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*edited by Sebastian Job, Linda Connor***

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# Without Ends Facing The End: Of Atztecs Revivalists and Anthropologists

*Sebastian Job*  
*University of Sydney*

*Shall we wait to see whether this culture will recover of itself,  
in the chance play of forces, which create and destroy values? Husserl, 1923*

## **Abstract**

This paper opens a discussion of anthropology's relationship to mythic practices endeavouring to bring contemporary urbanites into a more harmonious relationship with the natural world. I give a summary account of one such mythic practice, the dance of the contemporary *danzantes* (popularly known as *Los Concheros*) of Mexico City. My argument will be that the *danzantes* (no doubt like many others), can help us to better grasp that the present ecological crisis is just as much an existential and metaphysical crisis, and that if an epochal shift in its relation to nature is on the cards for modern or postmodern society, an epochal shift in our thinking about reality is on the cards for the social sciences. In anthropology, however, this metaphysical shift is yet to come properly into view. Its necessity may be obscurely felt, but words have not been found. This paper is an attempt to evoke that necessity and to point in a likely direction. Beginning with a sketch of much of contemporary anthropology's bamboozlement in the face of a sharpened existential predicament, it does no more than attempt to suggest that there could be an end to at least the present version of that bamboozlement.

**Keywords:** Mexico, *danzantes*, anthropology, myth, alienation, environment, reality, universal, metaphysics, apocalypse

**I**

How will anthropology, as a mode of thought and a practice of teaching, be affected by the ongoing degradation of the biosphere? Or to put the matter the other way around: how, as anthropologists, to develop an authentic response to the escalating destruction of animals and plants, of water, soil and air? What relationship exists between our own research and teaching and a modern human destructiveness of such proportions and rapidity that it seems to be breaking free of the regenerative circuits which hitherto brought new life from death?

Anxieties about the global economic, military, demographic, ecological, and “food security” situation testify to the accuracy of at least this in “globalisation” theory: for many populations “the global” is consolidating as a distinct psychological presence, and often a threatening presence. The global appears as a universal condition, that is, as a complex process gathering together or universalising all human fates. Actions as humdrum as turning on a tap or catching a fish are increasingly revealed within this universal horizon, and the horizon is closing in. One indication here is that scenarios of total ruin are now, or again, a cultural staple in the West. Haunted by socio-political impotence we are becoming transfixed by presentiments of a terrible end. But in the current rash of apocalyptic imaginings in films, computer games, novels and everyday conversation, there is no doubt disguised the longing for a *good end*. That is, a longing for a good collective end or purpose which would be the resolution to this looming bad end to the human story.

Yet this longing for a good universal, for a good collective end or direction for current human existence, does it not answer to an objective necessity? Notwithstanding our diversity, if we don’t diagnose the overarching forms of insanity and stumble through to saner ways of organizing ourselves, will we not do away with ourselves? It is to these questions, and to the challenges they generate for anthropology, that this essay is turned.

Sanity or death-bound normality: Such, apparently, are the choices. Yet however compelling, this doesn’t sound like an anthropological judgement; and when I consider how anthropologists might approach these issues, I notice how quickly it becomes difficult to get anywhere. Thought splits this way and that and every means of advance seems blocked. Ethnographic explorations of “sanity” make the necessary trip into culturally divergent conceptions of mental health, while generally failing to return with critical tools for global self-diagnosis (Marsella and White 1982). The very idea of an “authentic” relation to anything at all seems naïve to many anthropologists. It relies, it will be said, on an impossible ideal of self-mastery, or on some dubious ascription of a pre-existing collective or individual essence. “Humanity” is employed as a rhetorical word but rarely as an analytical concept. As for a “good” social goal or direction for humanity, well it might be desirable, but what business would an anthropologist have with defining it?

