

Eucalyptus rubida

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We cannot say the Universe

This line from the opening page of Brian Swimme's book *The Universe is a Green Dragon* has been with me ever since I put myself to re-reading the book several months ago. First impulse is to think 'what on earth is he trying to say.' In the book he put these words into the mouth of Thomas, speaking to the youth. This Thomas was a thinly veiled reference to Thomas Berry.

The paragraph read:

The universe is a singularity. To speak you need to compare things. Thus we say that the house is white, not brown. Or that the man is hostile, not kind, or that it happened in the 19th century, not before. But there is only one universe. We can't compare the universe with anything. We cannot say the universe.

Maybe you are none the wiser after reading the whole paragraph. As for me, I really switch on when someone uses language that is unitary or non-dual. I see it as a challenge to dissolve the barrier that isolates us from the deeper unitary relationship we actually have with the universe. The title of last month's editorial was:

I am the Universe, The Universe is my Body.

We can experience this unity with everything, for example, when we see something harrowing on the TV news. We can sometimes be brought to tears by seeing someone else's plight. Alternatively we can experience delight when we see someone's good fortune or heroism. It is good to recognise this hidden message from our own body (the universe) and bring it to consciousness.

Look at a flock of birds or a shoal of fish changing direction instantly. This might suggest a sense out of the ordinary, possibly a telepathic ability, who knows? We can't get inside the mind of other species, we can only conjecture. But this might be an example of what we might call 'one mind.'

Some indigenous people recognise a 'power animal' or a totem with whom they have an almost magical connection. Civilization seems to have dulled or completely removed this experience from us - or has it? There are numerous accounts of past lives being made present in some individuals. Is there a 'one mind' to which we are all bound. Is

this God? If so, then we might just have to re-envision what the term means. Maybe we just cannot **say** God, because our very language separates us from what we are trying to express. The deepest things are felt or experienced, not expressed. This is said to be the function of the right-brain. Logic and language belongs to the left.

Hindu teachings about the Brahma, Vishnu & Shiva trinity contain ideas translated as All Soul and World Soul, this usually associated with Brahma, who can only be known by negations i.e. indefinable. This seems to



parallel the negative theology of Meister Eckhart, who declared "I pray God to rid me of God."

This is not an essay on atheism or pantheism. It is an essay touching on the limitations of language when it comes to the way we express our deepest attachment to our 'real' connections, and the inherent problem with the 'subject' and 'object' nature of our language. Thomas Berry reminds us: "The universe is a communion of subjects, not a collection of objects".

For example, we have already touched on the way we use the words 'universe' and 'God'. This can be true also for 'earth'. We cannot **say** earth, because earth is an element in our own identity. Look at the juxtaposition of these two sentences:

1. As good Christians we should listen to God.
2. As good ecologists we should listen to Earth.

Both of these are essentially spiritual statements. A person who expresses themselves in eco-spiritual terms are reading from the same book as the person expressing themselves in godly terms, but perhaps on different pages of that book. Maybe we all should read the whole book, as culture struggles to capture the awe and reverence it has for both these realms. Perhaps both these people are attempting to say the same thing in the only way they know.

It is only in the past few decades that our culture has begun to recognise in their own right, the inherent dignity of all life-forms, as opposed to their benefit to the human. Across the world, laws and statutes have been altered to give some legal rights to natural phenomena. New Zealand has given an indigenous tribe the right to represent the interests of the Whanganui river. In Bolivia there is the **Cochabamba Declaration**. There is a strong movement known as the Global Alliance for **The Rights of Nature**. The **Government of Ecuador** is the first country to embody right for nature in its constitution. The following **other countries** have forms of legislation that involve rights for nature: Colombia, Belize, Guatemala, South Africa, Kenya, Ethiopia, Benin, India, Indonesia, Scotland, United States (some Counties.)

In the case of New Zealand there is the telling inference in the legislation: "Ko au te awa, Ko te awa ko au" - "I am the river and the river is me". This is not really different from "I am the Universe, The Universe is my Body." This is poetic and mystical language and expresses an interior truth that was lost when religion and science went their own way after the Cartesian divide in the 17th Century. Einstein very aptly created the aphorism "Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind." Time now to live out its truth. Myths need to be able to grow, just as science needs to embrace the interiority of the Universe in all its expressions, and the values its presence offers us.

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Photo: Fringe Lily flowering 22/11/14