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Title: Beyond transcendence: The reconciliation of individualist and communalist values and its implications for hope and action in English Eco-Paganism

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Abstract

So-called new spiritualities have been conceptualized as primarily self-focused in anthropological literature (e.g. Heelas, 2008). This study, employing a micropolitical analysis, expanded on this notion by looking at a loose Pagan group as a new spirituality with explicit communal and environmentalist values next to individualism. Using Robbins' (2007) ideas, it is argued that the apparent paradox of simultaneous individualism and communalism-environmentalism is reconciled by relegating the former to environmentalist methods, the latter to ends. Four Pagan spiritual beliefs reflect this reconciliation: the beliefs of fundamental human potential to live harmoniously with the planet and community; the beliefs of work on the self leading to wider change, and vice versa; the beliefs of insights beyond the ordinary self, used to question one's methods and ends; and the beliefs in magic as dealing with unstoppable processes, including the planet's self-healing. All these beliefs increase possibilities of environmentalist action and foster hope in practitioners. It is argued that this happens spiritually through a Pagan kind of enchantment, which is extended beyond the individual towards communalism-environmentalism, challenging the status quo intentionally. This hope further motivates environmentalist action, which is informed by the described beliefs and value reconciliation. Here, small-scale action and idealism are frequently employed. Idealism can foster hope in others while small-scale actions generally do not need "audiences" in Pagan beliefs, as they may influence others by magical means. The study expands the notion of new spiritualities by showcasing a new spirituality with intentional communalism-environmentalism, as well as explaining its coexistence with individualism.

spirituality – individualism – communalism – environmentalism – value – hope

There's a candle in front of my computer, next to a sheet of paper, a pen and celebratory cookies and beer: the list of items Rosie told everyone to have ready for this year's winter solstice online ritual – Yule in Pagan terms. The longest night. The wheel turns. What must be lost to the night?, Rosie chants, slowly repeating the question. Pollution, somebody says; doubt, says someone else. I say exploitation. Rosie repeats these words and continues chanting. Then, everybody goes silent. We're in hibernation, the space between the old and new. Finally, Rosie invites us to think about the coming year. What do we want to take over?

After a while, we return to our rooms and light our candles. Everybody shares what they lit theirs for: listening to the Gods, the return of the sun, hope, gratitude. I name solidarity. The rest of the group repeats the others' wishes, though we were ensured beforehand that this does not mean endorsement, but merely honoring each other's ideas. Rosie starts singing: Let it begin with each step we take / and let it begin with each change we make / and let it begin with each chain we break / and let it begin every time we're awake. Finally, people draw tarots or other divination techniques of their choice, we toast the new year, and the ritual space is opened again.

This online ritual illustrates the central values uniting the Pagans I met for this study: individuality, community, nature. In the following, I attempt to sketch the ways they form a coherent worldview, focusing on the way the at times conflicting values of individuality and community-environmentalism are reconciled, how this is manifested in and made possible by spiritual ideas, and how it informs environmentalist hope and action. This is based on largely

online fieldwork with a group of individuals participating in the monthly *moot* (Pagan meeting) of Totnes, Devon, as well as in rituals. Many of them have histories with protest camps of the 1980s and 1990s and their spiritual influences include Wicca, Reclaiming, High Magic, Druidry, and more. The main characters in this narrative (using pseudonyms) are Rosie, my initial field contact and a Reclaiming witch largely responsible for the local moot along with Nica, a magician, and Mary Coombe, a druid woman, as well as Jack, a male witch, and Dragon and Fferyllt, a Pagan couple engaged in shamanic practice. For clarification, “community” in this narrative largely means humanity-in-general rather than any specific Pagan community. Still, the Pagan community surfaces in the shared spiritual ideas described. All my informants identify under the umbrella of Paganism and are environmentally concerned and/or active, thus fitting the label “Ecopagan” (Plows 2007, 506). However, as it seems to be the label most people are comfortable with, the term “Pagan” is used below, which, for my informants, always includes environmentalism. It should be emphasized that this denotes the specific people I talked to and never Pagans-in-general.

For my informants, individualist values like subjectivity and freedom are crucial and they exhibit all of Mosurinjohn and Watts’ (2021, 1) characteristics for “religions of the heart” - one of various conceptions of “new spiritualities” - meaning that they should be conceptualized as part of this category. However, there is also a strong communal bent, frequently relating to environmentalism. These values, too, are seen as naturally Pagan. Common ideas of “new spiritualities” in literature, often focusing on individualist aims with communal ones as added benefits, are expanded on by this *intentional* communalism. The coexistence of the individual and the communal surfaces in the call to support each other’s wishes and the simultaneous assurance that this will not impinge on one’s own ideas as described in the Yule ritual. Rosie once defined Paganism as “the belief in a sacred earth that we should honor in our hearts and our actions – the rest are optional accretions,” summarizing the simultaneous individualist openness and communal-environmentalist political positioning.

There appears to be a paradox needing to be explained in, for instance, rejecting the imposing of ideas while having strong environmentalist stances. However, explicitly politically minded new spiritualities and the according struggles have not been paid much attention in anthropological literature. In this article, I will argue that the coherence of my informants’ worldview can be explained using Robbins (2007) ideas on value reconciliation. Further, both individualism and communalism-environmentalism and their reconciliation are manifested in, and made possible by, spiritual ideas – using Weberian terms, they are “sacralized,” given additional, magical, meaning. Finally, I argue that these sacralizations and that reconciliation imply preferences in environmentalist action, and that enchantment and hope play a role here, using Sliwinski’s (2012) ideas. This article looks at the *outwardly*-directed sides of Paganism micro-politically from *within* the culture. This micropolitical outlook is informed by authors like Mosurinjohn and Watts’ (2021) view of spirituality as a meaning-making (sacralizing) exercise of enchantment. However, these authors’ insights are expanded by the description of more-than-individual values and *intentional* communal-environmentalist work, in the new spirituality at hand.