It should be emphasised that in highlighting these rifts I am speaking to what I think is the overall situation in today’s anthropology and, to my knowledge, the other social sciences. A judicious appraisal of the far-sighted contributions of pioneering thinkers – always more plentiful than dark moods allow – belongs elsewhere. How then to get a handle on these conceptual rifts and the way they undermine even a preliminary clarification of anthropology’s relation to our times?

If anthropological thought tends to shatter at the posing of the problematic of sane, or good, or authentic human ends, this is not only due to the inherent complexity of the problem. My feeling is that one way or another the conceptual fragmentation we rehearse in so many discussions and forums feeds off and in turn reinforces a more basic split. This is a split within ourselves, between our situation as

humans, that is, our existential situation now standing out to us within its tenuous global horizon, and our socially reinforced understandings of our cognitive duties as anthropologists. It is a split, if you like, between current life experience and inherited modes of cognition. And it is this split between life experience and cognition which generates the splits within cognition. In my view, if we cannot see our way towards healing this existential-cognitive split within ourselves, anthropology will fail to contribute to the self-clarification of our common human situation. Worse, anthropology will maintain itself in an unconsciously perverse relation to the human end.

Let me illustrate by way of anecdote: The present Symposium was preceded by a reading group that met regularly and sometimes, I think it fair to say, provided evidence of this perversity. In the meetings of the reading group the idea was expressed that our task as anthropologists, in so far as we concern ourselves with these gloomy matters at all, is not to study the threat to humanity, but rather to study *how other humans respond* to the threats that they perceive to humanity. By its mode of delivery it was clear that this second-order or professionally distanced approach took itself to be comfortably orthodox. Like any orthodoxy it felt affronted at being questioned. But questions were bound to arise, if only in the readings themselves. For example, in one text we considered, Masco's ethnography of the US nuclear weapons industry, Walter Benjamin was quoted appraising the Italian Futurists and their aestheticising celebration of war. Writing in the mid 1930s, Benjamin remarked on the "self-alienation" of European society, which "has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order" (in Masco 2006: 98). Now adhering to the bitter end to a program of studying not the planetary crisis itself but rather only and merely how other humans respond to their perception of the planetary crisis – would this not be a parallel instance of the same "self-alienation"? Would it not be to assume the posture of thinkers whose professional form of self-consciousness is one of fantasising ourselves as squatting outside the world, watching as, perhaps, it burns? Let us put this in terms of the problematic of "interpretation". "The essential vocation of interpretive anthropology", Clifford Geertz argued, "is not to answer our deepest questions, but to make available to us answers that others, guarding other sheep in other valleys, have given, and thus to include them in the consultable record of what man has said" (Geertz 1973: 30). But why should the "consultable record of what man has said" not be brought to bear on "our deepest questions"?! In that negation we should discern, I think, philosophical helplessness dressed as sober self-limitation. And we will increasingly discern it as such the more our ears are unable to block out a world forcing its "deepest questions" upon us.

The attitude that anthropology is only about interpreting the interpretations of others must issue in a radical split within the personality of the anthropologist whenever they deal with well-founded interpretations concerning a menacing reality that envelops the anthropologist as well. As a "private citizen", as one colleague argued, I may be worried about the ecological crisis and may even become politically active, yet as a "professional anthropologist" I have no truck with "what really matters" or "how things really are". I carry on teaching and researching as if I am equally agnostic about all totalising interpretations. To add something to human understanding of what is really going on at this universal level would be outside my competence. And to speak of the meaning or human import of global changes would be

too metaphysical a stance anyway.

