, does a bhikkhu abide contemplating mind as mind? Here a bhikkhu understands mind affected by lust as mind affected by lust, and mind unaffected by lust as mind unaffected by lust. He understands mind affected by hate as mind affected by hate, and mind unaffected by hate as mind unaffected by hate. He understands mind affected by delusion as mind affected by delusion, and mind unaffected by delusion as mind unaffected by delusion. He understands contracted mind as contracted mind, and distracted mind as distracted mind. He understands exalted mind as exalted mind, and unexalted mind as unexalted mind. He understands surpassed mind as surpassed mind, and unsurpassed mind as unsurpassed mind. He understands concentrated mind as concentrated mind, and unconcentrated mind as unconcentrated mind. He understands liberated mind as liberated mind, and unliberated mind as unliberated mind.
>
> (Bodhi, 2009, p. 150)

It seems quite plausible to assume that the retreat experience I analyze, which started with a clear awareness of equanimity and ended with the realization of the illusion of I, would be classified as contemplation of consciousness by the *Satipaṭṭhāna sutta*.

The final phase designed by the pedagogy of the sutta – the contemplation of the nature of the process of life (*dhammānupassanā*) – suggests a strong inclination of attention towards perceiving subtle and dynamic structures and processes in the field of experience, and is supposed to result in the realization of the universal characteristics of the experience. The dynamics of such understood and designed meditation leads to abandoning illusion, one of which is the illusion self. As such, it is contradictory to the dynamics of contemporary Western culture with its tendency to underline the existence of the strong self. One aspect of this tendency is a cultural phenomenon known as "psychologization." I will analyze it, hypothesizing that it is unhealthy and that one reason for which being in nature enhances our health is that it animates the opposite process – that of depsychologization.

I could describe the Czech retreat experience as liberation from a psychic bubble, which happened in several steps: perceiving thought as if from outside would be the first one, realizing the illusion of the I that wanted to go to bed, final one. Perhaps my other experience, this time one that happened outside of the meditation retreat context, shows more clearly the anatomy of the psychic bubble:

> *I rise from my bed and realize that one of my body's images appearing inside my brain is a simulation of the future. I notice that although the body was hardly raised, still almost lying down, the mind pictured it*

> *already halfway between the position of lying down and the position of staying straight. I felt as if I were already there, higher than I was: I embodied a future state of affairs. I manage to stop the body's movement before it reaches the position already signaled by the mind as having been assumed by me and freeze in amazement. What has just happened? My attention in a micro-flash, was split between the position of my body and the picture of my body in mind. This was an exciting experience, which pumped into my veins adrenaline and unexpected excitation for the incoming day.*

While writing the note, the same day the experience happened, I had definitely assumed the Cartesian perspective, writing that image appeared "inside my brain" and later dividing the activity into the work of the mind and work of the body. But I was at the same time amazed how this experience messed with this dualist picture. What was disorienting (but exciting at the same time) was the feeling of embodying morphic dramaturgy in the form of my body raising, followed by embodying the hypermorphic dramaturgy of the future position of the body, which has never happened, and returning again to the morphic dramaturgy. Normally, we do not embody the hypermorphic dramaturgy, as we can distinguish between the feeling of the body as flesh and the immersion into the flesh-less mental words.

This experience may mean that the moment of cognition is "longer" than a minute position of a moving body. The self is longer than events, in the very sense the Buddhist *Satipaṭṭhāna sutta* teaches. The feeling of self (being a separated entity in space), itself appearing and disappearing rhythmically in flashes five to eight times per second (Hanson and Mendius, 2009), is a simplification of the complex pulsation of reality. It is also slower than reality as if it was pulsating in longer intervals. It may be projected – as a kind of "me-suspicion" to the future. Usually, "me-suspicion" happens in hypermorphic dramaturgy as a creation of the imagination. What was particularly interesting in this unexpected standing-up experience was that this time in was embodied "me-suspicion" as if I were moved into the future with my body and my senses operating normally, especially the sense of proprioception (but also the sense of visual presence). Shout I fell inertly fall down – taken down by a sniper's shot, for example – I would never reach the position I have already embodied. A phenomenologist's concept may explain what happened: "Perceptual presence is not punctual; it is a field in which now, not-now, and not-yet-now are given in a horizontal gestalt" (Gallagher and Zahavi, 2021, p. 82).

According to this view, consciousness is generated from the field of lived presence determined by what the authors call the *protentional–primal impressional–retentional structure of consciousness*. Their analysis includes the notion of "the extended now," a term borrowed from William James. In certain states, as the above-described situation shows, the sensitivity of attention allows one to spontaneously deconstruct the seemingly unified

extended now and see through the dynamics of mind resulting in projecting presence to the future.

The nature of meditative experiences and the pedagogy of the Buddhist spiritual exercises suggest that this tendency to spread to the future but also the past is a feature of attention in a specific state: attention intercepted by a dramaturgy. Not intercepted attention stays more closely with what is happening in the present, attuning itself rhythmically to micro-events, becoming more and more sensitive in the process. It becomes meta-attention. However, such meditative attention is a rarity, as social norms force us to engage our attention with performing tasks. Such a "tasking-attention" cannot attune to the subtleties of experience unless the task is meditation itself. Paradoxically, it seems we live most of our lives not in the state of me-in-the-present, relating to the environment but in the state of me-suspicion. Neuro-research seems to confirm such a picture, at least in the special case of out-of-body experiences (OBEs):

> There are typically two representations of one's body in these experiences: the visual one (the sight of your own body, lying on the bed, say, or on an operating table) and the felt one, in which you feel yourself to be hovering above or floating in space. Interestingly, this second body model is the content of the PSM. This is where the Ego is. … What these experiments demonstrate is that the deeper, holistic sense of self is not a mystery immune to scientific explorations – it is a form of conscious representational content, and it can be selectively manipulated under carefully controlled experimental conditions.
>
> (Metzinger, 2009, loc. 154)

Metzinger refers in these passages to research on OBE at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Lausanne, which included stimulating patients' brains with an electrode to cause such experiences. The PSM he writes about refers to "phenomenal-self model," or how we picture ourselves in daily actions. He states that we identify ourselves with the felt picture rather than with biological reality. Based on the meditative experiences, like the one described above, I propose that this is true for everyday functioning and not just for exceptional OBE experiences. However, we do not notice our functioning mode unless some kind of cognitive change messes with our attentional habits, as happens during a deep meditation or standing up from bed in the morning when old habits have not yet started functioning. I also think that such a "mess" takes place in nature when attention is spontaneously seduced by the biological realm, in the process of synchronization of the rhythms of human consciousness with the rhythms pulsating in the natural environment. To attune to nature, we need to mess ours sense of self.

The three dramaturgies of presence are functioning due to the mechanism of identification. Having attention seduced by one of them does not mean that we participate in a singular world of concepts or objects in space or

processes. Our experience is always a mixture of mental images and sensational stimuli, in which "what happened a few milliseconds ago is dynamically mapped back to what is coming in right now" (Metzinger, 2009, loc. 517). The information from the past mixed with what is coming right now and our projections into the future is arhythmical and desynchronizes us from the rhythms of nature. The three dramaturgies are played on what Metzinger calls "high-level attention," which constitutes, as opposed to the "low-level attention," realm of conscious information.

In the passages above, I referred to the particular case of OBE, and in Chapter 2 to another particular case of meditating because they are today subjects of scientific research and, on the other hand, they touch a different range of experience than that available for the default everyday consciousness. A similar situation happens in the natural environment when the range of human experience is shifted in the process of intimate embodying of nature (but also in the unusual situation of standing up from the bed as described above). It seems that in nature, the felt experiences are more pronounced than visual, as compared to the artificial environment. And as Louv writes, "When truly present in nature, we do use all our senses at the same time, which is the optimum state of learning" (Louv, 2011, loc. 444).

Viewed from the position of the conceptual framework developed in this book, me-suspicion interferes with attunement to the rhythms of nature, a process that would happen spontaneously but for our cultural conditioning. Does the realistic simulation of us into the future (so we believe the future is happening to us now) change all that is happening between now and the simulation? Do we have to "consume" the simulation, or is it in the power of our will to refuse it and choose another scenario? If we have to, which I think is the case unless our attention is sensitized to a certain degree by meditation or presence in nature, it means that our projections lead us. I propose that attuning to the rhythms of nature can happen more effectively when attention is on a very high level of sensitization, able to catch mechanisms of such simulation at work, which in the case of the Buddhist meditation, happens by a series of insights.

Certain philosophical and architectural theory, which I have turned to already in the previous chapter, states that there is much more thinking involved in the process of seeing than in other sensual processes. Overusing the sense of sight, we become more prone to seducing by hypermorphic dramaturgy. Architect Juhani Pallasmaa writes that to feel within the process of life, we need to abandon our habit of focusing the activity of the eyesight: "The very essence of the lived experience is moulded by hapticity and peripheral unfocused vision. Focused vision confronts us with the world whereas peripheral vision envelops us in flesh of the world" (Pallasmaa, 2008, p. 10).

According to Pallasmaa, ancient Greek architectural conventions, unlike today's, resulted in elevating buildings, which satisfied not only central but also peripheral seeing. By doing so, the buildings engaged the people that

faced them in a more active way. Modern houses isolate us from themselves. They are objects to be used and not spaces that invite us inside. This shows, I think, that the ancient Greeks had a different anatomy of the self than we have. They interacted with buildings more intimately than we do, reaching more easily outside the psychic bubble. Today's point of departure to being in the world, writes Pallasmaa (referring to Heidegger), is a position of someone who has colonized the world by the sense of sight. The more important the role of the eye in perception, the stiffer the muscles of the face, and the more pronounced the sense of separateness. The more important the eye is in a given culture, the stronger the supervision of some people over other people.[3]

Both meditation and presence in nature are de-colonizing the world, freeing it from the role of a huge magazine with the collection of means. The two situations break with the habit of giving a privilege to the sense of sight and to a lesser degree, the sense of hearing. They restore the important position of the other three senses – and perhaps also senses beyond the Aristotle list of five, which are claimed today by scientists, such as proprioception or the sense of balance – which according to Pallasmaa, are weakened by our cultural code.

Sight is the sense of a manager, writes the Finnish architect, quoting philosopher David Michael Levin:

> The will to power is very strong in vision. There is a very strong tendency in vision to grasp and fixate, to reify and totalise: a tendency to dominate, secure, and control, which eventually, because it was so extensively promoted, assumed a certain uncontested hegemony over our culture and its philosophical discourse, establishing, in keeping with the instrumental rationality of our culture and the technological character of our society, an ocullarcentric metaphysics of presence.
>
> (In Pallasmaa, 2008, p. 17)

Sight separates us from the world, while other senses connect us to it. It is the sense of sight that freezes us in the morphic reality of space filled with objects (including other people), which we want to use for our gratification. The world of objects can easily become the world of fighting and manipulation. Meditation or exposure to nature can be ways to get rid of these strategies and return to the world as it is, freeing our experience from our interpretations.

The Psy-problem

The division between us and reality manifests itself also as psychologization, which Gordo and Vos (2010, p. 3) define as "modern, and ever expanding, tendency to manage non-psychological issues in psychological terms." Editing a special issue of a journal dedicated to psychologization and

depsychologization, they state that "the psy-sciences have became a hegemonic discourse delivering and investing in ways of looking upon oneself and upon the world" (Gordo and Vos, 2010, p. 4). The authors provide such a definition:

> Psychologisation and, by extension, psychology may be conceptualised as an outcome, a central feature of neoliberalism or, alternatively, as a process rather than a steady condition – insofar as being in a psychologised milieu does not entail being fully psychologised or being the only play in town.
>
> (Gordo and Vos, 2010, p. 6)

They ask: "Are we lost in psychologisation? Is there no outside of psychology and psychologisation?" (ibid., p. 7). I think we are lost in psychologization, not only by explaining our experience to ourselves in psychological terms but also on the most profound metaphysical level. Psychological concepts are, for us, the dominating frame of reference explaining our position within the tissue of life, our relationship with what is not us, and the meaning of life. By doing so, they build an invisible barrier between us and our experience, which ceases to be direct and is always mediated by psychologization, blocking an intuitive response to whatever is happening and depriving us of moral sense and moral feelings.

Ron Roberts, in his book *Psychology and Capitalism. The Manipulation of Mind* (2015), states that psychology was born together with liberal capitalism and is serving a particular concept of humans, a concept which has emerged together with this cultural formation. It makes us, contemporary people, fake our emotions by acquiring psychological skills expected from us as efficient workers. It places our attention in unreal realms, cutting us off effectively from the vitality of life (which is exactly what Friedrich Nietzsche said about religion 130 years earlier). It dictates a normality pattern, which limits the range of our thinking, feeling, and acting, endowing us with the tendency to self-blame and self-scrutiny. According to the picture advocated by Roberts, psychology has made us human resources. Not just in the eyes of our employers, but also in our own eyes:

> Rather than seeing ourselves as organic living beings changing in flux with the ongoing world we come to view ourselves as a collection of components which we "have" or indeed which we "lack". What we lack we can buy, replace or upgrade – maybe by popping in a pill or by interfacing with micro-technology to transform ourselves into cyborgs.
>
> (Roberts, 2015, p. 26)

If this diagnosis is at least partly right, putting aside the critique of the economic and political system we live in, it means that psychologization has introduced to the life of the contemporary person a powerful filter

regulating her informational metabolism in a way that interferes with the rhythms of nature. It detunes us from the process of life, locking us in a bubble of separateness and cutting us from the senses, not as effectively perhaps as in the case of the torture rooms, but effectively enough to kill our flourishing, a kind of invisible snail seashell we take with us whenever we go. Madsen and Brinkmann write:

> The term psychologisation refers to psychology's variegated imprints on late modern Western society. In this paper, we argue that over the last few decades, psychologisation has become such a pervasive phenomenon that it is almost no longer possible to speak of psychologisation as something distinct from other systems of meaning that can be subjected to critique. We draw on the French contemporary author Michel Houellebecq's novel *Whatever* that examines the personal consequences of living under an individualised, psychological regime. To be a human being today is first and foremost to be a psychological being. A comparison of several influential critics of therapeutic culture leads to a seemingly recurring theme – the loss of alternatives – which now seems to have become a reality. Psychologisation has, therefore, disappeared in the sense that is has evolved into a monotheistic ontology of late modernity.
>
> (Madsen and Brinkmann, 2011, p.179)

The capability of psychologization to give meaning to everything, in the long run, a loss of meaning. The psychological enchantment of the mind that followed the scientific disenchantment of the world, wears out and risks leading us to a more thorough and depressing disenchantment. This paradoxical effect can be understood through Lacanian theory: psychologization appears to lead to less and less mystery outside the self, hence the individual loses interest (desire) in the on-going world. The result of all this is that the psychologized subject is left without any firm ground to stand on (ibid., p. 181).

In the context of humans' involvement in the natural environment, losing the sense of mystery and fascination with the world around is the opposite of the effect nature impresses on us. Psychologization closes us within our selves. The hypermorphic dramaturgy becomes dominant. As we saw, seeing is correlated with thinking, and consequently, psychologization seems to be an effect of the overuse of the sense of sight and the lesser role of the other senses. We can talk about psycho-visualization, which may be responsible for replacing a mindful contact with experience by the "me-suspicion" described above.

What is more, psychologization is at the same time physicalization (perhaps we should coin the term "Cartesianization" to cover both of them), as it leaves outside of the neoliberal self, a world that has no meaning in itself and seems to be at best a magazine with tools for self-satisfying. The mechanical order, which was ascribed by materialistic science to non-

organic matter, soil and stones, water and wind, is projected, by our contemporaries, to plants, animals, and other people. All they become means. The process consists in

> objectivication of lived experience culminating in the "invention" of the mind (or "soul") as a private, inner realm of subjective experience and in a corresponding "grinding down" of the world of lived experienced to a meagre, value-neutral "objective" reality.
>
> (Schmitz et al., 2011, p. 241)

How does psychologization, understood as above, and interiorized by all of us, consumers of psychological content in mass media and psychology-dependent education and subscribers to the present economic order, influence our relationship with nature? Seen in this light, the research that shows the effect of fascination caused by walking in the woods (Pasanen et al., 2018,) suggests that the "mystery outside the self" returns to us in nature together with activation of all the senses. Psychologization may weaken the effect of fascination, even when we walk the most interesting and rich of biodiverse landscapes. By doing so, it may undermine the positive influence of nature on well-being. This line of argumentation provides a hint as to how to attune to the natural environment more effectively. It is depsychologization, which could make our relationship with nature stronger. What could such a depsychologization look like? One important philosophical attempt to depsychologize experience was undertaken in the twentieth century by philosopher Martin Heidegger.

Thinking as Acting: Breaking Free from the Psychic Bubble

Reality reveals itself to us in two ways, writes Heidegger, as "challenging" and as "bringing-forth." The first one is typical to a contemporary person and "puts on nature the unreasonable demand that it supply energy that can be extracted and stored as such" (Heidegger, 1977, p. 14). The second, known to ancient Greeks as *poiēsis*, Heidegger also calls "presencing." It happens when we allow natural phenomena to arise from within themselves.

In his essay "The Question Concerning Technology," Heidegger searches for an answer to the question of what is the essence of technology, which has become one of the most important aspects of human life nowadays, something which we either criticize or affirm. The historical analysis allows him to find this essence much earlier than when sophisticated modern machine technology came into existence:

> Modern science's way of representing pursues and entraps nature as a calculable coherence of forces. Modern physics is not experimental physics because it applies apparatus to the questioning of nature. Rather the reverse is true. Because physics, indeed already as pure theory, sets

> nature up to exhibit itself as a coherence of forces calculable in advance, it therefore orders its experiments precisely for the purpose of asking whether and how nature reports itself when set up in this way.
>
> (Heidegger, 1977, p. 22)

Technology for Heidegger means technology of being present in the world. We cannot grasp the essence of technology so understood by means provided by natural sciences, which are correct (their predictions get confirmed) yet not true. The reason is that they are not after the truth, but after effectivity, and they do not see this self-conditioning. They adapt a simplified notion of causality, ignoring, for example, what in philosophy was called *causa finalis*, and was a cause operating in the present but towards some end. They only consider *causa efficiens*, or "that which brings something about" (ibid., p. 7).