I start by explaining these theoretical influences as well as the methods employed. For the main part, I describe the sacralized Pagan values of individualism and communalism-environmentalism, as well as their reconciliation using Robbins’ theory of value. Next, I illustrate four ways in which this reconciliation is manifested and made possible by Pagan spiritual ideas. Finally, building on Sliwinski, I explain how these beliefs, and that reconciliation,

imply a motivating, communal hope arising out of enchantment, as well as a preference for certain environmentalist methods.

Theoretical background

I will first outline the current state of anthropological research on new spiritualities, focusing on micropolitical ways of understanding, and point toward the scholarly gap concerning those new spiritualities with explicit communal/environmental orientations, such as environmentalist Paganism (“Ecopaganism”). To help explain the reconciliation of individualism and communalism-environmentalism in Paganism, as well as the environmentalist actions arising out of it, I will outline anthropological perspectives on values and hope.

1. New spiritualities: New spiritualities go by many names in academic literature – this term is used here because it does not imply individualism being such faiths’ primary value, which, as I will show, is frequently assumed. In their overview of scholarly literature on the topic, Mosurinjohn and Watts (2021, 4-5), using the term “religions of the heart,” describe as new spiritualities’ main characteristics experiential epistemology (true is what I feel), romantic expressivism (the existence of an authentic self and importance of expressing it), a valuing of individual liberty while rejecting attempts to “tame” the true self, and beliefs in a disenchanting modernity needing to be re-enchanting.

While the traditional sociology of religion argues that new spiritualities are unsustainable over time due to their lack of institutions or rules, Mosurinjohn and Watts’ (2021, 7) argue against this, as discursive commonalities such as their characteristics unite these beliefs despite heterogeneity in detail. Even though their members might themselves stress their individually unique beliefs, it is possible to treat new spiritualities as a Thing in analysis based on these commonalities, as many authors (Bartolini et al. 2017, Heelas 2008, Watts 2018) have started doing. This is also true for the new spirituality focused on in this article, (Eco-) Paganism: as Alexandra Plows (2007, 506) puts it, “difficulty of classification is part of [its] definition,” but core principles exist, including, but not limited to, the described characteristics.

Mosurinjohn and Watts (2021, 10) further critique the “critical religion” approach, which does take new spiritualities seriously, but reduces their individualism to working in assistance of neoliberalism at the expense of social justice, essentially producing consumers on quests of self-growth, without any communal benefit. Mosurinjohn and Watts (2021, 17) argue for a more micropolitical Weberian way of looking at new spiritualities as meaning-making activities enchanting modernity, essentially coping with the status quo through spiritual experiences, often in communities discursively delineating what is sacred. This way of looking at environmental Paganism – as a Thing, but an activity of enchantment not reducible to macropolitics - informs the analysis below. As will be shown, Paganism as I encountered it exhibits all of Mosurinjohn and Watts’ characteristics, and can thus be called a new spirituality. However, for the following reason, the framework presented is only partly applicable to the present case, and needs further development.

This is because even those arguing against the critical religion tend uphold a view of new spiritualities as essentially self-focused: In Watts’ (2018, 362) critique of critical studies, his examples of status quo transgressions in new spiritualities appear to largely happen accidentally, an added communal benefit to the main goal of serving the individual. In his words, such faith’s “begin and end with the self.” Heelas (2008, 207) calls new spiritualities’ outward effects “gentle

flows”, stressing their automaticity. The Paganism at hand, however, has *explicit* communal-environmental aspirations. Bartolini et al. (2017, 349) do mention the intentional political use of religion in modernity, but admit that this has largely been studied in traditional religions. Plows (2007, 507), on the contrary, partially defines Ecopaganism in direct opposition to “New Age” beliefs directed at the self, and stresses instead its actively communal-environmental character. While the Paganism I encountered does fulfill all of Mosurinjohn and Watts’ characteristics, and is thus categorized as a new spirituality, there are communal and environmentalist orientations next to this individualism, as Plows already touches upon, which make changes beyond the self *intentional*, rather than automatic. This twofold orientation of values has been largely neglected by scholars of new spiritualities.

Other scholars working with Pagans already pointed out the apparent paradox at work here – how can you value individualism and communalism-environmentalism equally strongly? Different preliminary solutions have been offered: Sage (2009, 46) argues that, to change public opinion on environmentalism, Pagans must employ discursive control, despite rejecting authority – communalism-environmentalism must triumph over individualism, as the values are incompatible. However, it does not appear that, to the people I met, a choice must be made between the two. Carlassare (2000, 101) argues that Pagans may work together politically in temporary groups and a common ideology is unnecessary. But, reevoking Mosurinjohn and Watts, it is untrue that common ideologies are absent in new spiritualities - discursive cohesion exists, and that is also true in the present case.

A scholarly gap exists concerning new spiritualities with explicit communal-environmental next to individualist values, and neither the apparent paradox nor possible reconciliations have been subject to anthropological inquiry before. Thus, next to informing the micropolitical way of analysis, the literature informs this study’s scholarly relevance, which is to understand this coexistence, and reconciliation, of values as well as its implications for environmentalist action, expanding on the notion of new spiritualities. To explain the coexistence and reconciliation of seemingly conflicting interests in Paganism, the anthropology of values and hope is invoked.

2. The anthropology of values and hope: Recently, anthropologists have advocated explicitly studying morality instead of assuming it to be equivalent with “culture”, as was historically common (Mattingly & Throop 2018, 476). Within this trend, Joel Robbins’ has focused on the role of values, as a manifestation of a culture’s moral understanding– this conceptualizing is helpful for the present case as it invites consideration of value *reconciliation*. Robbins (2007, 298) uses Weber’s idea of “value spheres:” these spheres all have one value on top of a hierarchy - other values are permitted, provided they ultimately serve this highest value. However, most cultures have more than one value sphere – with all claiming absolute power, they stand in eternal conflict. My informants’ individualist and communal-environmentalist orientations are conceptualized as two value spheres in this analysis.