Yet if it were ever possible in more restricted contexts, confining ourselves to interpretations of other people's interpretations of their experience also carries an *intellectual* cost where the relevant context becomes, in some way, "planetary". This for two reasons at least. On the one hand, the multifarious forms of cultural, political, psychological and ideological reaction to the world situation can only be understood by trying to understand the *real nature* of the crisis they are reacting to. To be sure, we frequently need to suspend judgement as to the veracity of people's ideas in order to give ourselves over to understanding those ideas themselves. This is essential. But the etic truth-status of claims that "the forests are disappearing" or "they pay us nothing" or "most of our young people suffer depression" cannot be permanently suspended. Our understanding of such claims hangs partly on our sense of their place in the mental life of the person concerned. Were they arrived at through reading signs and portents, speaking to invisible spirits, leaning on locally authoritative sources, partaking in events, carrying out tests, being on the receiving end of violence, going hungry, engaging in rituals, or reading blogs? Efforts to understand "what is really going on" are therefore ineliminable, that is, if the co-efficient of fantasy, impish desire, bad faith and wilful ignorance in the person's "interpretation" is to be estimated. And it *will* be estimated, say so or not.

Put otherwise, the familiar "realist" riposte to "symbolic" or "postmodern" anthropology is hardening. It is not just that the interpretation of others' interpretations of the world always takes place against the horizon of a taken for granted picture of the real world; it is that the background picture of the real world which previously served as the implicit horizon for interpreting interpretations can, in unprecedented ways, no longer be taken for granted. The animals are dying out, friends, and that will not let itself be ignored. Or: the more it is ignored, the higher the co-efficient of fantasy, impish desire, bad faith, and wilful ignorance in our anthropology.

On the other hand, epistemic "realism" (its sights set on what it conceives as objective truth) also comes up short. All the forms of cultural interpretation and reaction to the planetary crisis are themselves intrinsic elements of that crisis. The "real nature" of our global situation cannot be properly known as a purely techno-scientific object. It is not, for example, simply an object of ecological science. Nor is it any other kind of external object available to a purely "objective" or "etic" analysis. It is equally a mounting crisis of human being, of human relations, institutions, interests and self-understandings. Cultural dynamics are in most cases antecedent causes of the "natural" threats cultures react to. The same goes for academic practice and the institutions that support it. It seems plausible, for instance, that the culturally authoritative ideals of value neutrality and descriptive objectivity in the social sciences belong not only to the cure but to the disease, for if the price paid for pursuing this kind of knowledge is that the question of *true human ends* must always fall outside of the truths that the human sciences can consider, then the price is too high.

In short, the global crisis is real enough, and the social sciences will add to its understanding, or it will not be understood, let alone resolved, at all. But as the social sciences tackle this new environment

they will in turn be changed. In trying to understand the empirical dimensions of the crisis (what is really going on inclusive of how various interpretations are caught up in, or point beyond, what is going on), social scientists will confront, again and again, the properly “metaphysical” question of human being as it reveals itself in the light of the human good.

What does this mean? It means that there is nothing for it but for social scientists to chance their hands at suggesting what among the many different human cultural reactions appears merely symptomatic of a death-bound condition, and what in those reactions might be creative, healthy and sane. It may be objected that this is a job for moral philosophers or political activists, not for anthropologists. The point is that *as humans* each of us *will* make such judgements. To not be able to make them also *as anthropologists* is to wind back in the self-blinded and alienated condition (the cognitive-existential split of “professional academic” versus “private citizen”) we have just been examining.

The preliminary intellectual task, then, would seem to be this: to think our way beyond this split condition in a form that would also represent an *enrichment* of anthropology as an empirical science, rather than an abandonment of that empirical project for an ungrounded or merely wishful metaphysics, or just for worried moral wing-flapping.

## //

One of the major resources for engaging this difficult issue, I want to argue, is the universe of myth. In other words, I propose to take here the risk that many anthropologists have taken, despite criticism from within and without: that of appearing to give too much credence to the interpretations of their usually non-scientific, non-western informants. A few words, then, about the “Mexica” dancers in contemporary Mexico. Not because the *danzantes* could offer anybody an alternative “science of the concrete” (despite some of their self-understandings, I don’t think their ideas fall within even Levi-Strauss’ generous idea of “science”), but rather because their mythic practice is a self-conscious attempt to embody an experience of non-alienated reality.