Such a limited admission of the causes can be one reason we cannot describe the human–nature relationship using the language of the natural sciences and the language of contemporary psychology, which is modeled on the former and suffers from the same shortcomings. Intuitively, the description of reality as a rhythmical phenomenon based only on the causality of "that which brings something about" seems insufficient. Such a causality imposes a picture of the reality that is linear, and rhythms are not linear; at best, they are circular. Perhaps there exists "rhythmical causality" in terms of which we could describe more effectively why we flourish in the rhythms of nature. Heidegger writes that what the Greeks called *physis* and we call nature can arise for us from out of itself, like a "bursting of the blossom into bloom" (Heidegger 1977, p. 10). This is what Heidegger means by "bringing forth." The contemporary cognitive technology of revealing is much more brutal. It is revealing as manufacturing. It challenges nature.

Keeping in mind the lesson from the *Satipaṭṭhāna sutta*, I would like to express the same intuition in different terms to add one new dimension to the considerations. *Perhaps in revealing as bringing forth, the observer is changed as much as the observed, while in revealing as challenging, the self stays unchanged, performing its tasks of manufacturing*. To let reality unfold, we need to give it space, and the only way to achieve it is by withdrawing the self. In the situation of challenging, attention does not follow its tendency of freeing itself from entrapment: our self does not change its geography, or if it does, it remains firm. When we challenge reality, we focus attention. We do not embody nature but instead pacify it, first of all, by the sense of sight. The self tends to expand rather than synchronize with the rhythms of nature.

This setting-upon that challenges forth the energies of nature is an expediting (*Fördern*), and in two ways. It expedites in that it unlocks and exposes. Yet that expediting is always itself directed from the beginning toward furthering something else; that is, toward driving on to the maximum yield at the minimum expense (Heidegger, 1977 p. 15).

We cannot embody nature with such an attitude or such a mode of being in the world. And this mode of being seems to be reinforced by giving our attention to the artificial realities, such as the reality of the technology invented sounds and images. We cannot expect the pixels to reveal themselves as nature bringing forth. If nature loves to hide, using Heraclitus's terms, it does not hide behind pixels. As Aboujaoude (2011) showed in his studies, the geography of the self, produced by attention seduced by digital worlds, changes only in the direction of shrinking or assuming E-personality. He discovered that E-personalities are characterized by an exaggerated sense of abilities, superior attitude to others, specific moral code, proneness to impulsive behavior, and a tendency to regress to childlike states. Nature is indeterminate, Heidegger would say, while pixels are not, as they are nature transformed, stored, and re-distributed.

The question now is: In what way psychologization puts us into the mode of being in which nature reveals itself as a challenge and not as bringing forth. If the first is true, and the considerations so far are correct, psychologization despite its obsession with self-development, would, in fact, block the process of flourishing. It would deprive us of what Heidegger calls "mystery" and what is for him a necessary condition of human freedom pushing us into "the open" where "clearing shimmers" (Heidegger 1977, p. 22).

The tension between closed and open in Heidegger's philosophy could be expressed in terms of attention tending to free itself from the situation of interception in a dramaturgy by a perspectival view. For Heidegger, what facilitates such escape is thinking itself. It seems that for him, there exist two ways of thinking: one which explains reality in correct but not true ways and is typical for natural science as well as psychology, and second, which opens us to the mystery or the truth. William Lovitt, Heidegger's translator into English, writes:

> For Heidegger true thinking is never an activity performed in abstraction from reality. It is never man's ordering of abstractions simply in terms of logical connections. Genuine thinking is, rather, man's most essential manner of being man.
>
> (In Heidegger, 1977, p. XIV)

So, thinking is not happening in a separate psychological realm. It is acting. He continues, explaining what Being (the capitol letter indicates the active aspect of being: being as happening) is for Heidegger:

> Here Being is in no sense to be thought of as an entity of some sort. Nor is it to be simply identified with any element or aspect or totality of the reality that we ordinarily know. Rather Being is the Being of whatever is. Ruling in whatever is, yet transcending and governing the latter in the particularity of its presencing, Being may perhaps best be said to

> be the ongoing manner in which everything that is, presences; i.e., it is the manner in which, in the lastingness of time, everything encounters man and comes to appearance through the openness that man provides. Hence for Heidegger Being is the very opposite of an abstraction fashioned by human thought. … Being manifests itself continually anew. In keeping with this, thinking can never be for Heidegger a closed system. Rather it is the traveling of a road. Each thinker goes along a way that is peculiarly his own. In a fundamental sense it is the way and not the individual that assembles what is thought, that provides bounds and lets everything stand in relation to everything else.
>
> (William Lovitt, in Heidegger, 1977, p. XV)

In Heidegger's description, man provides openness for everything he encounters – he can be "open clearing." I take from this description the realization that the human being is a space, a form, and a possibility (a dramaturgy!). The human body invites but also invades the environment, being itself an appearance of the play of evolution, eventually not distinguished from the environment. The human mind can also invite the encountered, changing itself in its specific manner in the process. The way it changes is a particular life path of every human being. "Open clearing" means free attention.

Heidegger calls for a return to life itself, and as the last sentence indicates, such a return is an intimate endeavor. Thoughts are assembled by the way traveled, not by the person traveling. They are not soul-created, as we think. Thoughts are states, just like feelings or sensations. They are consequences of acting forces and are acts themselves. Heidegger's is a dynamic picture of thinking as acting and as being a function of the movement of life and not originating from a separate soul. Thinking so understood has the power of breaking out the bubble of the psyche to Being itself, an uneasy road to travel. I would add to this picture something Heidegger would probably disagree with: Thoughts are peripheral. Only the habit of our attention makes them central, ascribing to them, at the same time, independence. When taken to the extreme, this illusion of the independence of thoughts leads to inventing separate realms: platonic or Cartesian:

> The way through thinking to that place where man can open himself to the ruling of Being is difficult. It leads often through unfamiliar and even perilous country. We modern men are far from that open clearing. We are trapped and blinded by a mode of thought that insists on grasping reality through imposed conceptual structures. We cannot and will not come to that place where we can let what is, be.
>
> (William Lovitt, in Heidegger, 1977, p. XVI)

We are trapped in an unfavorable existential situation by the mode of our thinking. Heidegger writes of arresting things and entrapping the real in the limited framework of modern science (we can add here psychology) and

proposes a strategy to get free by contemplating art. According to the conceptual framework I suggest, salvation comes from quite a different direction than art, that of nature. And that of understanding the works of our attention.

One Step Outside of the Bubble of Psyche: The Weight of Attention

To depsychologize, we need to stop gathering stories, make out of them our identity, and cover reality with the carpet of concepts in order to feel comfortable while walking life's paths shoelessly. The whole big branch of psychology dealing with neuroses and psychoses teaches about the devastating consequences of believing in what we want to believe rather than facing reality. The bubble of the psyche can separate us efficiently from the vitality of the environment even during a walk in the woods, as this autoethnographic report shows:

> *I walk a path circulating the lake in Stołuń, western Poland, unable to be philosophically amazed, open, and fascinated by the environment (as I wished before I left my friend's house, where I stay). The landscape is lovely, but the forest remains impregnated to me. I do not feel connected with it, and one of the reasons must be that it is so dry, even though it is spring. As if there was no glue between me and the forest. I do not feel much odor either. It seems that the moisture connects not only sand grains but whole organisms, such as humans and forests. I am walking on the dry branches and leaves as if I was walking an artificial landscape. Maybe I want to settle the forest too much with myself. This greed makes me stay on the surface of things. Perhaps I want to collect sensations by memorizing them before I return to the city. But every collected item becomes dead.*

I conclude from the description that there is a psychological equivalent of material moisture. Which brings forth a question: What if attention has a glue-like quality? What if it has weight? The ancient Assassins, well-paid specialists in the peculiar job of depriving people of life, advised not to look at the target's neck before attacking with the knife from behind. The reason? The weight of our sight may warn her. What if attention is a subtle form of acting? What if it touches its objects, which can be detected by living beings, even if today's natural science does not describe it? What if attention acts and not just passively absorbs? Would using such attention not be the best way to free ourselves from the bubble of psychologization?

Of course, the hypothesis of the weight of attention cannot be supported in any way if we understand the weight in terms of contemporary physics. Phenomenological sensing, however, is another story. It is not difficult to notice the weight of attention within our bodies. Even superficial introspection allows us to distinguish forces acting within and separate them into

self-driven, such as the feeling of tranquility resulting from a memory of time spent with a friend and out-of-self-driven, such as the feeling of weight when we rise from the armchair. The two forces miraculously interact, even if they technically belong to separated Cartesian realms of the alive and the dead or mechanical to a contemporary person. Keeping our attention focused on sensations connected with the force of gravitation, for example, and far away from self-driven forces, brings in a feeling of tranquility, which is recognized and utilized in meditation practices of various types. Tranquility can be installed in us as well by exposure to a wild environment.

I am always amazed at how quiet a biodiverse forest such as the Puszcza Białowieska, Eastern Poland, is. There are no crazy bird songs, almost no mammals running around, as they hide and rest most of the day. Even predatory birds patrol their territories in search of food quietly, letting the wind do most of the job of locomotion. Such a forest feels like a place full of vitality, but also a place that uses this vitality scarcely, preferring resting over acting. Acting always requires mobilization of attention in the form of its focusing. It is costly, energy-wise. To a visitor, it seems that wild forests care about the tranquility of organisms living in them or visiting them, including humans. Mobilization is an exception. It increases the sense of separation: You mobilize to act on something outside of yourself. You can feel it as a human animal. You are walking quietly and relaxed in the woods, attuned to its shimmering when suddenly loud noise comes to you. Immediately you feel more separated, in one piece, ready to act. However, when you identify the noise as coming from the friction of trees nearby, your level of tension decreases, and your attention returns swiftly to the quiet background of shimmering. Your field of experience welcomes more peripheral sights, and you start sensing new odors, such as the smell of moss and soil. When there is no task to fulfill, such as escaping dangers, attention loves to relax and free itself from the entrapment in a spot a few centimeters behind the line of your eyes. The problem is that walking in the forest is, for most of us, an exception. We live lives filled with tasks and live them in the artificial environment, which is less attractive and – as research shows – less restoring to attention.

A drop in the general level of tension depsychologizes experience, as it allows more of the reality transcendental to hypermorphic dramaturgy to emerge within the field of attention. The physicality (in the sense of *physis*, i.e., the naturality and not mechanical dead matter created by humans) uplifts itself freely in the field of experience. But our social obligations rarely allow for such a dropping of tension. We remain in our bubble of the psyche, even after going to bed in the night, and cannot quietly fall asleep attuned to the rhythms of our breathing. The habit of attention keeps us trapped in the hypermorphic realm, a self-inflicted mental prison, even if the situation does not demand anything from us. When we close our eyes in a quiet room, our perspectival view does not disappear. It stands firmly in its

position behind the line of the eyes. On the physiological side, specific areas of our brain are habitually activated to preserve our feeling of separateness and our location in space. The habits of neurons consolidate patterns of attention. It would be too expensive energy-wise to wake up the sense of self every time it is needed. It is cheaper to make sense of self default. So we lie down in a dark room with a sense of being a separate piece placed into the bed in the night and having to be taken from it in the morning to fulfill the demands of daily chores.

> The parietal lobes of the brain are located in that the body is distinct the upper back of the head (a "lobe" is a rounded swelling of the cortex). For most people, the left lobe establishes that the body is distinct from the world, and the right lob indicates where the body is compared to features in its environment.
>
> (Hanson and Mendius, 2009, loc. 538)

We lie down motionlessly, but the lobes are active, the neurons within them firing with great speed. Still, we feel ourselves to be a compact monad in space. Should we start cultivating attention in a meditative way, a new reality would emerge. Attention freed from the situation of interception causes appear different kinds of experience, or as Schmitz describes it, a state in which "The foundation of personhood is not the soul but the life of the felt body as a life in the primitive present, marked by corporal dynamism and corporal communication, without a closed-off private inner space" (Schmitz et al., 2011, p. 254). We are no longer monads, and we realize that the whole of the environment is involved in what we call ourselves. Schmitz clearly distinguishes between emotional and environmental forces. Anger, for example, is experienced according to him as:

> [A] force impacting the lived body in a manner comparable to a stroke of lightning or the overpowering sense of gravity you feel when you slip and only catch your balance at the last moment. However, the trajectory here, rather than downward, is forward and marked by an even more important difference: You resist the overpowering sense of gravity, but you go along with the moving force of anger to some extent, at least initially.
>
> (Schmitz et al., 2011, p. 254)

We react differently to forces that seem to be self-driven than to the environment-driven forces, although it happens only in the second, personal phase of our response (this response is "pre-personal" at first). Initially, the reaction is similar. However, when we realize that we have to do with emotion and not with external force, something interesting happens:

> In the case of being moved by anger it is, at first, offence in agreement with the impulse of the moving force. Up to this point, the involvement

> is pre-personal, belonging to a life in the primitive present; a personal response by surrendering yourself to and/or resisting can only take place ex post, when the simultaneously pre-personal and personal conscious subject is already in the grip of anger. This is the distinguishing feature that sets being moved by emotions off from mere affective involvement by means of corporeal stirrings such as hunger, thirst, tiredness and pain, which are not emotions. Such corporeal stirrings the person can almost always observe and take a distance to them.
>
> (Schmitz et al., 2011, p. 254)

Unlike anger, which seems to be our authorship, we do not take "corporal strings" personally. This may explain why attuning attention to the force of gravity results in tranquility. Attention in such a situation works towards a less personal perception of reality, broadening the perspectival view, which means that it gets freed to some extent from the situation of entrapment. This state of affairs produces well-being, and the sign of well-being is tranquility.

According to Schmitz, emotions assume forms (or perhaps formlessness would give better justice to the way they appear) of atmosphere occupying "a surfaceless space in the region of experienced presence" (Schmitz et al., 2011, p. 255). Their extended nature is possible despite them having no surfaces or being compact. They belong to amorphic dramaturgy, changing their intensity and other parameters but not being limited by a form. It that is correct, we could perceive emotions as a medium of freeing attention from the situation of entrapment. In fact, in Buddhism, there is a special technique, called *brahmaviharā* meditation or meditation on four immeasurables, which facilitates this very process (more of which in Chapter 5).

Being in a natural environment influences our emotions, indicating an obvious way we can communicate with what seems to be outside of our skin. We can open ourselves to the emotional states nature installs in us by observing the rhythmic nature of emotions or how they depend on the landscape we pass. The experience can be described in reports such as this:

> Living in the forest, you also learn from the vapors that each plant exudes. Some plants are good for your health, some are bad. Sometimes, for example, when I've been feverish, I've gone to sit under certain kinds of trees and my fever has disappeared. Sometimes when I've been feeling well I've gone to sit under certain kinds of trees and the elements in my body have become disturbed. Sometimes I've been hungry and thirsty, but as soon as I go sit under certain kinds of trees, my hunger and thirst disappear.
>
> (Dhammādharo, 2011, loc. 6961)

Meditation makes one feel her body as lighter, more subtle, less material. Spots in the body that were not felt before now are felt, compact areas split

into sensations or micro-sensations, and there is more movement in the body. One realizes that attention has weight and that it produces pressure within one's body. One also realizes that the more desire in her attention, the heavier attention is. Based on meditative observations, one of the ways by which nature acts on us – I think – is weakening our desire. And the sense of possessing. This results in lighter attention, and this, in turn, produces an effect of well-being, physical and emotional.

Different forces are acting within our bodies on both sides of the Cartesian equation: matter + spirit = whole reality. These forces determine our actions in the world of medium objects. And our actions in the world determine these forces in return. In what way? We will probably never have a complete picture. But those inner forces are in a constant interplay with the forces outside of our skin, even if we live in an illusion of being separated, subject possessing free will. Awareness of the subtle forces adds to our psychological bubble an element of rhythmical reality that weakens the sense of separation.

Non-Cartesian Territories

Authors such as Diane Ackerman – author of *A Natural History of the Senses* (1990) – argue that the mind is not just a brain function. Like the blood coursing through our veins, or the impulses through our nervous system, it wanders freely through the whole body. It is the mind that awakens in us the sensations of taste, touch, and smell. Perhaps not being brain-dependent, our consciousness and our intelligence are rhythms-dependent. Paranormal abilities observed in such tribes as Aborigines may not be paranormal at all. Perhaps they are simply abilities derived from their efficiency in recognizing the rhythms, which (having been neglected) are out of our range of perception. Before the December 2004 tsunami struck the shores of India, killing over 10,000 people, the so-called "primitive" people of Andaman – members of the Jarawa tribe – fled to safety together with the animals of the jungle.

How did the Jarawa people know that danger was approaching? Did they feel sensations that we from the city ignore? Is it possible that generations to come, immersed in virtual reality, will lose the abilities that are still common among us, like sensing the moods of others even when they are trying to mask them or telling a fake smile from an authentic one? (After all, could an emoticon disguise its mood?) On the other hand: Can we relearn what the Jarawa people are still capable of by sharpening our senses? Was their attention freed from artificial realms and therefore tenderly attuned to the rhythms of nature we, city people, have forgotten? The truth that humans belong to the tissue of the process of life becomes slowly discovered by contemporary science:

> As the geneticist Richard Lewontin has emphasized, there is a fundamental and irrevocable interdependence between these modes of being,

> with each defining the other. "The environment is not a structure imposed on living things from the outside," he writes, "but is in fact a creation of those beings. The environment is not an autonomous process but a reflection of the biology of the species. Just as there is no organism without an environment, so there is no environment without an organism."
>
> [Lewontin] goes on to note that the key consideration for evolutionary research is neither organism nor environment, but the interaction between them: "An environment is something that surrounds us or encircles, but for there to be a surrounding there must be something at the center to be surrounded."
>
> (Barash, 2014, p. 92)

We are part of a process in which there is human consciousness, but also there are bacteria and viruses, odors, and vibrations. Seeing our skin as a border between us and the outer world is a mistake in thinking. Even if there is a border, it is being crossed every second by thousands of travelers, who smuggle themselves both ways invisible to our conscious perception. Between the inside of us and the outside takes place a constant exchange of gases, electrical and magnetic charges, information. Life is a metabolic process based on a continuous exchange, a process in which all forms are open systems.

Several hundred species of bacteria exist in our mouth cavity: on the inner side of cheeks, between the teeth, on the tongue. They are everywhere, and they can multiply at a terrifying pace, doubling their population every twenty minutes. Fortunately, they fight each other as if they have created their own microscopic but efficient mechanism of restricting the mouth cavity's overpopulation. When we brush our teeth, we arrange Armageddon for them. If the bacteria between our teeth had an ego and could speak, they would demand acknowledging that they are proper hosts of the body, whereas we are just guests, and our consciousness is a by-product of the process called the "process of life."