Robbins sketches some models of how conflicting value spheres may be reconciled - the notion of “(relatively) stable pluralism” (Robbins 2013, 109) is of interest here. It describes the coexistence of two conflicting values made possible by them being relegated to two different social contexts. In Robbins’ exemplary Sepik River group, equality ruled over secular life and hierarchies over ritual. These values are not in a hierarchical relationship with each other (none of them ultimately serves the other) and both are embodied by all members of the group in the according contexts. They are never fully reconciled, and some tension remains, but they form a coherent value system. The idea of stable pluralism is used to explain how individualist and

communal-environmental values relate to each other in the present case. Notably, Graeber (2013, 236) criticizes Robbins' micropolitical focus in looking at value. Graeber's Marxist perspective considers the influence of the political-economic field on values, and he sees Robbins as considering values insulated from such wider contexts. This is valid criticism – however, to complement the macropolitical focus dominant in studies on new spiritualities, a micropolitical understanding was employed here.

Two further anthropological insights are useful concerning this value reconciliation. First, Miller and Lukes (2020, 422) argue that moral “unfreedom” - the suppression of individual freedom - can be something people desire, and *freely* strive for. Internal constraints on the self may be embraced if they restrict parts of the self that are valued lowly. Constraints for the communalism-environmentalism thus do not necessarily counter individualism. Second, Robbins (2016, 775) argues that more explicit value systems than this “unfreedom,” such as spiritual ones, must not be dogmatic in their promotion either. In religious ritual, according to Robbins, values are realized fully, and taken into the mundane by participants without them feeling coerced to do so. Both ritual values and desired “unfreedom” are part of the value system I encountered - these insights show that both can coexist with individualist notions of freedom.

Concerning the implications of values for action, ideas on hope are central. Sliwinski (2012, 233) argues that hope, as an active state, motivates people to bring values into action. This is possible if people do not see life as completely out of their control and depends on trust in what is hoped for, and dealing with conflicting information. Material changes change values, and what is hoped for. Further, “everyday utopias” - ordinary alternative social models embedded in the wider hegemony - are one key action arising out of values via hope (Sliwinski 2016, 440). They alter the subjectivities of public audiences against the status quo by propagating alternative values - this is not unlike Robbins' ritual value promotion. Both hope and everyday utopias are central Pagan ideas to my informants and useful to consider when looking at Pagans environmentalist action. Interestingly, Bartolini et al. (2017, 342) named offering hope and alternative visions to modernity as political spirituality's key strengths – here, ideas on enchantment in new spiritualities link to the literature on values and hope, implying an explicit activist use of enchantment to foster hopes.

This study helps fill the scholarly gap on outwardly focused new spiritualities like Paganism. Paganism is treated as a real faith worthy of study, focusing on meaning-making instead of reducing it to macropolitical currents. This study's main contribution lies in explaining the coexistence and reconciliation of individualism and communalism-environmentalism. The presented literature on value reconciliation will be used to solve the apparent value paradox, while the insights on hope will link it to the preferred environmental actions, as well as a specifically Pagan kind of enchantment.

Methods

The ethnographic data was gathered between November 2020 and May 2021, a process shaped by the Covid-19 pandemic. Originally planned as “traditional” fieldwork in South Devon, my arrival to Dartington coincided with the start of a national lockdown that would, with minor breaks, last well into spring. While I did spend about two months in England, this time was shaped by online methods, as events did not happen offline, and I returned to Germany in the new year to continue remote fieldwork.

In total, my data consists of twenty-four unstructured interviews with twenty different

people (three of which happened offline), all thirty to ninety minutes long, and participant observation of two online rituals and six online *moots*, as well as content analysis of Pagan magazines, YouTube talks and Facebook groups. I was lucky to have chosen Totnes as my fieldsite, as its *moot* was the only one in South Devon that continued to meet, even hold rituals, online throughout lockdown. Additionally, I was lucky to meet people who were interested in helping my project by agreeing to interviews, as well as pointing me towards other informants and online content. Of course, the lack of observational data poses some limitations to this study, as I could not compare informants' statements to their behavior or attend "ordinary" rituals and magical workings, which would have also allowed more auto-ethnography and sensorial - next to discursive - modes of knowing. However, I think that I managed to seize the opportunities Covid left me with quite successfully, and the large number of interviews allowed me to inquire explicitly about the topics at hand.

All interviewees were asked for consent to audio-record the conversations and use them in this paper beforehand. The possibility to retract statements, or the whole interview, afterwards was stressed each time. Further, anonymity in the study was ensured, though I did sometimes remind people that anonymity in a small group like the present one cannot be completely ensured. Concerning participant observation, I asked the *moot* and ritual attendees at the outset to let me know, right then or later online, if they would not like to anonymously appear in this article. Nobody reached out to me that way.

Pagan values, sacralized and reconciled

On Ostara, the spring equinox, I am at my desk again, but in my mind I'm walking a labyrinth, a space between winter and spring, while Rosie guides our trance journeys. I manage to get into the ritual space better than on Yule, and somehow it feels like I really am between the hedges, meeting Aphrodite, who reminds me (through Rosie) that all acts of love and pleasure are [her] rituals. It's a strange state to be in: the Goddess is in my head, but more than a thought. The idea that myself and others must not stand in opposition is something I had learned from my informants already – now, it is turned into a more visceral awareness. Back at my desk, fully, Rosie leads another song: Equal day, equal night / The dark is balanced with the light / Sap is rising, blood like fire / Give us all that we desire. Our collective chanting raises a cone of power, to manifest our wishes for spring.