The contemporary Mexica *danzantes* are an urban mestizo movement which I began to study for the first time from January to March 2009. The movement, which in its current form dates back some thirty years, is organised into *calpullis* or dance groups. I studied the main parent *calpulli* in Mexico City, called *Zemanauak*. Some of the pertinent features of the dancers’ experience as they generally interpret it can be summarised in the following way:

- 1) What surrounds them, especially in the city, is materialism, political corruption, moral decay and the heteronomy of the Mexicans, who are externally dominated by the US, and who are neither authentically themselves nor successfully anybody else. This condition they will sometimes refer to dismissively or sadly as *una porqueria*, a pigsty, or un *desmadre*, a disorderly disgrace.
- 2) The dance is a sacred ritual. Its presupposition and primary concern is evocation of the sacred

or non-mundane experience that *todo es todo* (all is all). This experience of transcendent and immanent order is achieved by numerous means, principal among which is the carrying through of movements which replicate or instantiate the duality and quaternity of the world. Here, for instance, we find *ollin*, the interwoven cross, or its dynamically stabilised variant, the quincunx or primordial centred quaternity sometimes known as the Cross of Quetzalcoatl (Sejourne 1978: 95-97). Each grouping of steps of the dance, each evocation of the four cardinal directions, each star jump, each rotation about an axis, each instance of bodies interweaving from opposite directions, is a human microcosmic instance of this macrocosmic inter-relation of *ollin*, of the cross or diamond, this five that is four-in-one, or, more abstractly, this one that is two – and then four and then many – which is venerated as *Ometeotl*, Divine-Energetic Duality.

3) As much a temporal as a spatial totality, *ollin* is the Fifth Sun or Age of the Aztecs. At the same time its veneration now is preparation for the coming of the Sixth Sun, the Age which, coterminous with the Mayan 2012, is being ushered in as we speak (Calpulli Nexticpac de Anahuac 2001).

4) The cosmos is an energetic totality. It does not know stillness. *Ollin* means movement or earthquake and is related to *yollotl* (heart). The sound of the drums of the dance is the heartbeat of *Tonatzin*, Mother Earth. To dance is to engage in an energetic exchange with the Earth-Cosmos, whose rhythm is felt as the beating of one's own heart.

5) The dance is a form of "retro-alimentation", where the dancers give back to the Earth and the Sun, and in which they venerate the grandparents, the ancestors, as the life-givers. *Ometeotl* is also *El Dador de la Vida*, the Giver of Life, and the dance is a "sacrifice" of time, energy and "normal life" which gives back to those – the ancestors, the plants, the animals, the water, the Earth, the Sun, the Cosmos – who gave us life.

6) In return the dancers receive back more energy than they expended. After an arduous four hours dancing they are usually elated, and proud that they are elated. The cosmos shines on them, sends them signs in their lives and satisfies their needs. They know their place. They are connected to, sometimes embodiments of, the ancestors. They feel themselves well-rooted in tradition. They learn, they say, who they truly are. They are no longer lost. They can offer spiritual guidance to Mexico. They are part of that worldwide spiritual and anti-imperialist renewal that is returning to the non-western traditions; that renewal which the suffering Earth is waiting for.

7) The dancers are *guerreros* and *guerreras* (warriors). This requires much discipline and is about self-transcendence. It is not about external violence, but on the contrary about overcoming one's egoism and negative emotions, and strengthening one's will so as to be like *Huitzilopochtli* the warrior god of the sun, or like the women who heroically die in childbirth. To be a genuine *guerrero* or *guerrera* is to overcome one's pettiness so as to offer oneself wholeheartedly to the dance, and therewith to the cosmos.