Freedom from Form

I call the dramaturgy of our mental life in the default form of daily life (i.e., untrained by meditation or frequent exposing of our bodies to nature) "hypermorphic" because it has only a form but no "matter." When we develop our attention sensitivity, we arrive at a different dramaturgy than hypermorphic – a sub-morphic one. Such is a pedagogical goal of both the Buddhist and the Stoic philosophical schools, their way to progress on the path of flourishing towards less and less anthropomorphic dramaturgies. Marcus Aurelius writes beautifully:

> You will think little of the entertainment of song, or dance or all-in wrestling if you deconstruct the melodic line of a song into its

> individual notes and ask yourself of each of them: "Is this something that overpowers me?" You will recoil from that admission. So too with a comparable analysis of dance by each movement and each pose, and the same again with wrestling. Generally, then, with the exception of virtue and its workings, remember to go straight to the component parts of anything, and through that analysis come to despise the thing itself. And the same method should be applied to the whole of life.
>
> (Aurelius, 2006, pp. 105–106)

If the Stoics are correct, such a deconstruction changes not only the metaphysical but also the emotional and ethical landscape, weakening desire and drive to fight the world but strengthening the sense of belonging to the shared universe with all beings and phenomena. The deconstructed reality cannot overpower us because it lacks the appeal and power to seduce our attention. Certain experience persuades me that when the philosopher-emperor talked about deconstructing a song's melody into separate notes, he talked about his own experiences and not theoretically led considerations. Here is one more of my reports from the Shwe Oo Min monastery:

> *January 18th, 2003. I am listening to a strange sound, never heard before. After a few minutes, I realize that it is a mosquito buzzing. I could not recognize it because I was listening to it with a new sensibility and hearing it not as a whole but as a series of mini-phrases. The sound is broken into particles. I understand now that what I considered before a "mosquito buzz" is a mixture of a single acoustic charger synthesized into a certain psychosomatic sensation by my mind. What is strange in this monastic experience is that it has a taste of freedom instead of panic that the domesticated compact world disintegrates.*

This experience starts with bewilderment. And this may indicate that months of meditation practice that proceeded, resulted in strengthening *viveka* ("detachment") or spontaneous "taking into brackets" many of my mind conditionings. The sensations before being recognized as a "mosquito buzz" were very clear and pronounced. It seemed as if they were three-dimensional, as compared to the usual sounds. It could suggest that a moment of recognition and mental labeling of a sensation weakens its directness and inflicts a more "flattened" perception of them.

I never had a similar experience in the woods. However, I experienced in wilderness states of relaxed attention and increased movement and fluidity of all sensations. When we are attuned to the wild forest, our experience becomes complex but not compact. The complexity comes from the rhythmic participation in millions of occurrences of the process of life and not from the number and diversity of objects present in the environment. If Marcus Aurelius was right, the wild forest weakens our perception of ownership of the fragments of reality. We become more comfortable with the

reality that is not domesticated, remains wild, so we do not even claim to subdue, pacify, or own it. This reality itself decides when to satisfy us. This is why being present in the wild environment is associated with a sense of gratitude and belonging to the greater whole.

Language of Nature

By attuning ourselves to the rhythms of nature, we do not attune to what today's physics perceives as nature. Rather than that, we attune to that nature, which Heraclitus described as one that "loves to hide." In Buddhist terms, one starts "seeing through the three kinds of compactness: compactness of continuity (*santati-ghana*), of group (*samūha-ghana*), and of function (*kicca-ghana*)" (Pa Auk, 2000, p. 100). These are exactly types of compactness that classical physics nurtures, asking how individual organisms (such as animals) or parts of organisms (such as cells) develop, how they interact and what function they fulfill.

While we are in the natural environment, together with the compactness of reality, also the cause-effect chain recognized by classical physics gets broken. A new chain reveals itself, known to the Buddhist philosophers as co-dependent arising (*paṭiccasamuppāda*), which literary means "happening because of" (Ledi, 1999, p. 117). The chain consists of twelve forces co-acting and creating self-illusion, such as ignorance, contact, and craving. When seen, the chain breaks, freeing attention from a perspectival view and perceiving any dramaturgy of presence as objectively existing.

Attuning to nature must have consequences in the way we define ourselves and perceive reality on the deepest level, which should manifest in our actions, feelings, and thinking. Today, our thinking is that of contemporary physics, which describes reality as a non-living matter. However, we will never understand why nature enhances our health by using the concepts of positivist reductionism. These concepts, although very useful when it comes to describing the beneficial influence of nature on humans, as for example, when we say that watching the line of trees decreases the level of cortisol in saliva, are expressions of a certain type of human presence, which, due to a habit of attention, focuses on the exploitation of nature. However, they are less valuable when it comes to describing the dynamics of the intimate embodiment of nature. I have written already that to answer the question "why do we flourish in the rhythms of nature," we need a different language, which will elevate us above Cartesian dualism and positivist reductionism. The language should be immune to the effect of psychologization, which gives psychological concepts the power of fully explaining reality. However, ultimately, breaking from the bubble of psychologization is not a language game. It requires exposing our organisms to the rhythms of nature and acquiring what can be called rhythmical feeling and perception.

For the sake of our consideration, let us create a concept of a dynamic, based on a map of the human being as a field where various

forces act, some of them being self-driven, some of them environment-driven. Interestingly, our sense of possession does not consist of the first ones, which is expressed in our language and social practice. Let us consider a shiver to illustrate it. When I say "I have a shiver," it will be perfectly understood by our human fellow, as long as she knows the same language I know. However, even a short analysis shows that the shiver is not mine. It belongs neither to the body nor to the environment. Even if we stick to Cartesian notions, we must admit that it is caused by interaction between the two. I cannot say that I have a shiver. It seems that this would be easier to comprehend in Eastern societies, particularly among Daoists: "In the Chinese world, things do not *have* habits, they *are* habits. Habit is a mode of being" (Ames and Hall, 2003, p. 51).

Surfaces of objects disappear as the Daoists progress with their spiritual training in the view of becoming sages. Laozi writes in *Daodejing*: "Thus, to be really objectless in one's desires (*wuyu*) is how one observes the mysteries of all things, while really having desires is how one observes their boundaries" (in Ames and Hall, 2003, p. 77).

What changes together with abandoning the vision of the compact objects, the borders of which we perceive, is our need to manipulate experience. During a forest walk, compactness disappears both in what seems to be the outside world and inside. The two mirror each other. In nature, one relaxes what Battersby (2006) calls the "form-finding tendency." It is relaxed simultaneously in the field of sensual perception and within a mind (a sense of mind, as Buddhists would say).

Nature connectedness correlates strongly with the value of self-transcendence (Tam, in Pritchard et al., 2020, p. 1162), which could mean that one's weakened tendency to form-finding also concerns the I-form. The forest starts talking to us. It was talking all the time, but we did not understand its language. Now the forest's multi-language starts affecting us using different "signs": bodily, mental, belonging to the realm of feeling and consciousness. All this happens rather in a peripheral perception than in full focus. Our effortless background dialogue with the forest gives us a sense of connection to the environment and eliminates, at the same time, the energetic costs we need to pay every time we bring something into focus. Focusing means constant switching. Economist Paul Dolan writes:

> Distraction is damaging, because it requires *switching* costs. A switching cost is how attentional energy is required to change from one task to the next. Every time you shift your attention, your brain has to reorient itself, further taxing your mental resources. When you interrupt yourself to text, tweet, or e-mail you are using attentional energy to switch tasks. If you do this frequently, your attention reserves quickly become diminished, making it even harder for you to focus on whatever it is you want to do.
>
> (Dolan, 2014, p. 156)

The forest revigorates our attention by saving energetic costs of perceptual operations and thus preserves our vitality. The office environment, on the other hand, is a perfect place to waste vitality. The office presents itself to our senses, especially the dominating sense of sight, as a collection of compact objects in space. Forest as a living organism, an ongoing transformation. It seems that the Ancient Greeks saw the environment precisely in such a way:

> Classical Greek language lacks the specialized terms, which were later introduced by Linneus' classification in the modern culture. There are no terms like "animal" or "plant" or other terms of this type. What is translated as "animal," *zòon*, really means "to be alive," whereas the term translated as "plant," *phyton*, is connected to nature in its complexity, called *physis*. *Phyton* is a term that indicates the light, namely *phòs*.
>
> (Pellegrino and di Paola, 2019, p. 18)

Being in the forests often makes attention oscillate between the perspectival view and the background of life shimmering around. The logic of the dramaturgies of presence dictates that this oscillating has to make our attention more sensitive and make it possible to apply it so that it is lighter than the force of gravity and does not cover the second. The pressure of attention directed anywhere within the body is weaker than the pressure of gravity. To put it differently: the sensations of gravity are displayed within the field of experience because the pressure of attention directed to them does not outweigh them. Consequently, attention becomes filled with the perception of an acting force, and the hypermorphic dramaturgy weakens. *Attention, which loves to free itself from the situation of interception by a perspectival view, now can acknowledge subtle sensations that do not depend on our will and belong to the realm transcending our identity – such as the force of gravitation.* Attention becomes less personal as if it has been melted with the transcendent processes and acquired its characteristic. In our subjective experience, it is more difficult to classify the content of attention as belonging to the mind or the body, to inner or outer, or to organic or non-organic.

As soon as it breaks free from the bubble of the psyche, attention starts rearranging the metaphysical landscape we experience. Psychologization deprives attention of its sense of metaphysical agency. Insight resulting from *Satipaṭṭhāna sutta*-based meditation reinstalls it with full strength. When you meditate according to the Buddhist Theravāda instructions, this sense returns, and a moment comes when you cannot localize your attention in space. Wherever you direct it, it is still where it was before the act of will directing it. It gets free from the limitation of the will trying to steer it. Experiences like these make clear why Buddhist

philosophy does not place the senses and mental phenomena in separate categories. *Thoughts are not non-sensuous*. Each sensation in the body consists of both material and psychic components at the same time. Mind is a sense.

Attention has the power to merge various cosmoses and glue back the world divided by René Descartes. It does it in the process of disintegration of what we experience (e.g., objects perceived formerly as compact or a robust self, and reintegration on the trans-personal level). This particular quality of attention, which can be more or less developed, depends on the effectiveness of the Open-source Intelligence work.

Environmental Identity

If we are not a psychic bubble, what are we? How can we delineate our identity? One of the possible answers, in the spirit of therapeutic-based philosophy is – we are traveling beings, always on the path leading to flourishing or withering. When we realize this truth, we become philosophers, people who do not attach themselves to anything. Why is Socrates "impossible to classify," as Pierre Hadot (2004, p. 30) writes? Why was he always considered to be the special one in western Antiquity? Because "He is *atopos*, meaning strange, extravagant, absurd, unclassifiable, disturbing. In the *Theaetetus*, Socrates says of himself: I am utterly disturbing [*atopos*], and I create only perplexity [*aporia*]" (ibid., p. 30).

The philosopher is *atopos*, because she realizes that she does not belong to any particular nation, religious clan, or political party. Instead, she is kin to Allnature, as the Stoics would say. She is not restricted by any convention and remains wild. The only difference between a philosopher and an ordinary person is that the first one has realized his *atopos*, non-belonging to conventions, wildness. The second type of person builds artificial constructs aimed at freezing reality and making within a comfortable nest in reality – *topos*, which leads to denying the facts of life, up to freezing the process of life, as in the case of catatonics.

When I use the term "environmental identity," I do not mean considering the natural environment a part of our selves or our ego. I just acknowledge an option of the reduced territory of self. One of the people interviewed in the book *Identity and the Natural Environment: The Psychological Significance of Nature* expressed such a reduction in more positive terms as:

> There's a feeling like you don't end at the tips of your fingers or the top of your head. Because what's going on has to do with what you're doing, and with other things that are going on, so you're kind of a part of this whole thing, and very small because there's so much more out there.
>
> (In Clayton and Opotow, 2003, p. 14)

This description not only fits the definition of identity as "a way of organizing information about the self" (ibid., p. 44) but also encompasses a metaphysical vision expressed well by so-called "deep ecology," defined as follows:

> [D]eep ecology explicitly calls for the extension of the sense of personal identity to include or encompass nature: "Spiritual growth, or unfolding, begins when we cease to understand or see ourselves as isolated and narrow competing egos and begin to identify with other humans from our family and friends to, eventually, our species. But the deep ecology sense of self requires a further maturity and growth, an identification which goes beyond humanity to include the nonhuman world" (Devall & Sessions, 1985, p. 67).
>
> (Clayton and Opotow, 2003, p. 32)

I understand identity as an operating system of reference, using some kind of intelligence to function. When talking about "environmental identity," I refer to identity, which uses what I call Open-source Intelligence for its purposes. This intelligence operates as if from outside of the bubble of the psyche. Which brings up questions: Is wisdom impersonal? Is intelligence such? Various Buddhist teachers from the Thai Forest Tradition, the contemporary philosophical school most open to the environment, seem to answer "yes" to these questions when they write, e.g., that "wisdom investigates" experience in the process of meditation. Not person, not meditation, wisdom. And this impersonal wisdom is capable of intelligent strategies. Forest tradition master Ajahn Maha Boowa writes about such an intelligence: "The nature of the *citta* [mind or consciousness– authors reference] is such that once it investigates anything to the point of seeing it clearly, it lets go" (Boowa, 1999, p. 58).

The Open-source Intelligence knows when to stop operating. When perceived as a combination of the forces acting in an intelligent way, the human being ceases to be psyche and physis connected in some mysterious way. At the ancient Greek (but also Chinese) map of human territory, emotions are often perceived as resulting from somatic states, as some scholars state (e.g., van der Eijk, 2007). They do not happen in a separate "psychic realm," as is often assumed in the post-Cartesian picture of human territory. A recent study summarizing the state of knowledge about the mind–body problem in ancient philosophy (Ostenfeld, 2018) provides details of many variations of the mind–body relationship present in Greek thought (e.g., soul as substance, a form, a transmission function between the world of matter and ideas, or an animating principle, etc.), concluding that the contemporary debate about what is an exact position of even most discussed philosophers, like Plato or Aristotle, regarding the mind–body problem, is far from being closed.

Research on the human–nature relationship suggests, in my opinion, putting aside a conviction that knowledge progresses through the millennia and giving more credit to the ancient picture, which we can further enrich by viewing intelligence as resulting from the dynamic configurations of the

states of the whole environment. The scholars, inquiring into subtle aspects of the soul–body–reason relationship, often fail to notice the consequences of a prevailing picture in ancient philosophy, in which psyche and soma are strictly interrelated and depend on the world outside of the human skin. One of the most significant is this: identity is environmental.

Themes for Contemplation

To depsychologize experience we can consider several contemplations:

1 Presence, understood in the broad sense of being present, does not come from within myself. It is a function of the universe. I do not decide whether I am present or not. Attempts to control presence, as when I want to sleep despite my body's needs, end up with irritation. *Presence is apersonal but not non-personal*. It has nothing to do with being personal or non-personal. From the point of view of presence: a certain brain produces certain feelings and perceptions. They are limited by the brain's biology and chemistry. It also produces a story about a separate being. But presence has nothing to do with all of this.
2 Presence, understood in the broad sense of being present, is filtered and assumes a specific shape due to the work of attention.
3 Ask yourself: Right now, are there more environment-driven forces acting with me, like the pressure of air, or more self-driven forces, like my desire to change the body's posture? What forces act from me, and what through me?
4 Pay attention to some environment-driven force within the field of your experience, e.g., the sensation of heaviness, for some time. Notice how it changes your emotions.

Notes

1 In my analysis, I do not follow Allen-Collinson's five-step scheme, consisting of collecting descriptions from an insider's perspective, suspending preconceptions, initial impressionistic reading, in-depth re-reading, and free imaginative variation. Rather than that, I refer to her general concept of autophenomenography.
2 Which, of course, provokes questioning of the privileged epistemological position of our own experience. Again, I refer to Evan Thompson to clarify the point. Responding to the comments on his book *Waking, Dreaming, Being. Self and Consciousness in Neuroscience, Meditation, and Philosophy*, he points out the advantages of not hiding the autobiographical story in a philosophical narrative, the most important of which is grounding philosophical analysis in concrete experiences. In the case of meditative experiences, writes Thompson, their description provides rich data about usually ignored possibilities of the human mind. According to him, mindfulness types of meditation reduce cognitive and affective bias, although some other types of meditation may be accused of producing hallucinations (Thompson, 2016).

I would like to add Thompson's position some of my own remarks: The objectivity of the insights arising from this kind of meditation can be verified by rich meditative literature accumulated in the Buddhist tradition over more than 2000 years. Combining the knowledge derived from this literature with the results of neuro-research assures the high probability that the insights achieved during meditation are indeed the results of the application of a carefully designed method and are effects repeated in the same form in individual experiences of different meditators rather than their phantasies

3 For further study of the phenomenon see Michel Foucault's book: "Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison."

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5 Non-dualistic Experience of Nature

Close to Nature

Facing ecological disaster, we have to be open to dialogue with nature – understood as the natural environment – and start thinking and acting for its benefit. This opening and actions to follow will be easier if we take off the glasses of the mechanistic view on nature.

> Pro-environmental action will come spontaneously when humans start seeing nature as an entity with moral standing rather than merely a source of resources to exploit. This new perspective should lead to a recognition that we have some responsibility to protect nature.
>
> (Clayton and Opotow, 2003, p. 20)

We do not have to learn respect for nature from books. We can learn it from simply being mindfully in nature. Mere being in nature enhances mindfulness. Wolsko and Lindberg (2013) found that connection with nature was correlated with mindfulness. Individuals who score highly on an "awareness" subscale for mindfulness report more environmentally friendly behavior (Amel et al., 2009), which suggests that a mutually beneficial relationship between humans and nature may be mediated, in part, by mindfulness: "Examining the relationship more closely, Howell, Passmore, and Buro (2013) found that meaning in life mediated the relationship between nature connectedness and well-being" (Hamman and Ivtzan, 2016, p. 36).