As I understood quite intuitively from this ritual, individualism and communalism-environmentalism are not put in opposition by my informants – my understanding of the way this reconciliation works, using Robbins' theory of values, is this chapter's main argument. First, however, I will attempt describing these two major Pagan values, as well as their endowment with magical meaning ("sacralization"), separately, in order to show my informants' dual value orientation.

Paganism and the individual

As stated, Mosurinjohn and Watts' characteristics for "religions of the heart" all fit my informants' ideas: an experiential epistemology is manifested in ideas of subjective intuition as superior to intellectual knowing, and beliefs about true selves fit romantic expressivism. These

beliefs imply values of individual freedom while rejecting attempts to “tame” the authentic self, such as through dogma.

I noticed subjective knowing and belief pluralism as central values to my informants. Common jokes concerned long discussions on the intricacies of magic, one being that “when you ask two Pagans one question, you’ll get three answers.” Individualism is discursively strengthened as a Pagan value. Additionally, Pagan terms are often not generalizable beyond the individual or subgroup. Nica once talked about her use “rite” for magical workings, which she was aware did not fit the term’s general usage. This individualist view of Paganism by Pagans is often put in opposition to organized “religion” - one of my informants explained her refusal to call Paganism a religion with the fact that it is undogmatic. The Church of England especially is frequently viewed as overly structured, imposing beliefs on people rather than allowing them to engage with their own intuitions. The values of pluralism and subjectivity are mundane manifestations of Pagan individualism. But, similar to Watts (2018, 357), who describes a “sacralizing” of liberalism in new spiritualities, individualism is likewise given additional meaning, expanding on Mosurinjohn and Watts characteristics: for instance, while individual liberty is valued in itself, the possibility to act on romantic expressivism in ritual is also given the value of magical effectiveness. To illustrate this, take Jack describing activist rituals at the “Queer Pagan Camp” (QPC):

(...) we're gonna do dark magic, we're going to really, really hurt this company, like Monsanto or something. And you might go there in your darkest hour and put your darkest robes on or something like that, because you're - that's how you feel - and then someone would come along in full drag. Full drag, sequins everywhere and that is their way, you know. (...) that is their ritual garb, that's what they feel that empowers them to actually come up and do the magic, and that was just totally accepted. (...) And I think that's the key of it really. You have to feel happy and powerful in yourself in order to do the rituals to your best ability and to - yes, it's that you also get out of it what it is you need to get out of it.

This description illustrates the idea of individual liberty and authenticity, or romantic expressivism, as magically, next to mundanely, beneficial. Further, the presence of multiple Pagan traditions in group ritual is assumed to have magical value. Mixing various approaches and taking, often intuitively, what works from each is seen as highly effective: here, pluralism is sacralized. Jack was also concerned with making people question Pagan dogmas, for instance those concerning gender binaries in traditional Wicca, which he, as a gay man, viewed as restrictive. As stated, this questioning of dogma’s impingement on authenticity is a characteristic of new spiritualities. Additionally, experiential epistemologies play a role here: Jack frequently advised fellow Pagans to follow their intuition rather than external rules, which he argued lead to better interaction with deities.

However, while it exemplifies the manifestations of Mosurinjohn & Watts’ characteristics in Pagan contexts, Jack’s quote also shows how futile the separation of individualism and communalism-environmentalism is: individualism serves the communal-environmentalist goal of harming Monsanto - romantic expressivism helps yourself *and* larger goals and a self-focused idea of new spiritualities does not do this kind of Paganism justice. Al Head, also involved with QPC, added that questioning dogma “expands the possible for everyone,” thus not taking any power away – exemplifying a “both, and” attitude crucial to the

present argument. This connects to the general acceptance of doing ritual (partly) for oneself, emblematic of Pagan individualism. Dragon said about ritual:

(...) the fact that the ritual is taken seriously and the fact that the intention is taken seriously and people put a lot of effort into it doesn't necessarily (...) mean it has to be all doom and gloom. (...) and all magical work to some respect isn't dour, doesn't need to be dogmatic. Doesn't need - it should not be taken lightly, but it should be - I've always thought the best way of looking at it, is taking it as an adventure: You should have your wits about you, and you got to be careful with what you're doing, but not so careful that you forget to have an adventure and have a good time as well.

Dragon's quote puts dogma in direct opposition to the possibility of a fun ritual, once again stressing the tendency to reject it. As with the ideas of non-dogma benefiting the self and the community, individualism and communalism-environmentalism are no longer put into conflict - work for oneself is not seen as contradicting work for something else, and vice versa.

Finally, individualism may be viewed as a historical necessity. The "Age of Aquarius" concept has become a symbol for counterculture and gave "New Age" spirituality its name. For the Pagans that believe in it, it turns individualism into a natural process. Processes of increased freedom and non-dogma are given extra-ordinary meaning, and are basically deemed unstoppable.

As stated, even though individualism is a central value for the people I met, because of the "both, and" attitudes concerning the self and the other, the concept of "religions of the heart" cannot capture all major aspects of these Pagans' values – what is missing is the planet and community.

Paganism, community, and the planet

For this analysis, the communalist and environmentalist values of my informants are grouped together in opposition to – and reconciliation with – individualism. This is not suggesting that there is no difference between communalism and environmentalism, only that they can be treated as one for analysis. On one hand, they share the quality of explicitly going beyond the self. Considering the dominating trend in literature to treat new spiritualities as largely self-focused, it makes sense to unify the aspects of Paganism contradicting this. On the other hand, the lines between environmentalism and communalism are indeed blurred for many of my informants: Penny Billington, a druid woman, said in a YouTube talk that for Pagans, connection is not necessarily with human people, but also with stone people, or river people, and so on, which helped during Covid. The emphasis of humanity as merely one part of nature reduces the necessity to distinguish "human people" from the rest, including ostensibly inanimate nature. As stated, separating the communal-environmental from the individual is ultimately futile – still, a brief overview of my informants' communal-environmental values, and their sacralization, is given.