### III

One explanatory approach to the *danzantes* and their Aztec revivalism would be to place them in terms of other neo-traditionalist nativist movements. Let us note in passing the historical dubiousness of The idea of a Sixth Sun; the self-deception involved in the near-universal opinion among the *danzantes* that the Aztecs did not sacrifice humans; the oddity of contemporary, primarily non-Indigenous city dwellers finding

existential security in an appeal to the chronically insecure Aztec cosmos. For these and other reasons we would be fully justified in speaking, once again, of the “invention of tradition”.<sup>1</sup> But I want rather to pursue a different type of question; namely whether, in and through the mythic cast of their thought, the *danzantes* have something to teach anthropologists about how they should think about the state of the world.

This is a question which arose forcefully for me during repeated discussions with a painter by the name of Miguel Suazo. A handsome 62 year old man who came from extremely humble origins in the countryside, Miguel had the exceptional position of pipe player with the dancers. Proud of having chosen his own path in life, he became a successful artist in the Mexican school of abstract expressionism. In his youth, he told me, he won a major national art prize, but was denied the prize because he refused to be a toy boy for any of the influential female gallery owners. He voluntarily exiled himself from the art world and its fakery, went through a major existential shakeup, and wound up in a tiny one-room apartment with barely space for a single mattress. This is where he was living when I met him. He painted on the roof and kept his considerable collection of unsold paintings in an adjacent storage room.

Miguel is convinced that only art can save the world. In making authentic art, whether that be music, dancing or painting, we not only interpret but feel the essence of our relation to things, an essence which is both of that very moment, and cosmic-eternal. This essence is a dynamic current running between ourselves and the object we interpret. Seeing in the Aztecs a kind of agrarian socialism, he looked forward to the overthrow of capitalism on the basis of the felt sense of the power of original culture, of essential roots, of veneration of the ancestors, of the presence of the cosmos. As he said to me raising his hands and visibly inspired after a long dance in the majestic surrounds of ancient Teotihuacan, “Feel the space, how the sky rises like the wind over us, like a cupola.” That day he was satisfied the dance had successfully embodied the essential reality, the living cosmic energy, contact with which is the only basis for a life not deluded or wasted.

However the dance was not always so rewarding. On the day of the March equinox in 2009 we walked to what we knew to be a deliberately unauthorized ritual performance of the dance in the main Zocalo of Mexico City. Miguel’s mood soured when he discovered he’d mixed up the times of the dance, so that we arrived to find no one else there. I could see that Miguel, who was dressed in his finery and who had brought his instruments and wooden chair, felt humiliated. Unwilling to accept the mistake he’d made about the hour of the dance, he instead went into a particularly sharp diatribe about the other dancers, about how they understood nothing, how they had no dedication, were not true *guerreros*, and were only concerned with their own stomachs. Going further than usual, he equated them with the *Chimaleros*, those who earn money performing the dance for tourists. He had warned the *danzantes*, he said, to ban the taking of photos, but they hadn’t listened. They had let vanity poison the dance.

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<sup>1</sup> The most recent and thorough treatment of a closely related Mexican dance group is the ethnography of *Los Concheros* by Susanna Rostas (Rostas 2009).

What he was most concerned about was that the dancers not be absorbed back into the capitalist *porqueria*, the pigsty of lostness, ignorance, submission and inauthenticity of the urban culture. But at this moment he seemed crestfallen, swamped. “Everything”, he announced, “is fucked”. “The economy is destroyed”. He pointed to a bicycle and said that it was “cold”. It was mass produced far away in China. The person who rides it has no living connection to it. He contrasted this to the “heat” in the wooden drum I carried for him, and which, together with flute and chair, he had hand-carved himself. Later, on the train, he challenged a boy who was peddling some kind of business books to reveal whether he could read. The boy looked embarrassed. Miguel shouted at him to go to school and learn to read proper books. In a cafe we talked about the need for revolution and the merits of Che Guevara, the Cuban model, and the Zapatistas. He sneered at my taking notes, and implied that none of this was genuinely important to me, that he and the dancers and Mexico’s troubles were just material for building my anthropological career. He insisted I put my notebook away and be “present”.