In other words, both feeling like a part of nature and feeling well include an increased sense of the meaning of life – a truth not alien to the ancients. We can read whole passages in Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations*, for example, that are almost regular prayers to nature. The philosopher-emperor delights himself in loaf splits and cracks, which come from nature and not from the baker. He seems to fall in love with the lion's puckered brow and the foam on the boar's mouth, not in themselves, but as visual representations of the harmony of nature (Aurelius, 2006, p. 16). Chapter 2 of book 3 of *Meditations* is nothing but a respectful hymn to nature originating simply from perceiving its works. Recent research shows the same: respect for the

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environment is not unnatural for many people, as in the case of trackers such as Rex, who interviewed Gene Myers and Ann Russel:

> [The tracker] Rex described meeting several bears at night on a trail: I absolutely had my very calm state of mind and passive awareness, soaking up the fact that I was in the woods with these beautiful creatures … And I said "Hey, hey bear I'm out here and I'm just going to pick up some tracks. I plaster casted them earlier, maybe they're yours, this is how I learn." And I was just very directly talking to the bear and then I kept moving. And the bear kept moving in the opposite direction … And there was a definite little quiet turning point where I realized I was going to keep going and I was going to be confident with it … Just basically talking to them in a confident, friendly voice, in a nice stream. And the bears could sense my state of mind, I'm sure of that.
>
> (In Clayton and Opotow, 2003, p. 86)

Rex claims, as many people who wander the woods for some reason or without any reason, that there was a kind of mental communication between himself and an animal. It was not an exchange of thought, though. It was an exchange by moods, a case of emotional telepathy. A mutual understanding would not be possible if Rex perceived nature as a resource and saw the bear as a walking magazine with meat and fur. He anthropomorphizes the bear, just as kids do, and this kind of anthropomorphization makes both him and kids friendly towards nature, which we know from studies described in the same book, edited by Clayton and Opotow. Such an anthropomorphization is in itself a partial break from a dualism, as it puts into question the different metaphysical statuses of people and animals. An attempt to understand "language" spoken in nature, however technically and academically it sounds, may end up with an elevated mood, a kind of awe.

> Rick described a vocabulary of bird songs, and his aspiration was to understand them well enough to decode the complex interactions they were presumed to sometimes represent. For him, the effect of this awareness was to "[make] me feel connected" to a natural community. This is a very big feeling and a very small feeling, all at the same time, because there's a feeling like you don't end at the tips of your fingers or the top of your head. Because what's going on has to do with what you're doing, and with other things that are going on, so you're kind of a part of this whole thing, and very small because there's so much more out there
>
> (Clayton and Opotow, 2003, p. 86).

Even if not stated literally, Rex and Rick's reports give an impression that what he experienced was pleasant. It seems to be eudaimonic rather than hedonic pleasure, as it includes the sense of connection and is deprived of any trace of fear (which would be justified, at least in the case of the bears).

I think that this lack of fear is significant on the metaphysical level. *We fear what is alien and bigger than us. Nature definitely is bigger, but somehow not alien.* Fear or its absence is also an important factor in our moral behavior. To realize this, it is enough to reflect on how many morally questionable deeds were committed in the state of fear and how many of them were justified, before or after, in the name of fear.

Fear and Separateness

The most fundamental virtue in antiquity was neither wisdom nor justice. It was courage. Applied to the second-by-second presence in the natural world, courage would mean relaxed permission for the dynamics happening between what we conventionally call "us" and the "environment" to happen. In a way, courage is the question of attention. What we do with attention reflects our courage or inclination to surrender to fear, anxiety, and phobias. People who have arachnophobia while entering a room, for example, usually assume one of the two attentional strategies: either scan the environment to detect spiders or keep their vision very narrowly, in order not to see spiders hoping that there are not any of them. Both strategies serve one goal: release of fear. Both are unsuccessful. Both underline hostility of the environment and our separateness.

The sense of being separate, reinforced by our default dualistic metaphysics, the proprieties of the sense of sight in our perception, and the desire to exploit what is outside of us (all described in this book already) have far-reaching consequences for our actions. The morphic world consisting of objects to be used for our satisfaction, in which we are surrounded by nature as a collection of resources, can easily become the arena of fight and manipulation. The morphic world, being a product of morphic dramaturgy, is reflected by complex mood:

> Of course, there are emotions that remain despite the loss of affectability, in particular feelings of guilt, anxiety, or despair. However, these emotions show some characteristic features: (1) they do not connect, but rather separate the subject from the world and from others; (2) their felt bodily quality is characterized by constriction and rigidity, thus corresponding to the depressive state of corporealization; (3) they are embedded in the prevailing depressed mood rather than arising as independent feelings; therefore their intentional objects are just as ubiquitous as arbitrary.
>
> (Fuchs, 2013, p. 228)

Is there a specific mood that makes us feel the part of the tissue of life, producing what can be called a moral feeling of co-existence? Philosopher Johann Fichte was struggling with establishing the agreement of the two

orders, natural and moral, a struggle not unpopular among philosophers of his time (eighteenth to nineteenth centuries), such as Kant and Hegel. In 2014 I not only repeated his walk from Leipzig in Germany to Kaliningrad in Russia but also his struggle with the question. Fichte traveled partly on foot, partly by post carriages, first to Warsaw, where he had a job promised as a family teacher. When he did not get the job due to his insufficient knowledge of the French language, he decided to continue his journey to the city of Königsberg to meet the superstar of European philosophy: Immanuel Kant. He went there with a simple plan: to seduce Kant with his brilliance and get a local university job, a plan he never realized.

I do not know what exactly Fichte thought, marching lonely at the age of 29 through various countries and landscapes, but from his notes, we can conclude one thing: that God for him was not a person, but moral law. Such a God he was seeking in nature. Several years after the walk, he will describe this concept in the book *An Attempt at a Critique of All Revelation*, which will make him famous. But fame sometimes means trouble. Fichte will be charged with atheism.

While wandering, Fichte asks himself a question: What is a human vocation? (A time will come when he will write a book under such a title.) Towards the end of the eighteenth century, unlike today, it was not a question about success or well-being. It was a metaphysical question. He answers it in his specific way: the human vocation is to take care of his autonomy.

And this means creating his own identity while acting. But also: limiting his freedom based on respect to others. While following Fichte at days and reading his books by nights, what caught my attention was his struggle to comprehend nature. He observes in *The Vocation of Man*:

> I seize on Nature in her rapid and unresting flight, detain her for an instant, hold the present moment steadily in view, and reflect upon this Nature by means of which my thinking powers have hitherto been developed and trained to those researches that belong to her domain.
>
> (Fichte, 1931, p. 4)

He knows that nature means movement and that investigating nature by concepts is not direct. It is a kind of abstraction. He knows nature consists of processes, and human reflection on nature is, in fact, reflection on artificial particles taken away from a constant movement, separated and prepared for the thinker's joy of vivisection. However, he is not trying to understand nature in the way our contemporary science does. Rather than that, he follows the way of Heraclitus and directs his effort to capture this part of nature, which loves to hide. He continues:

> A flower has sprung out of the earth, and I infer from thence a formative power in Nature. Such a formative power exists for me only so

> far as this flower and others, plants generally, and animals exist for me: I can describe this power only through its effects, and it is to me no more than the producing cause of such effects, the generative principle of flowers, plants, animals, and organic forms in general.
>
> (Fichte, 1931, p. 10)

Fichte tries to capture a force, which is hidden under the outer appearance of plants, animals, and minerals. Observing nature, he arrives at a conclusion, which may not sound true for us, but for him is certain: that the self is "the thinking power of Nature within me" (ibid., p. 21).

This realization affects him powerfully. First, he achieves tranquility, which is quite stable and protects him against every day's neurotic thinking and behaving. Also, he does not fear obsessively that his consciousness will lapse one day and build a wall around it compulsively. Discovering this new inner freedom is therapeutic for him.

Secondly, Fichte knows now that efforts aimed solely at his own good are empty and will not result in flourishing. Neither will they bring satisfaction. The reason is that the nature of consciousness is universal. Only unselfish acts are in accordance with it. Unlike even a thousand-mile-long walk, life is not traveling from a point of lack of happiness to a point of eternal happiness, like traveling from A to B. The conclusion of his philosophical investigation results in a formula of the happy life as non-selfish acting for the good of all.

Concluding that *the self is a thinking nature within us*, which is a beautiful name for what I call Open-source intelligence, tells us not to be exploitive towards anything alive. Fichte's formula is radically anti-Cartesian. The self is, for him, an aspect, a focus, an expression, a display of the natural environment. It has no center or capacity of separate existence. Fichte seems to think that perhaps our moral feeling is the most direct way to understand nature, rather than catching it as it processes itself and reflecting on it. And that this moral feeling can express itself as a mood, rather atmospheric than closed within the contains of the body.

In the Buddhist Pāli canon, we can find a special meditation technique, called *mettā* or loving-kindness, which is the training in waking up in a practitioner a good feeling by repeating a series of phrases, first of which is "May all beings be happy and safe." The meditator is not supposed to focus on the phrase but on the sensation correlated with the well-wishing the phrase produces, which should be felt, according to this pedagogy, first in the chest area. Part of the technique is sending feelings so generated for all categories of beings and/or in all directions. Subjectively, this procedure activates an oceanic feeling of being much larger than the body's confines would suggest. It weakens the feeling of separateness. Neuro-research shows that it has far-reaching consequences: the long-term practice of this method of meditation brings lasting results. "Loving kindness meditation involves a present-centered, selfless focus for meditators as compared to novices" (Garrison et al., 2014). This kind of meditation changes the structure of the

brain, as research from Hong-Kong summarized in the paper "Increased Gray Matter Volume in the Right Angular and Posterior Parahippocampal Gyri in Loving-Kindness Meditators" (Lee et al., 2012) confirms. There is something unique in *mettā*. It stimulates our brain differently than mindfulness meditation. As the research paper, in which FAM means "focus attention meditation," and LKM – "loving-kindness meditation" shows:

> Specifically, we demonstrated that the practice of FAM was associated with expertise-related behavioral improvements and neural activation differences in attention task performance. However, the effect of state LKM meditation did not carry over to attention task performance. On the other hand, both FAM and LKM practice appeared to affect the neural responses to affective pictures. For viewing sad faces, the regions activated for FAM practitioners were consistent with attention-related processing; whereas responses of LKM experts to sad pictures were more in line with differentiating emotional contagion from compassion/emotional regulation processes. Our findings provide the first report of distinct neural activity associated with forms of meditation during sustained attention and emotion processing.
>
> (Lee et al., 2012, p. 10)

Mettā requires a certain focus of attention on the phrases and sensations in the body, but it does not ask the practitioner to pinpoint her object of meditation. The technique, when properly done, makes attention extending rather than concentrating. *Mettā* extends the subjective sense of the territory of self. It is not a practice aimed at changing anything in the environment. The specific *mettā* courage originates from eliminating the "surface" of the fearing object. To use German phenomenological language, part of this elimination results from the changed perception of the borders of *Leid* or body as we experience it (and not *Körper*, or body as viewed by science). A Buddhist legend says that the Buddha gave *mettā* instructions to monks who were frightened to meditate in solitude in remote forests filled with beasts and spirits. This reason for doing *mettā*, as well as the results it provides, indicate that our mind inclination and not the outer events are responsible for fear. In abandoning the sense of separateness and working the sense of co-existence lies the successful healing from fear, done by replacing it with what Schmitz calls "tranquility of a spacious landscape":

> Contemplative sincerity is an emotion that can affect a person as the atmosphere of an environment, e.g. the tranquility of a spacious landscape. The atmosphere can creep up on them, so to speak. Such sincerity is a powerful emotion, but it involves no pleasure or pain. This stands against the millennia-old common association of emotions with hedonic valence (up to the identification of both in Kant and subsequent psychology).
>
> (Schmitz, 2011, p. 257, citing Aristotle)

There are eudaimonic emotions, and the practice of *mettā* and other so-called meditations of immeasurables – which follow the scheme of extending attention from self-centered to radiating to the whole of the universe eventually (*karuṇā* – compassion, *muditā* – sympathetic joy, and *upekkhā* – equanimity) – seems to induce exactly such kind of emotions.

> The atmosphere of joy is less complex [than that of shame]. It is marked by a levitating inclination against the backdrop of which one is no longer impressed by the unchanged force of gravity ("to jump for joy", "to float on air"). This may also be due to a heightened feeling of strength induced by joy. But there is also a more passive kind of joy in which one can let oneself go, for instance, in the case of being relieved of serious worries. Nonetheless, in such cases, too, joy is uplifting and this can only be due to the directed atmosphere of the moving emotion.
>
> (Schmitz, 2011, p. 258)

There is, in this description, a clear allocating of the emotion in space, but also recognizing that the emotion has a certain weight and interacts with the force of gravity. Notions known from classical physics, such as "strength" or "uplift," describe quite precisely the landscape of our emotions. The landscape is larger than our body, so is the sense of self, which – in moments of awe, for example – seems as if unpacked from the compact form of self we usually present in social situations. Among people, we wear masks; in nature we can take them off. Our autonomy in nature finds different confirmation than autonomy in the social environment, where self-value is connected to hierarchy and achieved by winning competitions. The practice of the four immeasurables in Buddhism is aimed at breaking barriers between us and other sentient beings. And this is connected to eliminating fear and fear-related emotions. Both *mettā* meditation and being present in nature reorganize at the same time what are two separate orders: moral and ontological. We could say, in both cases, about *ontoethical* phenomena, as an analogy to spatio-temporal phenomena. *Mettā* and immersion in nature initiate an *ontoethical process*. Living, experiential metaphysics is at the same time living experiential ethics: changing the metaphysical position of standing against the environment into belonging to the environment makes us more sensitive to the environment needs, including the needs of other people:

> In relation to increasing autonomy, nature could be a route through which individuals are enabled to express their personal distinctiveness, and not feel constrained by external influences such as the values imposed by society … Ridder's (2005) concept of a "nature-inspired autonomy" describes the importance of recognising the value of naturalness as a means of gaining a personal sense of freedom and escaping from the dissatisfaction caused by extrinsic influences of society.
>
> (Pritchard et al., 2020, pp. 1160–1161)

According to this view, nature allows freedom of expression, impossible in the social world. In the context of the rhythms of nature as a source of morality, it is easy to observe that this freedom is not a freedom of ego expression but freedom to act spontaneously within the patterns of rhythmically pulsating nature. The emotional result of such actions is eudaimonic and not hedonic, as in the case of ego-gratification.

Dramaturgy of Coexistence

We have seen that meditative experiences, such as the ones provoked by *mettā* meditation, result in eudaimonic pleasure. They have tranquillity rather than ecstasy for their flavor, but nevertheless, they are pleasant. *Mettā* is sometimes called "unconditioned love," which expresses the radical breaking from the transactional relation to reality the practice causes. Yet, "unconditioned" does not have to mean "indifferent." Meditations of the immeasurables are pleasant. The longer one practices them, the quicker and easier they develop. The above-cited research indicates a brain morphology difference between those that just began the practice and experienced meditators. Just as during non-meditative experiences, also during meditation, pleasure and pain are flypapers for attention. The more pleasure during a meditation session, the happier we are to prolong it. And the longer we meditate, the more moral, at least in theory, we become. Thus, the language of morality, just as the language of survival, has pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral as its letters. Meditative *mettā* pleasure results with empathy:

> Contingent on the nuances of the practice, kindness-based meditation may enhance the neural systems related to faster and more basic perceptual or motor simulation processes, simulation of another's affective body state, slower and higher-level perspective-taking, modulatory processes such as emotion regulation and self/other discrimination, and combinations thereof.
>
> (Mascaro et al., 2015, p.1)

Other research states that mindfulness meditation training promotes prosocial behaviors even without ethical instructions, including reduction of prejudice and desire to retaliate (Berry et al., 2020). The meditative pleasure leaves the practitioner without deficits. One emerges from a *mettā* session with a vigilant, alive, co-existence-oriented attention. The pleasure from eating tasty food, reading a book, or watching a movie does not necessarily make us so. One is never tired after a properly done *mettā* session. And even if, as the pedagogy of this technique promises, one of the effects of the meditation is the easiness to fall asleep, this easiness is not an effect of tiredness but vitality as the vital body knows when to sleep. Thus gained vitality does not limit itself to physical feeling. It is also the *vitality of thinking and moral attitude*. It influences our choices, including our moral

choices, just as lack of vitality often results in mechanical actions (devoid of moral dimension and consideration, and often harmful for the subject, others, or environment).

Similar vitality is installed in us thanks to what I call sub-morphic mindfulness, the one in which we incline our attention to be seduced by the realm of micro-processes and let it rest from thinking or perceiving the world as a collection of objects in space, for example, during the Buddhist elemental meditation. Ancient meditative traditions, such as Buddhist and Daoist, suggest that very characteristic of various elements influences human character traits. Perhaps attention itself assumes features of the earth, the water, the fire, or the air. The Buddha had thought one of his students with the following words:

> Rāhula, develop meditation that is like water; for when you develop meditation that is like water, arisen agreeable and disagreeable contacts will not invade your mind and remain. Just as people wash clean things and dirty things, excrement, urine, spittle, pus, and blood in water, and the water is not repelled, humiliated, and disgusted because of that, so too, Rāhula, develop meditation that is like water; for when you develop meditation that is like water, arisen agreeable and disagreeable contacts will not invade your mind and remain.
>
> (Bodhi, 2009, p. 530)

Buddhist meditation is radical when it comes to deconstructing our metaphysical landscape. One of my students reported that meditating on various qualities of the element of water, such as fluidity and moisture, was for her a safe manner of such a deconstruction. Water was both the deconstructing agent and, at the same time, due to its gentleness, a fear soothing factor. Giving attention to a characteristic of water can wake up in the meditator a feeling of overcoming borders and enhance fascination. In various meditation traditions, water also has a symbolic meaning and is used as a metaphor for purity or a clear mind. In the Japanese art of *shinrin-yoku*, a proper walking track, which optimizes the process of forest bath, should include a stream or a pond. However, each element has its specific force.

> Rāhula, develop meditation that is like space; for when you develop meditation that is like space, arisen agreeable and disagreeable contacts will not invade your mind and remain. Just as space is not established anywhere, so too, Rāhula, develop meditation that is like space; for when you develop meditation that is like space, arisen agreeable and disagreeable contacts will not invade your mind and remain.
>
> (Bodhi, 2009, p. 530)

This short passage connects the metaphysical, the phenomenological, the natural, and the moral, as they meet together in a way we give attention to

reality. It says about the mind's reaction to contact, which is, according to the law of the co-dependent arising, feeling (Pāli: *vedanā*). From the Buddhist point of view, thoughts are considered equal to sensations because both produce feeling. We could say that thoughts are sensations deprived of space and cannot produce the space feeling the above-quoted sutta says about.