Like Plows outlined, (Eco-)Paganism often defines itself in opposition to "New Age" faiths mainly focused on transcending oneself out of the world's troubles, and is instead characterized as actively political. As Rosie put it:

(...) there's witchcraft and there's Druids, and both of them like to imagine that they have this real long heritage (...) You know the Romans wrote about Druids as the sort of spiritual community leaders and the advisor of (...) the king or the chief, or whatever. You know, and

Witches like to have this imagining that they were the wise women sitting on the outside of the village who knew herbs and could help people with their problems and things like that. And to some extent, these are sort of self-created myths. Because we don't actually know the reality in the past, but (...) we've created them because they carry a sense of having a role in the community. (...) Whereas New Age is much more individualistic, it doesn't really work on the sense of community, I don't think. And certainly, it doesn't work on a sense of duties or obligations or, or even sort of... values in that same way.

Even recognizing it as somewhat self-constructed, Rosie stresses this self-fashioning as discursively delineating the culture's communal values. Accordingly, Paganism as I encountered it sets itself apart from traditional religion through its individualism, and from New Age through its communalism-environmentalism.

As with individualism, these more-than-individual values are given sacralized meaning, for instance through group ritual. As Nica put it:

(...) however powerful individual rituals are, I think (...) and I've always thought that collective rituals, you know, are power houses. I mean not only, you know, you're working on your own, you got two people working. Twice the energy, three times the energy, and so on, you know.

This idea of more people equaling more magical power is manifested in the concept of *cones of power*, which were part of the described Ostara ritual, in which energy is raised through collective action such as chanting, and then directed at a common goal. Crucially, this only works if the individual group members work well together and engage in temporary compromises of their individual ways of working. As Dragon put it: "The best groups work when that dynamic flow is right for everybody, and everybody's being flexible enough without compromising their own promises in their own path," to which Fferyllt added: "It's feeling that the group coming together is a greater need than your own path, at that time." Clearly, individualism and communalism are navigated - still, a special virtue - deemed magically effective - is the compromising of one's individual preferences in favor of the group. Such community magic is used in protests, too. Rosie told the story of charging a ball of wool with magic, threads of which were then given to activists to show them acknowledgement, and recharge them for the protest: community support is sacralized.

Concerning environmentalism, a common belief is the naturalness of Pagan environmental thinking: many informants reported essentially being Pagan since childhood, before learning the word and that other people like them existed. Part of this Pagan sensibility is nature connection. Rosie talked about it in an interview:

It's a sort of visceral thing. That if you see people not doing their recycling, it sort of hurts in your body. It's not in your head, going: "Oh no, people should put their tea bags in the recycling, but you know, I shouldn't be judgmental. I should send infinite compassion." This (...) actually isn't getting those teabags recycled. Actually it's like, you know, "my teabags go in my compost bin and they get spread on my flowers and my flowers do better next year for my compost and so it's sort of - the earth in my garden is a part of me."

Beyond blurring the boundaries between the self and the other, nature connection is sacralized, and environmentalism is made intuitive. This offers a first hint at reconciling the individual

and the communal-environmental: things may be universal, but they are best intuitively known. Experiential epistemologies are given a more communal bent as motivators for communal-environmentalist action.

Finally, there are process beliefs somewhat parallel to Aquarian thinking. The *Gaia hypothesis* is the idea of planet earth as an organism. This also implies self-healing capacities, the role of Pagans being to facilitate and amplify the process. Sometimes, the recent surge in environmentalist concern is seen as a manifestation of this, and the pandemic may carry meaning as a reminder of communal-environmentalist values – for example, lockdown leading people back into nature and making group meetings more inclusive to differently-abled people through technology. Phoebe, a moot participant, called this part of “the Goddess’s plan” in a moot. Like individualist processes, environmentalist ones may appear natural and unstoppable.

Clearly, Paganism as I encountered it values more than the self. While Mosurinjoh and Watts’ list of characteristics is not disputed - and this faith can be called a new spirituality – communalism-environmentalism is sacralized next to individualism. As noted above, this carries an apparent paradox. A quote by S on the differences of Paganism and New Age illustrates this:

I think that New Age is very individualistic in that it's just “me, me, me.” What should I do to achieve my own best self? And it's also saying: Do I have a right to interfere in other people's lives? Do I have a right to say what's right or wrong? Do I have the right to tell other people what to do? I just need to live my own life as pure as I can, and then I've done my bit. Whereas, actually, I would say, (...) do you have a right not to take politics seriously? Do we not, as citizens of this country, all have a duty as citizens to do our bit?

More than showing the more-than-individualist values of Paganism, this quote invites the question of *how* you can tell people what is right and wrong (often regarding environmentalism), while also respecting their individuality. According to most of my informants, Paganism is not non-judging – but, as has been shown, a value is placed on individual freedom. How can individualism and communalism-environmentalism be reconciled without acting as constantly “warring Gods,” in Weber’s terms? It is for this that we turn to Robbins’ theory of value.

Means and ends: Reconciliation

Robbins' (2007) idea of (*relatively*) *stable pluralism* helps explain the reconciliation of individualism with communalism-environmentalism in the present context. Using Weber’s idea of value spheres, I argue that individualism rules over *methods* in the environmentalist context, while communalism-environmentalism rules over *goals*. This differs somewhat from Robbins’ use of spheres – in his examples, the contexts governed by different spheres are either subgroups of society or social contexts. However, his ideas, adapted to a more functional division of means and ends, are suited to solve the present riddle, and his insights are thus used somewhat liberally.

