

Freya Mathews. *For Love of Matter: A Contemporary Panpsychism*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2003. ISBN: 0-7914-5808-3

Freya Mathews. *Reinhabiting Reality: Towards a Recovery of Culture*. Sydney: UNSW Press, 2005. ISBN: 0-86840-809-3

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The ecophilosophical project is driven by the conviction that the endemic environmental problems that presently confront us have not been caused by mere human carelessness, but are the direct consequence of certain beliefs and assumptions being deeply entrenched in dominant Western discourse. Ecophilosophers maintain that due to a culturally legitimated faith in the validity of oppressive and destructive ideologies, humanity has seen fit to engage in systemically oppressive and destructive activities that have resulted in the current global crisis. Accordingly, ecophilosophers have sought to expose the flaws inherent in ecologically destructive ideologies and to envision models of thinking conducive to humanity's continued existence in a more-than-human world.

In *For Love of Matter* Freya Mathews undertakes this task in a critically sophisticated and innovative fashion. According to Mathews, ecologically destructive ideologies have found legitimation in the dominant 'materialist' metaphysical worldview which holds physical reality to be devoid of any 'mentality' or meaning other than that which human beings impose upon it. She argues that because of this 'deanimated' view of reality, humanity has lost reverence for material existence, thereby engendering an attitude of mindless contempt in our treatment of the earth. Mathews contends that this form of 'materialism' is not only ecologically destructive, but also phi-

losophically problematic. She insists that if we are to properly treat *and* understand the world around us, we are best served to adopt a metaphysical worldview that encompasses the fundamental unity of ‘mind’ and ‘matter’.

Accordingly, Mathews advocates a ‘panpsychist’ metaphysical framework that attributes a subjectival dimension to all physical reality. This is not to suggest that physical entities such as tables, chairs and telegraph poles are possessed of intentionality in the same way that human beings and others complex organisms are. Rather, Mathews maintains that such entities, while devoid of conscious awareness, are animated by the ‘mindlike’ energy of “the world at large.” This relates to Mathews’ cosmological schema of “the One and the Many” in which she envisages the Universe as a conscious whole (the One) engaged in a constant process of self-realization by means of individuation into “finite centers of subjectivity” (the Many). Although these centers of subjectivity arise from the One, they experience themselves as distinct from the One, providing them with the opportunity to pursue self-realization as independent entities. Thus, the existence of the Many furthers the One’s movement toward self-realization through the Many’s experience of self-realization as self-perpetuating individuals.

Insofar as the One pursues its self-realization through individuation into a multitude of ‘secondary selves’, Mathews argues that it is not in accordance with the One’s ‘Way’ that these secondary selves should seek to lose their individuality in ‘union’ with the One. Likewise, it is equally discordant with the “Way of the One” that these secondary selves should adopt an ‘autoic orientation’ in which they view themselves as radically separate from others, thereby positioning themselves in opposition to the One. Mathews asserts that the One neither seeks to be unified with, or in opposition to the Many, but longs to experience a communicative and loving relationship with all its secondary selves. Thus, the Many are called into a relationship of ‘eros’ with the One, facilitated through love of the manifold ‘subjects’ through which the One realizes itself. Mathews maintains that it is in this relationship of ‘erotic’ engagement that the process of self-realization can be most fully actualised, to the greater benefit of both the individual and the whole.

In *Reinhabiting Reality*, the sequel to *For Love of Matter*, Mathews addresses the question of praxis in the context of her panpsychist metaphysics, elaborating methods by which human beings might most lovingly engage with their more-than-human reality. In this work of first-rate ecological thought, Mathews explores a notion of human ‘culture’ that is defined in terms of the word’s root meaning, to til or to cherish. In this practice of ‘culture’, human beings are collectively called upon to cherish the world, and

tend to it with devotion. She describes this ‘cherishing’ as grounded in a fundamental modality of ‘grace’ – a deeply rooted sense of gratitude for one’s own life and the life of reality at large. She holds that in cultivating such a sense of profound appreciation for the given, humanity will cease the destructive quest to mould the world into its own image, and learn to live in alignment with the earth’s own unfolding.

In accordance with these principles of ‘culture’ and ‘grace’, Mathews elucidates the ethos of “letting the world grow old,” in which she promotes radical acceptance of the world in its present condition, and co-operative engagement with it. Mathews argues that if we are to stem the tide of humanity’s destructiveness, we must cease the quest to mould the world into any image whatsoever, whether it be anthropocentric or ecocentric. Rather than envision an ‘ecotopia’ in which the humanly created is denigrated in preference to the ‘naturally’ given, rather than encourage us to destroy that which is in favour of that which might be, Mathews argues that we must strive to cherish that which already exists, engaging with it in such a manner that it can ultimately contribute to the thriving of our more-than-human reality.

Mathews continues exploring the virtues of cherishing and gratitude in the ethos of “becoming native.” Careful to explain that the process of “letting the world grow old” does *not* entail a willingness to stand by while acts of social injustice and ecological destruction continue unabated, Mathews describes “becoming native” as a form of vibrant activism that combines the nurturing of the given with resistance to those forces that hinder the flourishing of more-than-human life. Mathews describes this nativism as arising out of a deep attentiveness to one’s surroundings and, although she emphasises the importance of the ‘home’ in this process, she affirms that nativism can be experienced in relation to any ‘place’ if one is sufficiently open to it. While Mathews emphasises the value of developing a strong connection with a particular place and community over an extended period of time, she also strongly advocates the value of internationalism and genuine openness to the stranger. While the native strives to cultivate a loving relationship with the small corner of the Earth in which they have made their home, they can also draw much from establishing open-hearted connections with unknown people and unknown places as they travel throughout the wider world. In order to further the reader’s understanding of this process, Mathews provides beautifully written “ground studies” of engagement with ‘place’ as understood in a panpsychist framework, concluding that that the reinhabitation of reality is far from being merely an abstract ideal.

Both *For Love of Matter* and *Reinhabiting Reality* are significant works

that address significant ideas for our time. Admittedly, the philosophical arguments Mathews uses to substantiate her metaphysical framework are not without their problems; many will doubtless find them overly faith-based and perhaps even implicitly theological in nature, despite Mathews' endeavours to ground her arguments in analytic reasoning. This said, Mathews demonstrates awareness of these limitations and acknowledges the fundamentally experimental nature of her work. With good humour, insight and creativity, Mathews dares to explore ideas that have for far too long been deemed 'outside' the sphere of acceptable philosophical discussion. Moreover, she does the important work of articulating *how* these ideas might not only change our thinking, but our very practice of being human. Demanding, poetic and sometimes funny, *For Love of Matter* and *Reinhabiting Reality* offer genuine insights and inspiration for those who wish to be engaged in the healing of our wounded world.

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