Moral responsibility can be understood as a function of the force of attention in its capacity to reduce perspectival view, forced by attention's inner quality of freeing itself from the situation of interception. I suspect that nature-based, processual, elemental perception-based morality is more effective in character building than the morality of social codexes, expressed in the hypermorphic world: character overtakes features from the elements and becomes spacious. The codexes are prone to prejudices and are easily interpreted, thus manipulated. The more dogmatic, the less "spacious" they are. Often this manipulation is, in fact, self-manipulation. We can see how it works in border situations. They influence our judgments and stimulate fictional explanations – for example, people who had just died overnight become much more praised in our storylines. Nature, on the other hand, is non-fictional and non-linear. It is rhythmical. Connecting to these rhythms brings equal feelings, no matter if the situation at hand is just difficult or dramatic, usual, or it is a border situation. Nature is not neurotic: it does not create fictional stories, subscribing to which make us pay with our vitality and energy. Keeping an immaculate picture of a deceased person for us and others, to keep to the above example, costs just as any other denial.

A body of research indicates that exposing our senses to the natural environment may result in a special kind of feelings, sometimes named "elevated experiences." In the passage below, "NC" means "Nature Connectedness":

> [S]ince eudaimonia is oriented towards excellence and growth, it would be related to uplifting experiences (such as contact with the natural world) which stretched people beyond their usual boundaries. Such "elevating experiences" are "where a person feels awe, elevation to a higher level of awareness and a connection with some greater whole" (Huta and Ryan 2010, p. 740). NC has been found to correlate strongly with the value of self-transcendence (Tam 2013) and also to predict transcendent and awe-inspiring experiences, particularly in wild nature (Davis and Gatersleben 2013). The "higher order" emotions such as awe and wonder, which are often associated with transcendent experiences, could be a key mediating influence in the relationship between NC and personal growth. Awe has been defined as "an emotional response to perceptually vast stimuli that overwhelm current mental structures, yet facilitate attempts as accommodation" (Shiota et al. 2007, p. 944). Thus, the sense of awe felt in nature could lead to an expansion in individuals' mental structures and frames of reference, as well as an expanded sense of self, and so foster personal growth. This would be consistent with Frederickson's broaden and build

> theory of positive emotions (Fredrickson 2004). Likewise, the association that NC has with meaning and purpose in life is also in accord with the idea that self-change is brought about when people accommodate new experiences after having contact with nature: people often describe awe-inspiring experiences in nature as giving them a sense of perspective on their life, goals, and purpose (Silvia et al. 2015).
>
> (In Pritchard et al., 2020, p. 1161)

Elevating experiences, even if they do not last long unless they are worked out in meditative effort, have great significance to our moral behavior. Being exceptional, unusual, and strong, they leave traces in us. Having a transcendent character, they strip us from selfishness. A sight of beautiful majestic mountains, revealed suddenly for us as we trek, leaves us with mouths open. But in situations like these, the mount opens in a totally unpractical way, not, for example, to eat something. And if we were hungry or tired during our walk, now the two sensations disappear.

Research indicates that our relationship with nature leads towards overcoming ourselves:

> Connectedness to nature, spirituality and eudaimonic well-being have been found to be strongly correlated (Trigwell, Francis & Bagot, 2014). Examining the relationship more closely, Howell, Passmore and Buro (2013) found that meaning in life mediated the relationship between nature connectedness and well-being.
>
> A reduction in pressure from the everyday distractions of society, as well as the fascination and awe that can arise within a wild environment, can lead to peak or "transcendent" experiences, which are characterized by a sense of union with the universe, absorption in the significance of the moment and a sense of timelessness …
>
> (Hamman and Ivtzan, 2016, p. 36)

In nature, especially the wild one, we get rid of our fundamental selfishness, which shows that perhaps perceiving nature as an arena of the fight and mutual consumption of beings that are hostile to each other is our projection. In nature, we sometimes cease to be human, as the research indicates, transcending our existential position. For a short period of time, we cease to be individuals and stop perceiving the passage of time. Experiences like this are deprived of fear and hostility towards anything, greed, and hate. Does, then, moral necessarily mean human?

Big, Intelligent Animal

> *I meet a moose in the ancient forest of Puszcza Białowieska. We are looking into each other's eyes for a minute through a woodlet of young birches. It is the most electric look I have ever experienced. I am aware of the moose, and*

> *the moose is aware of me. Both of us know that right now, direct contact is taking place between us. I have an impression that I am looking into some non-human world through this big animal's eyes. I know that the moose's huge mass is significant for our contact because neither the moose nor myself are afraid of each other. Looking into the eyes of a squirrel would not produce the effect. It is a meeting of intelligences and a meeting of vitalities – also, a meeting of persons. I can detect – in our mutual comprehension – the individuality of the animal: Its self-confidence, a slightly indulgent attitude to me, a being who came to visit his territory and does not fit in at all. We touch each other physically, by the medium of eyes, as if the streams of our seeing crashed. I can feel the weight of the moose's look. It is so heavy, I could not move from the place I stood, even if I wished to.*

Several months before I met the moose, in a Buddhist monastery of the forest tradition in Sri Lanka, I have performed an experiment in eye communication with animals. I was circling a stupa trying to meditate while walking when I noticed a big black macaque sitting on a bench of a tree, several dozen meters away, with his back turned on me. I knew this beast. He was a king of the large zones of the jungle spreading around. All monks knew him because he was much louder than other apes and passionate about fighting other males of his kind. Also, he was black and not brown as the other macaques. My meditation was in a phase of decline, and I decided to play with the ape instead. While circling, I was either looking straight at his shoulder or just observing him in a peripheral way, moving only my eyeballs, not even my head.

I repeated the experiment many times. The result was clear. Every time I focused on the macaque's shoulder, he turned his head to meet my sight; every time I just observed him in a peripheral way, he did not react. Has he felt human sight on his back as a touch, or in some telepathic way, as he could not see whether I was looking straight at him or not?

In the case of the moose, the encounter was a surprise. I did not plan it. At a certain moment, I just felt *someone* was looking at me, so I turned my head. The fact that it was a big animal had stopped me in the place. The awareness of the contact with the moose and the awareness of the fact that the moose is aware of me started immediately. Suspending my "natural attitude" – *epochē* – had happened automatically, at least during these first seconds, which passed without thinking, and which were saturated with the emotion of bewilderment. I did not have any preconceptions or presuppositions. I did not perform any interpretations of what was happening.

The situation was characterized by several features: I felt it was exceptional, and I felt it on both sides of the Cartesian equation: the body and the mind. I was excited. I gave the moose my whole attention, or perhaps a better way to describe it would be to say – he took my whole attention, seducing it without remainder and waking up a kind of amorphic dramaturgy of co-existence, which transcended both the sub-morphic, morphic, and hypermorphic dramaturgies. I described it as getting access to "a non-

human world." The experience was dynamic and transcended the mind-body division in a single act of touching each other physically, even if we kept some distance. My second realization was that both the animal and I were aware of the contact. In fact, it was the moose that dictated the conditions of the contact. I could feel the individuality of the animal. I did not meet a moose. I met this moose. There was a particular life story that influenced the way he looked at me, a story of a mature individual who had seen a lot and is not young and naïve anymore. What he has seen, I do not know. I can only imagine births and deaths, hunger and abundance of food, escaping packs of wolves, the pleasure of the sun rays touching the skin in the morning, and the pain of nocturnal shivering when the temperature dropped several dozens below zero. I am sure the moose had seen people before and knew how clumsy we were.

If I took into bracket all that I know about the animal kingdom from the science books and from the lessons of biology and was to create a concept of animal, based exclusively on this single encounter with the moose, it would be a completely new picture. I would say that humans and animals are equal. I did not feel more intelligent than the moose. In fact, I felt the contrary: that although we were equal partners in our exchange of the sight, the moose "understood" the process of life much better. I would say that we can communicate effectively and understand each other. I would also say that we have similar goals in life – both he and I would like to avoid pain and enjoy every moment's intensity, only that I am much more clumsy in this pursuit, just as I am more clumsy relating to the environment of the forest. Should that be my only encounter with an animal, I would think that the animals are spiritual teachers to us people. I would like the experience of exchanging looks with them happening as often as possible.

The essence of this experience, its *eidos*, was the conscious contact with a being involved in the same existential yearning, meaningful exchange between myself and an individual of the other species, which enriched me spiritually, and resulted in a new, exciting, and unusual presence in reality. The experience was a lesson in flourishing and had a therapeutic effect on me. One of the aspects of the therapeutic effect was the distance it produced from the achievements I was after in human society. The chase after carrier, material goods, and appreciation by other people presented itself as insignificant when compared to the drive of phenomenological investigating into "what loves to hide" in nature. It has influenced the hierarchy of values and style of my life.

The case of the macaque in Sri Lanka was different. It was a setup experiment: while circling the stupa, I was either looking straight at his shoulder or just observing him in a peripheral way. He used to turn his head back and towards me only in the first case. This, of course, was not a real scientific experiment. It was not done in a laboratory. One professor of philosophy with whom I discussed the experiment, and whose positions were strongly anti-Cartesian, pointed out that it might have ignored the

broad range of contextualizing changes, such as a change in smell and quieting of other animals. However, none of the two had happened as there was only one variable in what I did: a movement of my eyeball and focusing of the sight.[1] But I accept the philosophy professor's critique. I limit my considerations to stating that, just as in the case of the moose, it was an instance of meaningful inter-species communication and broke a barrier between myself and the environment. I was no longer a parachutist into the environment – as the philosophy of mind expresses it.

These were pleasant experiences. I felt like part of the primeval forest in the first and jungle in the second case, at least to some degree. Animals may seem to be separated bodies moving in space at some distance from us, but although we do not speak the same language, we can communicate with them in a meaningful way. We can understand each other. Animals are, at the same time, connected to the environment in an intelligent way, transcending individual intelligence, and can serve as a mediating means for our communication with the environment. If animals can participate in this collective intelligence of the open-source, why could we not, humans?

Attuning at the Micro Level

Nea Makri, a shore town near Athens in Greece. September. For several days we have been studying the letter of Epicurus to Menoeceus in a garden of a rented villa in a group of dozen people aged from 25 to 70. We have just arrived at the passage in which Epicurus advises us to act only to get rid of our pain. How do we do this?

I ask my students to go to their rooms and lie down on their beds, to do the same on a comfortable armchair or the grass under the big pine in the center of our garden. They are supposed to allow their bodies to choose the most comfortable position and then wait. Wait until pain or any uncomfortable sensation or emotion appears. When it happens, they are supposed to deal with the pain by moving the posture, for example, having a sip of water or going to the toilet, whatever the nature of the discomfort will be. After that, they should stay motionlessly and wait again for another discomforting sensation. For the next 90 minutes, they should not do anything but release discomfort: physical or mental.

Two students will fall asleep during the exercise. The other ten will return with shining eyes and facial expressions, which reveal from the very start that they have discovered something valuable. One woman will say: "I had the best meditation in my life. My mindfulness was better than ever." Another: "I have experienced a pleasure greater than the morning swim in the sea, and you know how much I love my morning swims."

While we delicately correct physical and psychic irritations, our attention enters a new state of sensibility, in which reality becomes intense, like in the hyperrealist paintings. Perhaps this state is close to the state called by the ancient Greeks – *ataraxia*: deep, juicy tranquility. It is a state our attention

cannot attune to in daily life, chasing intensity of experience and collecting goods. To achieve this state, Epicurus advised us to be content with the situation in which three conditions are met: we are not hungry or thirsty, and we are protected against elemental forces, such as freezing cold. These are natural needs, as opposed to the deluded ones. That much is enough for *ataraxia*. However, non-philosophers do not know this and "overshoot," so to speak, the target. They want delicious food, many exquisite goods, fame, and various physical gratifications.

I also did the exercise my students did. I went to my bedroom, opened the door to the balcony to let in some breeze from the Aegean Sea, and laid down. I applied the instructions, and my body felt well and started to relax by itself. It felt no need from any of the Epicurean categories when suddenly … A draught of wind powerfully, and by surprise, smashed with the balcony door the frame. I was waiting for an impulse, and the universe provided me with one.

Fortunately, at that point, I was already in a state of heightened mindfulness and could realize what was happening. Within a few seconds, almost simultaneously, various reactions occurred. They all aimed at one effect: to make the world return from the state of unexpected chaos to the soothing order. An impulse appeared to stand up and close the door before the wind broke the glass. It was associated with several quite complex events within the hypermorphic dramaturgy that ended with a suggestive picture of broken pieces of glass staring at me grimly from the floor.

On the level of physical reactions, my body got tensed and ready to act. But the most exciting thing had happened on the level of micro-sensations. Suddenly a cloud of sensations and unpeaceful emotions started vibrating within my chest. However, the cloud settled down as soon as I decided that the broken glass and the problem of bringing in a Greek glazier on a hot Saturday afternoon is not bad enough to stop my Epicurean exercise.

The breeze, or perhaps the whole universe, gave me later a dozen minutes of deep tranquility, which helped me observe one more interesting phenomenon. When my body decided that it was too hot, it sat down by itself on the bed, waited for my hands to take off my T-shirt by themselves, and put itself – again by itself – back to the comfortable lying position. This advanced sequence of actions had happened without the participation of my will. I started to feel that if my conscious experience of the self was amputated, my body's life, endowed with some other kind of awareness, would continue living as usual.

The Epicurean experience implies that human actions are a consequence of innumerable micro-movements, most of which we will never know: sensational, mental, emotional, all evoked by the whole universe, including movements resulting from our desire. We cannot control them, no matter what the little person on the captain's bridge aspires to. But the Epicurean exercise is not about control. It is about awareness. It shows reality a covered before reality, a new chain of causes and effects, and a new net of

relationships between micro-events within different dramaturgies of presence. Even though we cannot control events, we can work meditatively with the mechanism of desire and aversion.

My students and I could have observed the results of this Epicurean exercise through all three dramaturgies of presence: as thoughts, as objects in space, and us micro-events on the elemental level. In my case: doors clashing and causing an impulse to stand up and secure it (morphic dramaturgy level); micro-sensations and micro-reactions to these sensations (submorphic dramaturgy level), various thoughts on the hypermorphic level. I realized that the activating of hypermorphic dramaturgy was not a necessary pre-condition of acting. I took out my T-shirt without employing it. There was no thinking mind involved.

The observation resulting from the exercise had a nonpartial character as if our living organisms became laboratories due to the fact that our attention was not filled with craving. This is what happens when we take craving itself as an object of investigation, as the essence of this exercise dictated. Attention became light, and naturally investigating the dramaturgies it has awoken.

Only attention with a low level of craving can attune to the fluent, pulsating reality. It is as in throwing a rock at a paddle in some distance. Using too much power will make us overshoot. Our attention, when influenced by craving, overshoots reality and entangles desire-based illusions. Epicurus tells us that a life of a person untrained philosophically is a series of overshoots aimed at erasing primary anxiety. We want to feel safe, but we overshoot buying big apartments or spending all our vital powers to be promoted at work. We want not to feel hunger, and we overshoot by buying a luxurious meal in an expensive restaurant. Overshooting results in deepening desire and a false life strategy, according to which we constantly have to fulfill our desires.

Extinguishing Dramaturgies

The obvious change in the perception happened in the third month of my meditation retreat in Myanmar in 2002/2003 (three months at the Chanmyay Yeikhta Meditation Center, followed by two months at the Shwe Oo Min Monastery, both near Yangon). I stopped perceiving my body as a piece of flesh. It started vibrating, particularly intensively in the middle of the chest. It was clear that my attention entered subtler territories than usual, which was accompanied by relaxing of the body to the level I had never experienced before. I could observe sequences of actions within the process of life never seen before, as if nature has lost its love to hiding, and decided to reveal some of its secret actions within the field of my attention. I had seen when the thought of doing something in the future caused an impulse in my organism and initiated a subtle contraction of muscles. Most importantly, I saw that my self had nothing to do with this cause–effect chain. It happened

by itself. However, if I was not mindful and moved as a result of the contraction of muscles, I would be certain that it was my decision that put the body into movement. I could distinguish single jerks of my desire. On January 16, 2003, I noticed that "vibrations have changed into subtle fluctuations of energy, more psychic than material." If I was still a Cartesian being, I was a Cartesian being confused about his Cartesianism.

I started feeling as painful the extended solidity of flesh which kept regularly returning for several hours every second day, in some rhythm never described by my teachers or in books I read. Movement meant easiness and pleasure, solidity – pain and suffering, which I called an "awful feeling":

> *January 17th. It is night. I am lying down. Sensations come in clouds of vibrations and disappear, and sounds seem to be like an echo. They rumble. I wake up in the middle of the night with the awful feeling. I observe it. It is solid, but after some time, it changes into vibrating clouds. I am sleepy, and I cannot follow the clouds well, and they freeze back into the forms of solid mass, which immediately brings back the awful feeling. I need to follow change if I do not want to suffer. The awful feeling tried to tell me that for the three last nights, waking me up in their middles. But I did not get the clue.*

Two days later, a series of experiences started to happen (usually at night), which destroyed the usual geography of mind and body and undermined the sense of self. For example: "While lying down, I moved my hand to scratch the face, and I left the self in the initial position." Or "It does not matter where in the body I direct my attention, I am observing only the mind." Several times I felt a sensation of a release in my legs, I turned my attention there, and the legs fell into grains and disappeared. I mentioned this experience earlier in this book, comparing it to "a dry sandcastle disintegrating and disappearing as an effect of a strong wind blow." This experience was not the most revolutionary of my monastic experiences, but it was important because, after sneaking into the monastic library one night, I could identify it as a particular stage of insight – an "insight into dissolution of phenomena" – described in the contemporary manual of meditation *In This Very Life: The Liberation Teachings of the Buddha* (1992) by Burmese master Sayadaw U Pandita.