The described ideas on value subordination illustrate this division of value spheres. The examples of individualism above are all relegated to method – expressing authenticity in ritual, having fun with magic, tuning into the subjective experience of climate change. If there is individualism in goal, such as pleasure in the Ostara ritual, this self-focus is *subordinated* to a larger - communal-environmentalist - goal. When Rosie explained the ritual’s use to me, she acknowledged that it may be perceived as selfish, but has a deeper purpose: connecting people “to nature, to joy, to community” in hopes it has “a knock-on effect of making them more engaged with the wider world.” Individualism is used to help people look beyond the self – a

“both, and” attitude persists, but the goal lies ultimately beyond the self: New Age transcendence is discouraged. Likewise, a communal focus in method is tolerated if it is *subordinated* to (and ultimately serves) individualism. For example, in group ritual, structure may be introduced to ease people’s “letting go” and entering of the group’s flow. Likewise, even with the focus on compromise to the group’s intent at the expense of one’s own preferences, it is often stressed that you should only work with groups that fit your individuality. Otherwise, it is probably more effective to work on your own toward the communal-environmental goal rather than having methods imposed on you – in Dragon’s words: “if you got seventy-five people and it doesn't quite gel, then it still doesn't quite gel.” Ultimately, communalism-environmentalism is subordinated to individualism in method, and individualism to communalism-environmentalism in goal. Like in Robbins’ Sepik River example, all Pagans I met exhibit both values depending on the context, and neither value is generally situated above the other.

That last point is crucial: it may seem like goals sit hierarchically above the methods, but this understanding is misguided. As my informants frequently reminded me, the most important part of magic is *intent*. Explained by Mary early in my fieldwork: “Magic is all about purpose and intent, and it's sort of in your head, it's visualization and finding ways of how you as a human being can visualize that intent to make it sort of manifest in the world.” Magical intent, virtually indistinguishable from goal, is, in a way, the most important method at the magician’s disposal. As the lines between method and goal blur, the two parts do not appear in hierarchy: it cannot be said that the method ultimately serves the goal, and individualism ultimately serves communalism-environmentalism. In this article, intent and magical goal are used synonymously.

This also means that many specific methods are permitted, leading to a “whatever works” attitude – it is ultimately the intent, the main method, which counts, and almost any other method may serve it, if it works for you. Indeed, the acceptance of various methods to reach common goals is part of a shared discourse. Nica spoke of “all paths leading up to the mountain” while Rosie used the metaphor of radio signals to explain why different paths and methods may work for different people. Rosie’s definition of Paganism given above also reflects this. Methods are various and individual, and most important is the ultimately shared communal-environmental intent. The simultaneous focus on subjectivity and universality is manifested in the visceral nature connection described by Rosie: while it is desired to feel things subjectively, rather than having them imposed on oneself, this intuitive knowing leads to somewhat universal insight concerning communal-environmentalist values. Experiential epistemologies are extended for use beyond the self. This also explains how honoring others’ ideas without losing one’s own subjectivity made sense in the described Yule ritual: with the belief that multiple distinct subjectivities lead to similar universal (communal-environmentalist) goals, this becomes possible.

Robbins’ theory helps explain this reconciliation. With the division of its two central values onto methods and goals, it is usually clear to individuals what “doing the right thing” is. Of course, due to the open-minded nature of Paganism as I encountered it, it is never only one thing that is permitted – ultimately, even dogma may be freely chosen, as Miller and Lukes tell us, and Nica pointed out once. However, some things are discouraged, like excessive communalism in method, or excessive individualism in goals. Still, this overwhelming “whatever works” attitude produces a hopeful outlook at environmentalism, which will be described in this article’s final part. First, however, four spiritual ideas manifesting it are discussed, which in turn have more

concrete implications for methods. These beliefs give sacralized meaning to the reconciliation of values described above as well as making it possible in the first place, aiding the insights gained from Robbins' work in explaining the reconciliation of individualism and communalism-environmentalism.

Reconciliation sacralized: Spiritual ideas

Shortly before my time in Devon was cut short by Covid, I cycle to Dartmoor, the National Park next to Totnes. After the long way there, I find a tor, park my bike, and walk to its summit. The view is beautiful, over rolling hills dotted with sheep and a sky that feels bigger than usual. I light a cigarette to reward my efforts. Once I'm done smoking it, I realize that, somewhat obviously, there isn't a trashcan around. I'm fine putting a dead cigarette in my jacket, but I need to put it out first, and I feel bad pushing its ashy remains into Dartmoor. I decide to consult the spirits of place through intuition. It's no grand epiphany, but I notice a spot of bare stone on the moss-covered rock I'm sitting on. Cycling back, I wonder if the spirits showed me that, or if I just really needed to kill my cigarette.

As will surface below, my decision to dispose of my cigarette in this way was influenced by the conversations I had with my informants, and the spiritual ideas described by them. These ideas work next to the described importance of intent, and their classification relies on my dividing them into four classes – of course, such divisions are bound to be somewhat arbitrary, but shared discourses exist which signify collective trends of understanding. Still, none of these ideas are the same for all Pagans, as no general belief dogma exists. Finally, they act as links between value reconciliation and environmentalist action.

Getting back in touch: beliefs on human nature

Was my decision to kill the cigarette on bare stone related to me tapping into my innate Pagan potential? The beliefs described first may lead to such a conclusion. Essentially, they provide philosophical context to the described value reconciliation, fundamentally making it possible. As already touched upon, there is a tendency to view caring for nature as a natural human disposition. Nica, for instance, said:

I also think that you can't really get involved in Paganism and become sort of close to the nature and the environment through your spiritual belief without wanting to protect the environment because that would make a nonsense really, if your spiritual connection is with the earth itself.