## IV

I found Miguel’s despairing sense of alienation compelling. I think this was because it brought to the foreground exactly the challenge I take anthropology to be facing due, among other things, to credible evidence of irreversible degradation of the biosphere. The scene for this challenge is here the universe of myth. Miguel and his fellow *danzantes* invoke *Huitzilopochtli*, *Quetzalcoatl*, *Tonatzin*, *Xipe Totec*, *Tezcatlipoca*, and numerous other personified powers or energies or gods as if they were attributes of the cosmos. Reality grasped as an energetic totality of this kind is reality which no longer stands apart or outside. It infinitely transcends them yet is intimately their own, is *felt* as their own. That, at least, is the aim.

Now the explanatory canons of anthropology generally refer mythic and ritualistic phenomena like this to intra-cultural, or intra-psychic, or archetypal, or symbolic, or socio-historical structures and contexts. In other words, the presumption of participants to be in relation to transcendent or otherwise sacred realities is suspended. These beliefs are germane to native experience, but they form no part of anthropological explanation. The mythic or religious presumptions of participants refer to non-empirical (inaudible, invisible) realms about which the anthropologist has no special knowledge, and about which it is best to be silent. This agnosticism seems the only neutral way to proceed.

Others, with a more scientific and atheistic cast of mind, may insist privately or publicly that the participants’ mythic self-understandings are outright delusory. This was the approach, for instance, of Marvin Harris, who in his reconstruction of the logic of Aztec human sacrifice preferred his etic explanation concerning protein deficits in the Mexican Valley to indigenous self-mystifications about aiding the Sun in its nightly battle with the gods of the underworld (Harris 1978).

Against Harris’s scientific cultural materialism, it can be observed that although we might well be able to distinguish between less and more plausible mythic claims, this cannot be simply done by reference to

an empirical and/or scientific standard, not if what is at issue is also the plausibility of claims about *proper human ends*. Meanwhile, the fact that science might have had little to say on the subject can no longer be taken as an indication of superiority.

A further observation is that we never exactly get outside of myth, least of all when we forget how much science owes to it. This, I think, is the position put forward by Jon Marshall in these proceedings (Marshall 2010). With equal justice this point about myth can be extended to speak of the ubiquitous presence of the imagination, of fantasies, or of archetypes, within forms of rationality which take themselves to be simply free of such dimensions. This applies to the ecological sciences as a human product as much as any other.

As far as it goes, this last approach seems the most promising. From a perspective that pays attention not only to myth as such but to the background infrastructure of the archetypal imagination, we might validly point out, for example, that Walter Benjamin is fishing in deep psychological waters when he speaks of the aestheticisation of our own collective destruction. Perverse responses to such a prospect are most likely more than just side-effects of “self-alienation”. If it is true that Gramscian “morbid symptoms” are now proliferating, it seems probable that contemporary self-alienation is bound up with a psycho-social death-drive masquerading as the resolution of alienation. That is to say, aestheticised or shoulder-shrugging or otherwise nihilistic stances towards collective extermination are most probably unconsciously seduced by a mythic return to self; a kind of omnipotent self-closure where alienation is subjectively overcome because we anticipate ourselves as alive not just beyond the moment of our own deaths (as with so many suicide notes), but beyond the unique moment of the death of the human race itself.

All the same, suppose we gathered enough materials to diagnose the contemporary fascination with the apocalypse as caught in the coils of this kind of narcissistic fantasy – would this diagnosis grasp our situation radically enough? Or would it repeat the standard secular or agnostic “bracketing” of the realm of ultimate or cosmic significance? Let us put that more pointedly: would this “archetypal” analysis ultimately be anything more than a second-order instance of what it is analysing; that is, would it be anything more than a sophisticated way for a human to milk some bitter satisfaction, as if from some immortal “elsewhere”, from contemplating humanity’s mortality? In short, an archetypal or mythic approach like this is crucial, but not if it becomes what it usually becomes: yet another way in which social scientific knowledge deafens itself to exactly that dimension which a voice like Miguel’s is feverishly trying to draw its attention to – namely, the need to understand and experience ourselves not as trapped outside the world looking on, but as beings whose essence and end is the world itself.