> Concepts become indistinct. Up to now, the yogi may have seen phenomena clearly, but the mental factor of perception, or recognition, was still mixed in. Thus he or she was able to see both the ultimate, nonconceptual reality of objects and also the concept of form: body, arm, leg, head, abdomen, and so forth. At the dissolution stage of insight, concepts fall away. You may be unable to tell where the phenomena are located; there is only disappearance.
>
> (U Pandita, 1992, p. 202)

An attempt to analyze the series of experiences phenomenologically is not easy. The phase of *epochē* or suspending happens in Buddhist insight meditation by itself, to the degree impossible to achieve by non-meditating consciousness. There is a point when the meditative experience unfolds by itself and consists of experiences never encountered before; there is not much to suspend in our attitude, as this is the state of the deepest fascination, with the self almost absent. Perception opens to movement, appearing and disappearing of objects, or just disappearing of them, in a certain phase of deepening the insight. What emerges in the field of attention is experienced as real and more essential than the content of the ambient consciousness, as if the meditation process wanted to follow phenomenological instructions once again and retrieve an essence of the content of the experience. One dominating feeling is that of renewal of the presence within the process of life, refreshing our existential position. One gets in touch with a completely new chain of the cause and the effect. On top of feeling what is revealed as much deeper than what non-meditative consciousness reveals, one also feels a universal validity of this new material. The range of experience deepens enormously. Attention wakes up new dramaturgies unknown for non-meditating persons. It is sound to call them amorphic dramaturgies, as our experience departures the domesticated reality, crushing on the way the psychic bubble and questioning the Cartesian dualism.

When compared to the effect of being in nature, the result of a long intensive Buddhist meditation retreat seems to me to be much more intensive (although I have never spent five months in the woods exposed to the natural environment all day long). The direction the two activities push us towards seems to be the same: the weakened sense of the self as a separate bubble; seeing movement when there was stability before; the sense of wonder and discovery; refreshed vitality. In the next chapter, I will compare the known effects of being in nature with the Buddhist seven factors of awakening, a list consisting of the features of our experience ripening in the process of achieving the highest goal of this philosophical tradition.

Training in Attuning to the Process of Life

In direct experience provoked by the Buddhist insight meditation as well as a presence in nature, the general level of tension of a person involved drops down. It allows subtle physicality to emerge freely in the field of experience. Without this drop, attention is seduced by dramaturgies characterized by the presence of the strong self. Such attention does not have access to details of physicality and is blind to most of the sensory input. It is cut from the myriads of subtle sensations. It easily binds sensations into thoughts, placing itself eagerly and fully within hypermorphic dramaturgy. It is impartiality that awakes intelligence of the open-source. It lets us *identify the environmental influence on our actions and a mental mechanism of disguising this influence. It increases our awareness of being dependent on the environment.*

The exercise that follows aims at developing Open-source Intelligence. I call it "returning the body to nature." May it serve as an additional theme for contemplation for this chapter. It is done in stages:

1 One distinguishes between two forces within her field of experience: self-driven and non-self-driven.
2 Delicately, without forcing, one lets one's attention make the non-self-driven forces filling the field of experience and self-driven forces diminish slowly. This is not done by focusing on the first ones but by following the self-suggestion of allowing the impersonal forces to emerge within one's field of experience. As if the forces wanted to do so.
3 One follows the directions from which the impersonal forces impose as if searching for their source. Subjectively, it gives the sense of expanding attention atmospherically far beyond the contains of the body.
4 One can ask oneself: Is self on the side of sensations or the side of attention?

There is no one right effect of this exercise, which may be concluded with the written or oral report by the student. The student learns that in the world of middle-size objects, attention can be heavy. But it cannot afford to be heavy if she wants to penetrate the sub-morphic realms effectively. To have access to them and the benefits this access brings with itself – such as emotional, health, and eudaimonic well-being – one needs to learn to refine attention. While discussing the student's report, it could be useful to ask some questions of a philosophical nature, such as "If self-contentment depends so much on the way we pay attention, what sense does it make satisfying our desires by collecting some sensations and avoiding others?"

On the theoretical level, understanding the general principle of attention – as a force wanting to free itself from the situation of interception within dramaturgies – will probably result in avoiding giving attention to artificial patterns and choosing the natural environment as a place to be as an optimum environment for flourishing. The student knows that doing so restores the force of her attention and changes its habits.

In today's world, we think that desire originates from us and, consequently, that we have to satisfy it for our own sake. Exercises as the "Epicurean one" or various forms of Buddhist meditation allow us to see what had happened with desire before it matured in the form of an impulse to act. *One can see how desire acts through oneself and not from oneself*. This is an effective, insight-based, and not a discipline-based strategy for moral life.

Thoughts, the most important receiver of traditional pedagogical efforts, are no longer special. They are not autonomous. They are just a form of attention, one of many. They do not create a separate kingdom as Descartes wished, but they appear and disappear in constant dialogue with emotions, sensations, and mental background, which we experience as a mood, as I have already written. All this complex experience does not happen in the

void. Moments of attention arise and disappear in constant dialogue with the environment: with phenomena we describe as temperature, air pressure, pollens flowing in the air; other phenomena recently described by science, such as gravitation waves, registered first in the year 2015; and those, we do not know yet. This complex experience does not transpire in a vacuum. Moments of conscious presence happen in a constant dialogue between ourselves and the environment with its moisture, odors, sun warmth, and energy of other beings. The way contemporary humans are present in the world deprives them of conscious participation in this dialogue.

New Presence

The exercises described in the former section are both of ancient origin. Does returning to the ancient, nature-friendly philosophies allow us to reverse environmental disasters and facilitate human flourishing? I think that choosing re-adapting an old ethical system or picking – from the supermarket of ideas – some religious or laic ideology as well as creating a new narration would not suffice. We need to realize the limiting power of all narrations and teach our attention to operate fluently in non-narrative dramaturgies of natural processes. Even the most brilliant new ideas, methods of acting, or ways to solve problems will not help us if we remain involved in the old ways of being present in the world. A new, more radical approach is needed– a new kind of collective presence of our species on the planet Earth, which I call "new presence." This new presence is guided by a particular embodied notion of being actively attuned to the rhythms of nature.

This new presence does not mean being passive, even if the proposed exercises require standing away from active involvement in events. The exercises result in aliveness, teaching us how to intuitively use our vitality and provide us with the ability to quietly see how vitality slowly diminishes according to the rhythms of nature, every day, and in the context of our whole life.

One can feel vitality in the organism without special training. Such training, however, would allow one to feel subtleties of the increasing and decreasing vitality and its relationship with other factors. When transferred to social life, this sensitivity would have to change the system of education and the way people work. The system was blind to such subtilities so far. One can also quickly realize that allowing nature to act, trusting it, and trusting in its intelligence, saves vitality, as contrasted with, say, constant planning, which is nothing else but the expression of distrust to nature.

Philosophy as an instruction for attention can be incredibly creative in the process of establishing direct knowledge of the body, intention, and will. Being aware of the vitality of life is a precondition for learning the art of flourishing. It becomes clear if we return to the catatonics in Volterra hospital, whom we left on their stone bench in chapter one. Even in their case, the freezing of the body and presumably of the consciousness is only a reaction to the dynamics of

life and not an effective one. It was an effect of a certain pedagogy (in a broad sense of the word) applied to them. This is what the psychiatric hospital staff wanted from them: to sit quietly and make no trouble. This was the pedagogical result the doctors and nurses wanted to achieve. Presence-centered pedagogy could not possibly fall into this trap.

Themes for Contemplation

1. When in nature, observe how the environment influences your mood. See if you feel more tranquil? Investigate how strong is your sense of separateness as compared to being in the city, office, or industrial settings. Is there any force in you that drags you towards this tranquility? Is this a force of attention?
2. What is the effect of sub-morphic mindfulness: observing elements inside and outside of ourselves? Does observing space gives you the feeling of spaciousness? When you attune your attention to the fluidity, for example, of the saliva in your mouth, and then to fluidity in your body, as you scan it with attention, what is the result in terms of emotions?

Note

1 It is interesting to notice that we can easily admit that attention is a force influencing our body and how far-reaching consequences it can bring. Psychosomatic illnesses, for example, are for us the result of such co-influence. We acknowledge the existence of affective weight, overcoming the Cartesian positions. We ascribe weightlessness both to thinking and seeing, however we accept the first as acting force, but not the second. On the other hand, we refuse to even consider that the force of attention can affect something outside of our skin – our skin suddenly becomes the impassable barrier. We fight Cartesianism but only within the bag of our skin, even though concepts like "atmospheric emotions" or "shared resonance" challenge this attitude.

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6 Nature-based Flourishing

Impersonal Virtue

There are approaches to life which explicitly assume that nature teaches us morality and that morality acquired by nature is of the utmost quality, as it is perfect and spontaneous:

> For the Daoist, premeditated morality is a sham. Preassigned responses are forced and, because coercion only serves to diminish the creative possibilities of a situation, they are dehumanizing. Even in the cultivation of one's own character, efforts to excel according to stipulated behaviours only compromise one's natural moral proclivities, and will not do the job.
>
> (Ames and Hall, 2003, p. 136)

Technical morality, imposed from without, is no more than a record of steady moral deterioration. The more elaborate the terms of such norms, the clearer is the indication that morality has slipped from what we do spontaneously and unconsciously as the spirit moves us, to what we do for some self-conscious reason. Morality becomes increasingly instrumentalized, reduced to a means to some ulterior end in this spiraling decline (ibid., p. 137).

Some research (e.g., Mauss et al., 2011) shows that struggle for happiness is correlated with a lower level of happiness. It brings disappointment. The *Daodejing* says the same about morality. Struggle for morality initiates moral deficit or at least the sense of moral deficit. One of the Daoist virtues is the virtue of non-acting. For us in the West, non-acting brings to mind the expression "sin of giving up" rather than thought of wise behavior. It is not a coincidence that even most sensitive, nature-appreciating philosophers, such as William James, define human life as "meaningful struggle" and not "meaningful surrender."

> The Chinese did not make formal models of the natural world but rather proceeded by intuition and empiricism. Indeed, it has been maintained that the Chinese never developed a concept corresponding to

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> the laws of nature for the sufficient reason that they did not have a concept of "nature" as distinct from human or spiritual entities …
>
> (Nisbett et al., 2001, p. 293)

Virtue, for Daoists, is impersonal, although humans can personalize it. We learn it from the example of nature. And we lose it while being cut from nature. *The less a system (individual consciousness, organized religion, political party, etc.) is in touch with the process of life, the more it defends its identity; the more anxiety it contains, the more obsessive with itself it becomes*. Nietzsche seems to have similar intuition, which I summarized in a book on philosophical therapies in the following way:

> Here is how [for Nietzsche] our demons are born: we succumb to elations and, when they pass, our worn-out nervous system plunges into sadness and despair. Then we build our selves out of these elations, discarding other experiences like rubbish. From now on, they will come to haunt us in the form of a hostile environment, and we will spend our lives avenging this environment. Resentment, the result of using up one's nervous energy, is a mixture of three poisons: anger, unhealthy irritability, and desire for revenge.
>
> (Fabjański, 2020, p. 49)

Both Nietzsche and Daoists seem to pay careful attention to properly dealing with the vital forces humans can access. The energy should flow freely, according to the design of nature. We can achieve a dynamic psychophysical state of flourishing when we attune to the process of life and spontaneously express what is called in Chinese *de* (virtue). Attention is moral. And if so, it is attention and not a self, particularly the human self, that is the bearer of moral value. Based on daily observations, we know that not just humans but also animals dispose of and apply attention. How about plants?

Plants are treated from Aristotle, through Christianity, through the Enlightenment, through contemporary times, as inferior, often mechanical, and being in a position to serve animals, which in turn are to serve to humans. Aristotle at least ascribed to plants a soul. True, it was the most inferior, nutritive soul, but the Enlightenment deprived the greenery of even this little significance, making it a mechanism without value (Pellegrino and di Paola, 2019).

Plants are not growing up chaotically. There is definitely an intelligence governing their behavior. But, usually, in daily life, we do not praise this intelligence, as it is impersonal. However, some authors (e.g., Pellegrino and Paola, 2019) state that we can ascribe to the plants the abilities considered formerly as typically human, such as: being active, having intelligence, perception, and communication capacity. All these capacities may be executed in a different way than that of humans, as the plants underwent a different path of evolution.

Some pre-Aristotelean philosophers did not claim a metaphysical barrier between humans and plants. Empedocles, for example, perceived plants as a type of creation, which, just like humans, emerged from the never-ending fluctuation of the universe, perpetuated by co-acting basic forces of the elements: earth, water, air, fire, love, and strife. The plants were participating in the same intelligence and the same moral order we do. Therefore Empedocles preached respect to plants and forbade harming them. He thought that they could feel pain. Today, some authors revisit this vision.

Emanuele Coccia places plants in the crucial role as creators of life, environments, and whole worlds, and calls them forms of "absolute contemplation"; Michael Marder ascribes to them a status of persons (not human though, just as Empedocles); other authors point to the fact that plants flourish (as in the case of flower) just like humans, which gives them the status of subjects to ethical considerations and even to protection by law (in Pellegrino and di Paola, 2019). Just like us, the plants can sense gravity. To return to my question – which is not whether plants are subjects to moral laws, but if they are, together with the rest of non-human nature "producers" of such laws – I would like to refer to Coccia, whose perspective is summarized by Pellegrino and di Paola:

> As we already said, the plants exemplify a metaphysical modality [and as such] alternative to all pictures that were predominant in the history of philosophy. They are also alternative because they express a certain form of rationality; the seed that develops into a plant represents or manifests non-mental consciousness, a non-cerebral reason – a sense. The metaphysics of mixture [proposed by Coccia] is perhaps a form of panpsychism: all matter is alive, and all that is alive is rational.
>
> (Pellegrino and di Paola, 2019, p. 113)

Non-mental rationality and consciousness is a radical possibility. In this book, I am developing a theory of Open-source Intelligence, which does not necessarily result in panpsychism but proposes a non-personal intelligence that could be expressed and perceived in the life of plants. Logically speaking, if such an intelligence exited, its perfect manifestation would be a complete wilderness. If such an intelligence acted on human beings, the effects would be most obviously felt while we are in the wilderness. There exist a body of research, which points towards this direction. Here is one example if we treat positive moods, increased mindfulness, and sense of meaning as symptoms of intelligence:

> The present study found that location had a significant effect on positive mood and subjective well-being, as well as finding that meaning and mindfulness increase significantly only in "wild" areas such as forests or mountains, and then only when participants spent 30 minutes or more in these settings every day.
>
> (Hamman and Ivtzan, 2016, p. 41)

It seems that ancient philosophers knew this much earlier. A Greek historian Megasthenes, who had reached India with Alexander the Great in the fourth century BC, distinguished two categories of the Buddhists: *hylobioi* – living in the forest, and *iatrikoi* – living in cities. The city Buddhists offered their services as healers, but the *hylobioi* were to enjoy much greater esteem, as they were uncompromised in their quest for awakening and considered the forest a place most conducive to this task. Some Thai monks had the same thought and, toward the end of the nineteenth century, decided to live the *hylobioi* life. They left city life, went to the jungle, and created a philosophical school called today the Thai forest tradition: "Wild meditators lived in a context where things we spend most of our lives pretending do not exist were ever-present" (Fisher, 2013, loc. 108).

What are the problems? Passing away, lack of stability, death. We have to come to terms with them to see the source of our anxiety. One of the Thai forest tradition masters, Ajahn Maha Boowa, based the pedagogy he created for his students on the assumption that only by working with panic-inflicting, biological fear can one enter into the most profound states of tranquility. He recognized and used evolution mechanisms, which force us to be alert in the moments of deadly dangers, for developing concentration: his own and his students. He advised meditating on the edge of an abyss as an antidote to sloth, torpor, and daydreaming.

What was taking place in the forest monks' minds was constantly translating personal experience to non-personal experience. Hunger, which they experienced most of the time, was translated into the wind element movement in the guts, tiredness into sensing the force of gravity. A common meditative experience teaches that the pain becomes a series of neutral sensations, which does not bother us anymore when we realize that it is disappearing together with the change of attitude.

Ajahn Maha Boowa repeats many times in his writings that wisdom operates in us as a non-personal force of attention. Attention has its strategies, sometimes attacking its objects intensively, sometimes retreating, as if it wanted to rest and regain the strength, but it is always self-independent. At a certain level, meditation develops by itself, in the form of attention independent of us, runs around in the body with a great speed, and investigates each nook of our flesh, bones, and bodily liquids. Its acting is caused by forces independent of our will, not necessarily local, perhaps forces of the whole universe. In environmentally oriented Buddhism, conversion takes place thanks to nature and against concepts.

> Forest renunciants focused minutely on the interplay between nature and mind and guarded against the defilements of the mind. In the jungles the renunciants attended to the existential meaning of eating and being eaten and the inevitability of decay.
>
> (Fisher, 2013, loc. 2576)

Defilements in Buddhism are the crucial factors spoiling our morality. Monks get rid of them when facing the reality of their existential situation. One of the masters of the Thai forest tradition, Ajaan Lee writes:

> Some kind of trees make themselves quiet in ways we can see: We say that they "sleep." At night, they fold up their leaves. If you go lie under them, you'll have a clear view of the stars in the nighttime sky. But when day comes, they'll spread out their leaves and give a dense shade. This is a good lesson for the mind: When you sit in meditation, close only your eyes. Keep your mind bright and alert, like a tree that closes its leaves and thus doesn't obstruct our view of the stars.
>
> (Dhammādharo, 2011, loc. 6950)

One way to describe the process of awakening in Buddhism is by presenting how the so-called "seven factors of enlightenment" (Pāli *satta bojjhaṅgā*) mature and support themselves until they all become perfectly developed and present in human experience. They are mindfulness (*sati*), investigation of the phenomena (*dhamma vicaya*), energy (*viriya*), rapture (*pīti*), tranquility (*passaddhi*), concentration (*samādhi*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*). We find these basic translations of the seven factors in a Buddhist dictionary (Nyanatiloka, 1997). Translating the *Satipaṭṭhāna sutta* Bodhi (2009) follows this tradition with one exception. He translates *dhamma vicaya* as "investigation-of states." When we analyze the results of the studies about human organisms' immersion into nature, we come up with a collection of similar words. Only in one book – Louv's *The Nature Principle* (2011) – do we read how research indicates that nature enhances relaxation (factor associated with Buddhist factor of tranquility); creativity and intelligence (Buddhist: investigation of the phenomena); attention span (Buddhist: concentration); or mobilization of the organism (Buddhist: energy). This similarity indicates that the process of flourishing initiated by Buddhist insight meditation and being in nature leads in the same direction.