Once you get the Pagan nudge, it is assumed, environmentalism comes naturally. The belief in a fundamental human potential for good – also relating to the community – is strengthened by the possibility of accidental magic. Over fieldwork, I have heard multiple ostensibly mundane things described as (possibly) magical: knitting and cooking may be spells, protest chants can produce cones of power, hugs may be magical healing, and awe felt in nature is Paganism. This also relates to the statements of being Pagan before knowing the word - Paganism and magic is seen as something naturally human. Further, common ideas of shared universals – such as earth care - across traditional religions imply such human universals and deities of different pantheons may be viewed as manifestations of the same energies. Beyond religions, environmentalism may not even be classified as a political issue as such. Nica once called it

“political with a small p” in that it is not based on a specific ideology or party, but rather about exerting influence. This, too, points to an assumed universality of environmentalist ideas.

This has one important implication for the reconciliation of communalism-environmentalism with individualism. If people are naturally predisposed to arrive at certain Pagan insights about the planet and community, and act harmoniously with the two, the dogmatic imposing of ideas becomes unnecessary. The most effective way of spreading environmental awareness is reminding people, or making them remind *themselves*, of the values of nature and community. In the words of Nica:

It's important probably for environmental actions and environmental concern as well, for people to make a connection as an individual, (...) rather than collectively thinking “this is what I'm supposed to think, or this is what my group thinks, or this is what my neighbor thinks” or whatever.

While it did not result in a large environmentalist act, my decision to put out my cigarette on bare stone, not harming the moss that was on it, certainly arose out of the Pagan connection to nature I had been learning about.

Helping people find their own connections to nature and community is an environmentalism that respects everybody's individualism. This works with the assumption that people will in fact end up with relatively similar *ends*, despite their subjectivities – in magic, it means that you can trust others' intents to a large extent, which further explains the supporting of others' intents on Yule. Again, it connects to the relationship between subjectivity and universality: a main way to reconnect people is open ritual where intuitive methods are employed. In trance journeys, participants are frequently given relatively little concrete information, in order to fill in the gaps themselves, and make insights more personal. As open ritual is consciously used by some Pagans to nudge people's consciousness into the right direction, the method is trusted to lead people to similar places. Human nature beliefs further explain how, countering Mosurinjoh and Watts' more individualist conception, experiential epistemologies are trusted to lead people to a natural communalism-environmentalism. Of course, intent is what matters here, as it does in all magic – if a ritual does not have environmentalist intent, it is less likely to produce these effects.

While it will be further explored below, Robbins' (2016) insight on ritual transcendence not necessarily being coercive fits these notions – in fact, many Pagans seem to prefer it specifically because it is believed to be undogmatic, emphasizing each participant's personal experiences.

As above, so below: beliefs on connectedness

As human nature beliefs lay fundamentals for the described value reconciliation, connectedness beliefs explicitly question individualism and communalism-environmentalism as opposing forces. The hermetic creed is central in Wicca: *as above, so below; as within, so without*. In practice, it explains how work on the self carries meaning beyond it. This is part of the “both, and” attitude common in Paganisms. The binary view of individualism versus communalism-environmentalism is questioned and the creed sacralizes this – Rosie argued that magic does not fit capitalistic scarcity ideas, which imply a choice having to be made between individual and communal-environmentalist uses of one's magic. Work on the self does not take away from wider change, and vice versa.

This features also in the nature connection described: narratives of connectedness between humans and wider nature are common, an example being the connection between fire in the human digestive system and the sun noted in a moot. These beliefs are direct applications of *as within, so without*. They also have implications for the permitted self-focus in ritual. Rosie mentioned how, during Pagan seasonal rituals, she always works with intents of her personal development in conjunction with the wider seasonal change. Dragon and Fferyllt also talked about the possibility to receive spiritual guidance from external beings during these festivals. With connectedness beliefs, the distinction of the self and the other is blurred, and questions of individualism versus communalism-environmentalism lose relevance.

It is obvious how connectedness beliefs allow for individualism, especially in method – the acceptance of attending a ritual in drag is a manifestation of this. Further, as work on the self carries larger meaning, it is not viewed as a subpar alternative to direct outward work, at least not if outward change is part of the *intent*. With such an ultimate intent, it is not only permitted to strive for personal things *next* to communal things in ritual, but also to do magic largely for oneself in the first place. In a Facebook discussion, Rosie explained the creed’s implications as such:

In my view it's fine to work for personal stuff too - you could say that having your personal life go well frees up your attention for wider stuff. And you could also say that attention to our own personal growth is necessary to know and develop our true will, with which we work our magic. As within, so without.

The quote introduces the concept of *integrity*, which is further explored below. Importantly, it shows that individually-focused work may be seen in a larger context that allows for communal-environmentalist effects arising out of it. Work on self is not just *tolerated* next to ultimately larger change – often, it is encouraged as a *necessary* part of it. Fferyllt described this illustratively:

When we went to the Witch camp in France, they had bottles of water and a glass. (...) And they were giving people bottled water and the glass saying “how much would you give to your community?” And there were people there just emptying the whole bottle into this glass, and of course it was overflowing and going over the table and to the floor. And so - what are you keeping for yourself then, you know?

Work on self is a part of work beyond it. There is a strong acceptance, even necessity, of individualism in magic – not just in method, but also as a goal. Crucially, however, for most of the people I talked to, the *ultimate* intent of magic is wider change. Importantly, the creed goes in both directions: while work on the self is important for wider change, some wider focus is important for oneself, too. Take what Rosie said immediately after her previous Facebook quote:

In the long run I think what matters isn't what we do our spells for so much as what we devote our lives to - and if that's just to selfish personal gain rather than greater planetary good, we won't thrive.