This idea, that we, even when we are anthropologists, are beings whose essence and end is the world itself, seems to offer a way of conceiving ourselves beyond the split between our existential situation as humans caught in a mortal social order, and ourselves as anthropological knowers. Or at least it might if it could be cashed out in non-mythological terms. Can it? I think it probably can. I think as a proposal it can be made an object of rational discussion, empirical validation and disputation, where that discussion, empirical validation and disputation is invited to understand itself as part of humanity’s search for a more authen

tic relation to itself.

Put otherwise, social scientists have more epistemological options than they usually suppose. Interpretations, whether mythic or scientific, are not simply a medium that either allows us local and fallible engagement with “reality” (the realist or pragmatist assumption), or forever gets between us and unreachable “reality”, where “reality as such” is conceived as some wholly pre-interpretive beyond (the Kantian assumption). But nor is reality reducible to interpretations, so that all we ever deal with are social or discursive or archetypal or mythical “constructions” (the post-Kantian or Nietzschean-historicist assumption in its many variants). Despite their opposition to each other, these apparently reasonable or non-dogmatic viewpoints take for granted the dogma, typically modern, that thought and reality, and with it the good and being, are fundamentally divergent.

What if, rather, we took a cue from the unjustly traduced German Idealists and regarded reality less as an impossible object and more like the Subject to which our thought about it inescapably belongs?<sup>2</sup> In that case our culturally organised lives would belong to the life of reality. Our destructiveness and creativeness would be forms of the destruction and creation proper to reality. Our insightful interpretations and our obtuse delusions would arise from and belong to reality, would be part of reality’s ongoing self-division and self-synthesis. As such, some interpretations might bring reality to greater self-knowledge, greater thoughtfulness and care for itself, they might, that is, be part of overcoming a self-alienation which is ours because it is reality’s own self-alienation. Other interpretations might lead it further into hostile splits, self-blindness, exploitation and the repetitive circuits of capitalism’s resource munching death-drive. To be able to tell the one from the other would not immediately become any easier on account of adopting this standpoint, but reality *qua* subject is reality to which good ends are intrinsically important. Notwithstanding cultural diversity and aspects of moral incommensurability, telling the good from the bad therefore becomes intrinsically plausible, and something that, in and through us, reality owes to itself.

My suggestion, then, is not that anthropologists should all switch topics and rush to investigate the social dimensions of the planetary crisis. Nor am I saying that an awareness of our dire ecological situation must become omnipresent in our minds. I wouldn’t wish that on anyone. Nor am I saying that we should abandon anthropology to become activists putting out ecological fires – a departure which would leave anthropology as it is. I am rather suggesting that the planetary crisis, of which the ecological situation is one major component, will increasingly force us to suffer the split between our inherited social scientific conceptions and our existential situation, and that only a profound metaphysical shift, a shift in the basic coordinates of our “reality principle”, has any hope of healing that split. If this new sense of reality is to address our crisis it will necessarily weave new relations between humanity’s diverse ideas of what is and what is good, and therewith our understandings of human ends and the ends, in all senses, of the world. As anthropologists, that is, as teachers, students and erstwhile contributors to human culture, attempting that re-weaving would be one of the best ways to help humanity edge closer to becoming master of the situation it has created. It might also be a way of insisting on some personal sanity.

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<sup>2</sup> A more developed treatment of these ideas, with particular reference to G.W.F. Hegel, can be found in the essay ‘Human Sciences at the Edge of Panentheism’ (Job 2011, forthcoming).

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