Investigating of the phenomena (Pāli: *dhamma vicaya*), one of the factors of awakening refers to intelligence, which is probably the closest to the concept of Open-source Intelligence I propose, operates as an impersonal force, but can be stimulated by personal meditative effort. This impersonal feature of intelligence is clearly felt in the meditation process, in which one realizes the difference between various types of attention. Attention trapped in a perspectival view has a different quality than attention freed from such an entrapment: It feels different in the body – both the types of attention influence our actions in different ways. Freed attention, which translates into ease in the body and the mind, affects us in an ethically positive way. *If there is moral freedom, it is freedom of attention.* The more sensitized to natural patterns our attention, either by meditation or by exposing our organism to actions of nature, the more intelligent we are in terms of Open-source Intelligence and, consequently, all types of intelligence: rational,

emotional, and moral. According to the teachings of the Buddha, in daily life, an untrained person misplaces her attention:

> The Buddha teaches that the craving and clinging that hold us in bondage are sustained by a network of "conceivings" (*maññita*) – deluded views, conceits, and suppositions that the mind fabricates by an internal process of mental commentary or "proliferation" (*papañca*) and then projects out upon the world, taking them to possess objective validity. The task of insight meditation is to sever our attachments by enabling us to pierce through this net of conceptual projections in order to see things as they really are.
>
> (Bodhi, 2009, pp. 39–40)

This pedagogical task, which belongs to the field of living, applied metaphysics rather than psychology, is deeper than emotions, thoughts, and even sensations. It affects and organizes the primitive sense of presence. Dramaturgies of presence can be understood as conceptual tools that help us navigate on this deep level. They allow for existential adjustment of our position within the process of life, from which change on the moral, emotional and perceptual level happens.

In the skillfully performed process of meditation, we can choose between dramaturgies of presence. Their application frees us from compulsiveness, broadens our imagination, giving us more existential space to breathe. They can also facilitate the process of freeing attention from the situation of interception by the perspectival view by providing a meta-perspective of our experience.

Troubles with Types of Intelligence

I designed The Open-source Intelligence hypothesis to explain observations made during meditation as well as the co-influence of the natural environment and organisms. It seems to be a force that is impersonal (or beyond-personal) yet not mechanical, and we cannot reconstruct a simple cause-effect chain that would fully explain its actions. For that reason, naturalistic sciences cannot capture it, as they are accustomed to dividing reality into the dead and the alive, physical and mental, and explaining the fields separately by its particular set of assumptions about causality. The kind of intelligence observed in, for example, beavers' behavior as they build their sophisticated under- and over-water constructions cannot be explained by these assumptions: neither plants' non-mental rationality and consciousness. There must be some other causality working there, which is behind scientific comprehension.

The very definition of intelligence suffers from these limitations. It is a relatively recent term that replaced the former notion of reason: "By presenting itself as a redefinition of the mind, of the faculties of knowledge, and

of psychic life as a whole, intelligence played the same role as did reason during the Enlightenment" (Malabou, 2019, p. 1).

But this replacement is not one-to-one. While in antiquity, intelligence as reason was cosmic thus impersonal after the Enlightenment's radical turn to anthropocentrism, it becomes personal. This is reflected by contemporary definitions of intelligence by various authors, such as the faculty of practical judgment, the ability of abstract thinking or solving problems, the capacity to live purposefully and think rationally, a total of cognitive processes, or skill in achieving whatever we want to attain.

There is no agreement today: is intelligence a general human capacity, or are there specific types of intelligence? We recently witnessed a whole pack of intelligences appearing in our intellectual arena, as a theory of multiple intelligences became quite popular: emotional, social, kinetic, musical, etc. This approach is criticized on the ground that it defines talents and abilities and not intelligence. One of the new items in this pack is ecological intelligence, also known as environmental intelligence, but even it is defined in the spirit of anthropocentrism – for example, by Goleman (2009, p. 93) as "ability to adapt to our ecological niche" as an effect of nature-friendly considerations. It is not what I propose in this book as the Open-source Intelligence, which does not emerge from a single organism or its organ. The existing notion of ecological intelligence is to a large degree transactional, based on the idea of exchanging services or goods between organism and environment, and calls for the wise exploitation of nature and not to co-existence with it. To be fair, Goleman's definition of ecological intelligence moves toward a similar direction when he talks about identifying and understanding by humans the dependence of their action and eco-systems.

Howard Gardner, who first proposed a theory of multiple intelligences, defined naturalistic intelligence as:

> [T]he ability to connect, on a profound level, with non human living beings and to appreciate the effect that such relationships have upon us and our external environment (Gardner 1999). This form of intelligence requires a developed sensory ability with which to perceive living organisms, the capacity of logical reasoning that allows us to distinguish and classify living organisms on the basis of certain logical parameters, a particular emotive sensitivity toward all that is "natural" and, finally, a certain existential knowledge that allows us to link all these qualities together on the basis of experience of a spiritual nature (Gardner 1999).
>
> (In Barbiero, 2011, p. 15)

To be naturalistically intelligent, one has to, among other things, sensitize the senses, inclining them to perceive with fascination the natural environment, develop a conceptual apparatus to differentiate its nuances and feel connected to it, instead of treating it as something indifferent. Putting aside

consideration of how our conceptual apparatus can actually isolate us from nature, I would like to focus on the most intriguing part of this definition – a certain existential base that integrates all these qualities in a spiritual way. What we have in common with the environment is the propensity of being alive or immersed in the tissue of life. This immersion is primordial. The sense of separate self is a later development, as we know from child development studies. Accessing Open-source Intelligence can thus be perceived as returning to what is primordial. Pierre Hadot, in his numerous books, calls what was for ancient philosophers flourishing a "conversion," or return to the source. Mythologies and religions also explore these themes passionately. Arne Naess, the founder of deep ecology, writes that we humans can "re-discover our ecological selves, being part of our deepest self" (cited in Barbiero, 2011, p. 16).

Some insight into what is this "ecological intelligence" may come from anthropologists studying cultures that live much closer to nature than ours:

> In tribal cultures that which we call "magic" takes its meaning from the fact that humans, in an indigenous and oral context, experience their own consciousness as simply one form of awareness among many others. The traditional magician cultivates an ability to shift out of his or her common state of consciousness precisely in order to make contact with the other organic forms of sensitivity and awareness with which human existence is entwined. Only by temporarily shedding the accepted perceptual logic of his culture can the sorcerer hope to enter into relations with other species on their own terms; only by altering the common organization of his senses will he be able to enter into a rapport with the multiple nonhuman sensibilities that animate the local landscape.
>
> Magic, then, in its perhaps more primordial sense, is the experience of existing in a world made up of multiple intelligences …
>
> (Abram, 1997, p. 9)

These intelligences seem to have a personal form for a shaman, as described by Abram. However, this does not have to be the case. As we learn from the same book, for the Navajo people, there exists a psyche of land and, consequently, an intelligence operating that is not limited to a single organism.

The Latin word *intelligentia* means the ability to understand relations among things. Just as the term "intellect," popular before contemporary times, it is associated with what was known in Antiquity as *noûs*, the reason of the whole universe, which is also present within an individual human being but not produced by her. *We can participate in a kind of intelligence rather than have it*. Such an approach (and I see no reason for which the approach treating intelligence as a product of an individual is less impartial metaphysically) can throw new light on the mystery of our well-being enhancing when we are in nature. Let us try to consider this option starting with plants and then moving to mice and humans.

What would be a dramaturgy of life for a plant? How is attention intercepted by a green organism that does not move? One general view is provided by Mancuso and Viola in their book *Brilliant Green: The Surprising History and Science of Plant Intelligence* (2015). They start by observing the incredible efficiency of plants in the difficult art of survival. Plants dominate the planet, and to achieve that, they have to be advanced forms of life endowed with intelligence. Humans do not see this intelligence because of the radical difference between the ways our organism and the plant's organism work. We have mobile bodies consisting of separate organs. Remove one of the crucial organs – the brain, heart, or lungs – and we die. Plans do not move, which means they cannot escape disasters or enemies, but they are built modularly. No single part of the plant is essential, and when deprived of large parts of themselves, plants are perfectly capable of growing them back and continuing living. They also live their lives as colonies and not as individuals, which is typical to contemporary people but not necessarily for people in general. For many members of indigenous societies, just as for single grasses or flowers, life outside a colony was impossible.

The authors of *Brilliant Green* adopt a very broad definition of intelligence as the ability to solve problems. They grant this ability to all living forms:

> Intelligence is a property of life, something that even the humblest single-celled organism must possess. Every living being is continuously called upon to solve problems that essentially aren't so different from the problems we face. Think about it: food, water, shelter, companionship, defense, reproduction – aren't they the underlying factors in our knottiest problems? Without intelligence there can be no life.
>
> (Mancuso and Viola, 2015, loc. 1599)

> The most recent studies of the plant world have demonstrated that plants are sentient (and thus are endowed with senses), that they communicate (with each other and with animals), sleep, remember, and can even manipulate other species. For all intents and purposes, they can be described as intelligent.
>
> (Mancuso and Viola, 2015, loc. 1896)

> Recent developments in plant biology enable us to study plants as organisms with a proven capacity for acquiring, storing, sharing, processing, and utilizing information collected from their environment.
>
> (Mancuso and Viola, 2015, loc. 1896)

Despite the plants' modular structure, their intelligence is concentrated in particular places, just like human intelligence. It was observed already by Darwin, who noticed intelligent behavior, equal to the intelligence of lower animals, of the tip of the radicle, which directs the underground movement of

the roots. Its movement is intelligent and not mechanical, and something, rather not the tip of radicle but whole plant colony, employs a sophisticated strategy to take care of the plant's well-being. It has to actively search for oxygen within the soil, mineral salts, water, employing equivalent behavior to making by humans. Moving downwards for water lowers the chances for oxygen found closer to the surface of the soil. Moving towards crucial phosphorus can mean distancing from no less critical nitrogen. And this calculation needs to consider quickly changing environment and factors such as invasions of insects, the well-being of the other parts of the plant, which may contradict the roots needs, and the collective good of the colony the plant belongs to (or perhaps "is a part of" would give more justice to this relationship).

To make such intelligent decisions possible:

> Each root tip continuously detects numerous parameters such as gravity, temperature, humidity, electric field, light, pressure, chemical gradients, the presence of toxic substances (poisons, heavy metals), sound vibrations, the presence or absence of oxygen and carbon dioxide.
>
> (Mancuso and Viola, 2015, loc. 1718)

We are talking here of a being that is deprived of the brain or the heart. Thus, the plants' intelligence must be what authors call "distributed intelligence," not unknown also in humans, who can attune to each other, as in the case of thousands of people clapping in a theater, starting this collective noise asynchronously and making it synchronized within few seconds.

The last example supports the hypothesis of intelligence as rhythmical synchronization. *Rhythms can be basic "units" of the universal language of intelligence. Perhaps all intelligence is, in its essence, musical (an idea not alien to the ancient Greeks). And the basic expression of intelligence is the ability to attune. When conceived in this way, intelligence would naturally tend to prefer larger and larger spaces to overcome the shortcomings of attention entrapped into a limited perspective*. Understanding, as an effect of such an intelligence, would increase together with capturing more and more relationships between things and conclude with insight into the nature of life. My perspective on this point corresponds with the traditional meaning of the word *intelligentia* as the ability to understand relations among things.

Such ability may be developed by the community of single organisms: a colony of plants or an anthill. We forgot about such a possibility, trying to define what intelligence is within a positivist metaphysical vision. And the process of forgetting began in the nineteenth century. Already then, it met the resistance of philosophers, such as Henri Bergson, who saw in intelligence the general ability to adapt and not a faculty of a single organism. He wrote that humans find intelligence in themselves, but this intelligence is an expression of a much larger evolutionary force operating, to which psychology and biology are blind. Discovering the details of this force is left to philosophers.

Intelligence in humans, although born from life, turns its back to life and cannot comprehend life itself. What does this mean? According to Bergson, intelligence:

> It is life looking outward, putting itself outside itself, adopting the ways of unorganized nature in principle, in order to direct them in fact. Hence its bewilderment when it turns to the living and is confronted with organization. It does what it can, it resolves the organized into the unorganized, for it cannot, without reversing its natural direction and twisting about on itself, think true continuity, real mobility, reciprocal penetration – in a word, that creative evolution which is life.
>
> (Bergson, 1998, loc. 2173)

> Characterized [by Bergson] by exteriority and distance, intelligence does nothing but look straight ahead, solidifying and stabilizing everything it touches. Then, when it starts to take itself as object, intelligence petrifies itself. The biological and symbolic fail to understand each other.
>
> (Malabou, 2019, p. 5)

This passage is an intriguing description. First, as understood by Bergson, operating intelligence resembles the radicles' intelligence in the book by Mancuso and Viola. As if radicles' behavior was an exact depiction of the Bergsonian intelligence in action. Secondly, Bergson writes that intelligence solidifies and stabilizes everything it touches. I propose the opposite characteristic of the same force: intelligence as freeing attention from a stable situation. The intelligence Bergson writes about is entrapped intelligence. He uses the image of the prism, which facets are space and language, through which intelligence sees life, ignoring life's richness, the whole spectrum of vitality. He sees intelligence as something that limits and freezes reality. As such, it cannot grasp realities movement. Psychology and biology see and research only the frozen aspect and are blind to the movement itself. That includes the biological version of the theory of evolution, which employs a mechanical chain of causes and effects, much too poor to describe the richness of the process of life.

Bergson describes intelligence as a force operating within what I call dramaturgies, actually creating the world of dramaturgies. Doing so, he describes habits of attention. *Just as nature loves to hide, science loves to freeze nature in a stable frame*. But the author of *Creative Evolution* introduces mind and intuition to the scene of his considerations. Due to intuition, intelligence changes the direction of its acting. It starts refreezing reality. Bergson describes intuition in a way that can be applied to human attention. It is self-conscious but disinterested and impersonal, and it enlarges its objects indefinitely. This resembles my hypothesis of an intelligent force operating between the subsystems that seem for today's epistemological stance independent, which I call cosmoses: consciousness, not alive matter,

organic life. The force operates in a rhythmical, pulsating way. There is a correlation between these cosmoses. The hypothesis of Open-source Intelligence is an attempt to create such an explanatory theory.

The human organism reacts in the same way to meditative training and presence in nature. Both the training and the presence result in a moral attitude, and part of the training is cultivating morality. The OSI hypothesis explains how morality, well-being, and presence in nature are codependent. Although we can detect impersonal intelligence of the open-source acting in the plant world, we find it awkward to ascribe morality to plants, even if we acknowledge that plants make decisions and that the concept of morality as flourishing may be applied both to humans and plants. To break this awkwardness, let us consider humans, visiting the animal kingdom on the way.

Of Mouse and Maze

One of the most striking research results proving how intelligence is a factor of the environment is that of Matthews and Jenks (2013), who had discovered that the bacterium *Mycobacterium vaccae*, when fed to mice, makes them less anxious and twice as intelligent[1] – at least when it comes to navigating mazes. Mice who had ingested the bacteria passed the maze twice as fast. The bacterium has proved itself to be a crucial factor for the efficiency of their actions.

Like people in the torture room, mice in the laboratory lose their intelligence and vitality (decreased by anxiety). This research pinpoints a single factor that produces a certain result but, seen from another perspective, accords with the ancient idea of intelligent vitality of the whole universe. The hypothesis of Open-source Intelligence connects the two perspectives. It can also be supported by the research on how merely staying in nature enhances our well-being and how chemical pollution results in lower IQ results in children, as reported in *Scientific American* (Bienkowski, 2014). They all indicate that intelligence is environmental. It can operate by other mediums than the brain and nervous system.

> We have become accustomed to associating brain activity – particularly activity of the human brain – with a phenomenon we call "intelligence." Yet, four billion years of evolution could have selected networks with topologies and dynamics that confer traits analogous to this intelligence, even though they were outside the intercellular networks of the brain. Here, we explore how macromolecular networks in microbes confer intelligent characteristics, such as memory, anticipation, adaptation and reflection and we review current understanding of how network organization reflects the type of intelligence required for the environments in which they were selected. We propose that, if we were to leave terms such as "human" and "brain" out of the defining features of

> "intelligence," all forms of life – from microbes to humans – exhibit some or all characteristics consistent with "intelligence."
>
> (Westerhoff et al., 2014)

Mycobacterium vaccae made mice less anxious and more intelligent. Being in nature does the same to humans. Both the parameters – anxiety and intelligence – are connected by way of paying attention. Anxiety locks attention in the cage of heavy emotions in the body and mechanical obsessive thoughts. While lowering anxiety, nature frees attention from this cage, in line with its tendency to free it from a situation of entrapment. This freed attention has a chance to perceive the new connection between things and events as its perspective enlarges, resulting in increased intelligence.

When I ask myself what kind of intelligence stands behind my breathing, I cannot answer that it is the brain, heart, or whole body. The intelligent act of breathing comes from both body and environment. Attached to one side of this intelligent breath is atmospheric pressure, pollens in the air, the mixture of gases present on Earth. On the other side, attached to this process is my thinking, which depends on all the factors. Thinking and air pressure are interdependent.

Writing this passage was interrupted by a phone message from my friend, who is lying in a hospital under a respirator, as COVID has made her lungs inflamed (70 percent in one lung, 80 percent in the other). She can turn her body from one side to another with great effort. She writes that she struggles to stay alive and asks what she could possibly think about to get some relief. I imagine what her thoughts are and how much they depend on her present inability to breathe fully. She is in a state of panic, and her thoughts must express it. She is also depressed. Also, cut off the intimate contact with the environment: the most critical activity responsible for the contact, her breathing and work of her lungs, is in the unnatural situation of depending on the respirator and not directly contacting the world.

Writes philosopher-psychiatrist Thomas Fuchs:

> Depression is the consequent psychophysiological reaction: at the biological level, it involves a pattern of neurobiological, metabolic, immunological, biorhythmic, and other organismic dysfunctions which are equivalent to a partial decoupling or separation between organism and environment. These dysfunctions are experienced as a loss of drive and interest (anhedonia), psychomotor inhibition, bodily constriction, and depressive mood.
>
> (Fuchs, 2013, p. 227)

As we have seen in Chapter 1, it works both ways: immobilization of the body increases depression. I could only advise my friend to think that COVID is a natural phenomenon, and like all other phenomena, is not solid and will eventually pass. Also, I wrote her to pay attention to what changes

in her body rather than to what is stable, but only when she finds herself in the moments of relative relaxation, not by forcing attention. *Attention and its object inform each other. They also change each other*. We know that from the *Satipaṭṭhāna sutta* lesson. Attention paid to what is liquid and changing in the experience becomes more spacious, which in turn influences our thoughts. They also become more spacious and less mechanical or compulsive.

Let it be Arthur Schopenhauer, this time, who suggested that to flourish, one needs to abandon craving, thus depriving the cosmic will of its impetus. Here is the program of educating our attention proposed by Schopenhauer, which aims at ridding attention of desire:

> Learn to understand from my own movement on motives the inner nature of my simplest and commonest movements of an inorganic body which I see ensuing on causes. I must recognize the inscrutable forces that manifest themselves in all the bodies of nature as identical in kind with what in me is the will, and as differing from it only in degree.
>
> (Schopenhauer, 1959, p. 126)

It seems that such a lesson of learning how the will in me causes movements of my body, kinetic in its essence, could be applied even in a kindergarten. It may be fun and attractive to kids, as it concerns their own body and mind. Seeing the same will operating in other living phenomena can be postponed perhaps until the primary school, although education in nature is more and more popular and the there is an increasing number of kindergartens in which children spend most of the day on fresh air in countries like Finland and Switzerland. This unconventional education covers all three dramaturgies of presence, whereas traditional education – focused on counting and remembering – sucks students' attention effectively into the hypermorphic dramaturgy.

Schopenhauer advises observing the inner and the outer world as a fundamental condition for freeing us from the cosmic force of desire. According to him, someone who imagines possessing free will in the world of phenomena is under the spell of illusion. First, we should see how the will to live acts around us and within us, then catch its actions intellectually, and finally use the knowledge to learn surfing on the waves of experience.

The order of the activities is not accidental. Without it, thinks Schopenhauer, we will be just speculating, as most Western philosophers did according to him. Metaphysics derived from sensations, which – following Eastern traditions – Schopenhauer proposes, should have in the center an inquiry into one phenomenon particularly: desire. It should investigate how desire manifests in the sensual sphere. We should observe if what we do derives from the will or outside of it and do it without judgment. We need to learn to distinguish between desire and pleasure. Desire does not happen when we do something pleasurable. It conquers us when we want the

pleasurable experience to last or occur in the future. The more complex and detailed our experience – seems to write Schopenhauer – the less in it the wanting ego. To use the language developed in this book: wanting ego finds the best environment in the hypermorphic dramaturgy – thoughts, mental pictures – which is a series of simplifications of the richness of life and which happens on the periphery of the process of living.

Periphery of the Thinking Self

As an effect of the meeting of cosmoses such as the cosmos of consciousness, organic nature, and dead matter, life unfolds to us as a single complex phenomenon in a series of dramaturgies. What is the logic according to which the dramaturges follow each other, absorbing within and spitting off my attention? What habits determine the way they put themselves in sequences? Self-observation shows that life unfolds to us according to the dramaturges of presence, which are fueled by emotions and sensations of pain and pleasure. *Attention paths are dictated by craving*. Various schools of philosophy, including the Epicurean in the West, and Buddhist in the East, had realized it and made work with craving a central theme in the process of flourishing. It is craving that makes our world a half-frozen reality and intercepts attention. This process precedes our conscious experience. What we call "now" is, in fact, "after." The Buddha, Epicurus, and for example, Bergson, would agree that we live in the universe, which is a kind of cemetery, a half-frozen reality being aftermath of the fluent process of life. *Self is entirely built of what is not present, even though it can be a reaction to what is now*. Bergson expressed it beautifully:

> As our attention has distinguished and separated them [psychic incidents] artificially, it is obliged next to reunite them by an artificial bond. It imagines, therefore, a formless ego, indifferent and unchangeable, on which it threads the psychic states which it has set up as independent entities.
>
> (Bergson, 1998, loc. 159)

Thinking and the thinking self itself are the peripheral syntheses of the process of life, a secondhand reality, a dead reminder of what has already passed. Only in this sense does stability exist for us: as past. Presence is the movement of rhythms that cannot be frozen. This is why dramaturgies are dynamic, putting aside the dramaturgy of consciousness of catatonic schizophrenics, which we can imagine as motionless.

There are three dramaturges of presence within the sphere of our experience of physicality that interfere with nature's rhythms, making our world frozen to some degree (the sub-morphic dramaturgy less than the morphic one). Philosophical effort suggested by various ancient schools aims at seeing through the dramaturgies. At the center of their pedagogical endeavor is *attention, a pulsating operating universal force, which loves to free from the*

situation of interception in a perspectival view. This view survives the changing of dramaturgies, which gives the impression of what Bergson called the formless ego. But Buddhist insight meditation teaches us the more subtle dramaturgy, the less robust self, and the more intense contact with what I call Open-source Intelligence of the rhythms of nature. In deeper meditative states, the very observer starts to disappear and appear again, as it teaches deep meditate experience. The self itself becomes rhythmical.

> Wherever you look, there is just a flash of quick dissolution. You will have a feeling as if someone is pulling the carpet out from under you. The disappearance is not an abstraction. It comprises your entire life at that time.
>
> (U Pandita, 1992, p. 246)

When the rhythmical synchronization of attention and reality is completed, all feeling and consciousness disappear. In Theravāda Buddhism, this experience is *nibbāna*. It is the goal of the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*-based pedagogy, usually achieved after long periods of intensive meditation.

In everyday life, however, no special training of attention is needed to detect two radically different forces that act on the body: One of them consists of the impulses from the storylines typical for hypermorphic dramaturgy, and the other is the rhythmical action of nature, best noticed at the sub-morphic level. Giving attention to one of the forces results in producing different sets of emotions. The rhythmical connection to the natural environment produces tranquility, so highly rated by both Stoics and Buddhists. It also weakens and, in the Buddhist case, destroys the sense of separateness. Mere being in nature produces the same effect to some degree. As the large body of research demonstrates, the sense of fascination awakened in nature makes subject-object split smaller.

Open-source Intelligence

I have described various aspects of Open-source Intelligence (OSI) in this book already. To sum it up: *OSI refers to the ability to attune to the force of attention tending to free itself from a situation of entrapment within a perspectival view. The force operates universally, always towards the escape from the perspectival view, and expresses itself within human experience differently on different entrapment levels or dramaturgies of presence: such as hypermorphic (thought and mental images), morphic (objects in space), and sub-morphic (dynamic processes). One can oppose the force (decreasing the open-source intelligence) or attune to it (increasing the open-source intelligence) by deciding the range and the way of paying attention to reality, thus influencing its situation regarding entrapment. Attuning to the force of attention and increasing the OSI happens spontaneously in the natural, especially wild environment*.

I propose several sub-hypotheses of the OSI hypothesis for further research:

1 Attention freed from the situation of interception produces new kinds of identity and enables communicating with nature by the medium of emotions. The more free attention is, the weaker craving.
2 Walk in the forest restores attention by saving the energetic costs of psycho-visual perceptual operations and distributing it from the dominant sense of seeing to various senses.
3 Making attention lighter by meditation allows us to become conscious of the actions of forces that before were too subtle to be consciously perceived, such as vibrating movements in the body or the force of gravity. Paying attention to these impersonal forces results in increasing eudaimonic pleasure and intensifies the process of attention escaping from the situation of entrapment.
4 Attention merges what we usually perceive as separated orders: alive and non-living, mechanical and organic, conscious and unconscious.
5 Attention, when trained, can be used for disintegrating compactness of experienced reality reintegrating this reality as a more impersonal rhythmical, pulsating movement. The process happens spontaneously in nature. Such reconstruction enhances well-being and health.
6 Increasing the consciousness of co-dependence with the process of life by freeing attention from the situation of entrapment in hypermorphic and later morphic dramaturgies is a way to develop a more ethical attitude and behavior.

To describe the dynamics of attention operating within various dramaturgies, we can consider the experience of pain. A physical factor may cause pain, but psychic pain or suffering is born and perpetuated within hypermorphic dramaturgy. The pain usually assumes the compact form – we think that there is solid pain within our bodies – embedding itself in morphic dramaturgy but being under the influence of hypermorphic dramaturgy. In meditation, the pain can get disintegrated into micro-events. It happens when sub-morphic dramaturgy starts seducing our attention. In both ancient and contemporary meditation literature, especially a Buddhist one, the subject of pain plays an important role. Meditation on the elements can break the sensation of solid pain into pulsating micro-sensations, making it less personal. The pain can be observed more impartially as a natural phenomenon. Such an observation shows that resistance to pain reinforces it in the form of suffering. As an effect of this resistance, neurotic scenarios appear in our heads and assume forms of thoughts such as: "this pain will never end," "I will die because of the pain," etc. These thoughts strengthen the solidity of ego, which resists Open-source Intelligence.

Phenomenologists assume that reflective consciousness emerges from pre-reflective consciousness (Gallagher and Zahavi, 2021, p. 68) but do

not know how and why. The OSI hypothesis provides a mechanism for such an emergence. The pre-reflective consciousness is a foggy periphery for the attention entrapped in the perspectival view. The periphery can become clearer if attention frees itself from the entrapment within a dramaturgy that imprisons it, e.g., by the process of meditation. By doing so, attention reveals its embodiment-like nature. When attention is further released to the degree that it encompasses interconnectedness with the environment, we get fuller access to the OSI, and the environment starts regulating our bodies more freely, improving our health. To express it colloquially, we do not think and act from ego but the body-environment system. It is not that OSI did not operate before it got into our field of attention. It always operates when life is taking place. However, having attention entrapped in a narrow perspectival view, we are not aware of its acting.

Intentionality, in the light of phenomenology, means that that consciousness has its object. This is how it is defined in most of the books. However, it is interesting to investigate the other side of the equation: the force that directs attention on an object. What aims attention at its target is what can be named its "onto-ethical weight" that results from persons ethical development and metaphysical sensitivity. *Attention is an onto-ethical force*.

As Gallagher and Zahavi (2021, p. 103) write, after Husserl: "we intent object by *meaning* something about it." But this meaning is not born from the soul. The authors, referring to various phenomenological literature, write: "The moment both mind and meaning are taken to be environmentally embedded, there is nothing mysterious in ascribing an intrinsic referentiality or world directedness to the mind" (ibid., p. 110).

This phenomenological view states that our thinking reacts to the whole environment, and constructing meaning does not occur in the head. We are in the world and do not have to produce a relationship with it. The relation mind-world is not externally casual, but it is an internal relation: thus, philosophy of mind is simultaneously philosophy of nature. We perceive the world directly and not by the medium of representation. There is no division into thinking and extended substances. Descartes was wrong. The hypothesis of OSI adds to this phenomenological picture an observation that this environment-dependent meaning is constituted within a dramaturgy. Dramaturgy is the frame that provides meaning. There is no subject traveling from situation to situation. If something travels, it is a habit.

Moods for phenomenologists also do not happen within the human monad and are not a question of interior life. They can be perceived as acting forces:

> They do not enclose us within ourselves but are lived through as pervasive atmospheres that deeply influence the way the world is disclosed to us. Moods such as curiosity, nervousness, or happiness disclose our embeddedness in the world and articulate or modify our existential

> possibilities. They are taken up into intentional structure of our experiences.
>
> (Gallagher and Zahavi, 2021, pp. 103–104)

Pain, about which I wrote that it assumes a compact form at a certain point, appears in our experience first as a mood, a non-conscious irritation, as in the example provided by Sartre and authors of the book quoted above, of trying to finish reading a book late at night when our eyes hurt. We may get irritated even if we do not identify hurt eyes as a source of pain. Irritation crawls into our experience as if from nowhere.

This situation happens when we stay within the hypermorphic dramaturgy of images awoken by our reading and are influenced by stimuli from outside of this dramaturgy manifesting in the form of mood. Should the pain get stronger, we would abandon reading and realize its location – our eyes. Our attention would switch to morphic dramaturgy without us directing it there consciously. Pain will manifest in our consciousness as a solid, compact object. Paying meditative, equanimous attention to the eye area, in turn, may make attention to wake up sub-morphic dramaturgy in which this solid pain breaks perhaps into a vibrating zone with no clear borders and becomes less personal.

It is craving that dictates moves of our attention between dramaturgies. To be more precise, it dictates the dynamics of the complex phenomenon consisting of interplaying attention and dramaturgies. Perhaps, positive effects of mindfulness, such as stress reduction, do not come from giving impartial attention to what is happening right now, but from taking away overweighted attention from pressing its object. When not in the deepest phases of sleep, one has to pay attention to something. Perhaps we do not know how to cope with the affluence of attention in non-meditative, task-filled moments. So we over-focus, make attention heavy, and lose access to the dramaturgies of subtle realities.

Attention refined in the meditation process becomes so light that it starts pulsating and losing its continuity. It gets interrupted by blackouts, appearing and disappearing. When the Buddha talks about what we could call the "stream of consciousness," he predicts its interruption in late phases of meditation, unlike William James, who created the term, and for whom the stream of consciousness was smooth and uninterrupted.

By attuning to the process of life, we are expanding our sense of identity in a simple act of being co-present with the process of life. But we never find a definite identity. This expansion is a never-ending adjusting of self-models, second by second. This is why the ancient training in schools such as Stoic or Epicurean often required an enormous amount of mindfulness, alertness, and awareness. The activity of constant model adjusting implies that by immersing in nature, we do not mix our self with the environment. Rather than that, we create a series of new selves, each new one different than the one we identified with a micro-moment before. *Nature and humans,*

pulsating rhythmically, share the same world, the same attention, and the same meaning. We do not need to magically connect with nature to make our thoughts express the wisdom of the environment.

Themes for Contemplation

1 1. Observe how two forces belonging to two different Cartesian worlds – attention and gravitation – interfere actively. In what sense first one is alive and the second non-alive? If my experience is myself, am I half-alive? Can you feel various forces that you did not notice outside contemplation, such as heaviness due to gravitation, the rhythm of breathing, effects of your intentions within the organism, and the animating force of the body or its parts? Can you observe sub-gravitational forces, such as vibrations, which seem to be indifferent to the planet's gravity?
2 What if planet Earth is alive and gives us its most tender attention, and we interfere with the process by our self-driven counter-attention?

Note

1 This is yet another example, coming from empirical research, of the correlation between anxiety and decreased intelligence, recognized by Buddhist philosophy.

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Conclusion

The Open-source Intelligence hypothesis potentially has an enormous range and interesting consequences. It suggests the existence of a fundamental force, which – unlike the gravitational, electromagnetic, and subatomic forces – is both selfless (not bound to a single organism or system of organisms) and alive. This idea seems strange for us post-Cartesians, but was comprehensible for ancient philosophers. Empedocles, for example, in the fifth century BC, distinguished six universal forces operating in the universe: earth, water, air, fire, love, and strife, which for us belong to two different realms: physical and psychic (the last two of them). The forces act on both soul and what today we call matter in a cosmic whirl of evolution:

> The eternal power, he [Empedocles] says, pursues souls to the sea, the sea spits them up onto the threshold of the earth, the earth into the light of the bright sun, and the sun hurls them into the whirls of the ether: the one receives them from the other: all hate them.
>
> (Barnes, 2001, p. 115)

The elemental forces we perceive today as physical Empedocles calls "mortal gods," the "emotional" ones – love and strife – immortal gods. He suggests a kind of meditation: observing the forces with gentle, careful, and pure attention. Such an application of attention will result in the strengthening of human character as opposed to the application of attention filled with daily worries, a custom typical for non-philosophers. Meditation will allow the adept to master the knowledge and arrive at the truth. It should be performed with attention centered on the breast. Empedocles thinks that the organ in the body responsible for understanding is not the brain but blood. Our thoughts depend on the state of the blood. The result of this ancient mindfulness of elements is, for him, immortality, as the elements themselves have no age and are eternal. If Empedocles was right, the miserable existential conditions of the contemporary person – auto-aggression, depression, anhedonia – are caused by a lack of the ability to get in touch with universal, directly felt forces.

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Within our field of experience, we can easily find out that the two sensations, which seem to belong to different realms – gravity and tranquility – interact. Direct your gentle attention to the sensation of gravity operating in your body, and within minutes you will become tranquil. In what sense is tranquility a feature of the organic body and gravity of the dead matter? They have similar qualities. Gravity is equanimous; tranquility, when developed meditatively to a certain intensity, provides us with a sense of clarity and equanimity. We can go to the forest, approach a tree, and feel a subtle field of invisible energy while bringing our hands closer to its bark. How does it feel? Is it more like gravitation or more like emotion? Naturalistic science aiming at data that can be communicated in some kind of language does not concern itself with such experiences and does not ask such questions. But no one, including scientists, can claim that something does not exist because science does not recognize it.

What if the tree has emotions that are atmospheric, and just as there is peripheral seeing, there is also peripheral feeling outside of the one-pointed application of attention, which allows us to connect to these emotions? Clear experiencing such a feeling requires soft attention, which results from tranquility. Tranquility, in turn, results from ethical living. The peripheral feeling is by nature more distanced from "I feel" that focused feeling, being experienced more like "it feels." Does the assumption of selfless and organic force help us better explain the scientific data on the human-nature relationship and better understand our direct experience of nature?

To summarize the Open-source Intelligence Hypothesis in its aspect of claiming the existence of attention as a universal force: I propose that apart from gravitational and electromagnetic weak and strong forces, there exist fundamental force in nature, which operates both for what we call the alive and the non-living.

I can assume the existence of such a force based on its effects on direct sensing. I can experience directly that within my field of experience act two forces or two pressures. One is self-driven and depends on my will, and the second is non-self-driven and experienced as if acting from outside of myself. I can attune the first to the second by an act of will, directing gently my attention to, for example, the feeling of gravitation acting on my body. When I do it, I can observe changes resulting from the interaction of the two forces. One obvious change happens to my emotions as they become more tranquil.

There is no reason why fundamental cosmic force cannot express itself as a function of the human organism, as many ancient philosophies stated. Seduced by positivist thinking, we closed ourselves to search for cosmic force in our own organisms. Interiorizing Cartesian metaphysics, we became blind to detecting force which is both alive and non-alive. To include both, a new metaphysics is needed. I leave to the reader's

imagination how such new metaphysics could influence our actions. How would it change our map of responsibility, our impulses, and attempts to correct reality, as well as our map of what depends and what does not depend on us?

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