As stated, it is necessary to look at the whole picture, and what counts for Rosie is ultimately looking beyond oneself. Again, this is often contrasted to “New Age” stereotypes, whose goal in spiritual practice is self-transcendence, with wider effects as added benefits. In Paganism as I encountered it, self-focused goals are usually subordinated to communal-environmentalist *intent*. A major way some Pagans contrast themselves to New Agers concerns how effortfully they “weave” ritual insight “back” into action, and make it have real world effects. This is also a ritual goal as described by Robbins (2016). This is almost diametrically opposed to Heelas’ view of “gentle flows” in new spiritualities, which automatically carry benefits beyond the self. To ensure this weaving back, the possibility of rejecting the individualism-communalism binary must be yet again questioned.

The topic of cursing further calls for self-questioning. Some Pagans reject such “negative magic” categorically while others take more flexible karmic views of their ethics being context-dependent. Those who reject cursing often argue with the *rede*: *An it harm none do what ye will*. This means that one should only ever work with positive intent, and not engage in selfish cursing. The *rede* may be supplemented with the “threefold rule”, stating that any energy you send out may hit you back three times stronger – a cautionary elaboration on the creed. The focus on personal safety is interesting: again, while ultimately a personal decision, caring for the more-than-self is viewed as benefitting – or shielding from harm - the individual themselves. In karmic beliefs too, *disproportionate* negative magic is expected to rebound to the sender. As with “weaving back,” explicit questioning oneself helps karmic believers decide when to curse or bind.

Generally, the individualist implications of connectedness beliefs do not imply selfishness. In the domain of goals, especially, intent is supposed to be positive and ultimately go beyond the individual, contrasted to New Age stereotypes. Thus, pertaining to cursing or weaving back, it must be questioned. This is done through (non-)ego beliefs.

Know thyself: beliefs on the (non-)ego

While connectedness beliefs dissolve the individualism-communalism-binary, the possibilities of excessive self-focus in goal (through self-transcendence or selfish curses) and unnecessary communalism in method (through dogma) call for caution and explicit questioning. Here, I encountered two different (non-)ego belief categories in Pagan discourses: Jungian beliefs on the ego, and beliefs in spirit guides or other external beings. They both serve to receive wisdom (or “gnosis”) to question one’s *ego*’s knowledge, as well as its intent and methods, and further leave the possibility to embrace so-called moral “unfreedom.” Essentially, these ideas test the reconciliation of individualism and communalism-environmentalism.

Jungian ego beliefs, as described by informants, involve two aspects of the self: the lower self or ego, associated with intellectual knowing, and the higher self, associated with intuitive/subjective knowing. The higher self can also tune into and influence the “collective consciousness.” Again, the subjective and the universal are combined, general things may (better) be intuitively known. Tuning into the higher self and collective consciousness, for instance in ritual, can offer intuitive “lightbulb moments,” as Nica describes. Meanwhile, other Pagans connect with external beings. For Jack, this is a common occurrence, as he describes frequently working with fairy people he knows, and almost always with his shamanic totem. The concrete beings people work with differ - what they have in common, also with higher-self intuition, is offering wisdom beyond the ordinary (*ego*) self.

1. Questioning intent: As one part of wisdom, questioning one's intent is a central function of both (non-)ego belief categories, and here, they most clearly link to connectedness beliefs. Rosie described an experience in which "New Agers" were told to ask their deceased grandmothers for advice – the answers most received, Rosie argued, did not come from their relatives but from themselves: "do what feels right to *you*," instead of "call your mother." This extreme assumption of "unverified personal gnosis" (UPG) - subjective knowing as always true – is viewed skeptically. Rosie advocates self-questioning, ensuring that work on the self is "woven back" to use beyond the self. I would argue that my insight on where to kill my cigarette described above should be questioned on similar lines. (Non-)ego beliefs act as safeguards against excessive individualism in the realm of intent, but one also must know one's ego to understand how it might meddle in it – Rosie referred to a Quaker saying of the water tasting like the pipe. Being the metaphorical pipe, it's useful to know one's taste and how it influences the apparent wisdom (water) one receives. Again, work on the self can serve communal-environmentalist goals.

In Jungian questioning, primacy is often given to the sensorial as it relates to the higher self – Rosie explained the decision to use her bare finger, as opposed to wands, in magic with the feeling she gets using it: through it, she knows it as likely not coming from her ego. In the cigarette story, my decision was likewise intuitive, rather than resulting out of intellectual deliberation, and so where my insights from the Ostara labyrinth. While UPG is questioned, Mosurinjohn and Watts' experiential epistemologies are used, albeit skeptically. This also connects to the concept of integrity, which features in the section on small-scale action below: it stresses not just the importance of knowing one's true self, but also acting in accordance with it, for magical efficacy. This is a different conception of the true self than described by Mosurinjohn and Watts: in these Pagan beliefs, the true self usually wants to enact some beneficial change beyond the individual - much like experiential epistemologies inform people of communal-environmentalist goals rather than merely individualist ones. This, of course, also reflects the mentioned beliefs on human nature.

Those working with guides likewise consult them to question their egos and intents – as Jack describes it:

I've done curses on people to harm them when I have found out that they are a child abuser or a rapist, or I've thrown curses at people who killed gay people or - that type of thing, you know. And nothing's ever, ever come back at me. And I feel that there is a real danger of ego in this, that you know what's best sort of thing. I do feel that I'm incredibly lucky I never, ever work alone.

As higher-self intuition helps some people question their egos, external beings help others. As Jack's example shows, this concerns not just the questioning of "weaving back" but also cursing – both these practices safeguard against the possibility of excessive individualism in method.

2. Questioning method: As another part of wisdom, both higher selves and external beings also help to question excessive communalism in method, such as dogmas. Rosie described some tendency of unnecessary rules and myth in Pagan circles which must be questioned. As mentioned above, Jack frequently critiqued dogma as complicating work with deities. This is illustrated by him talking about the old Pagan dogma of Goddesses only being able to speak through women:

I find it really limiting, like if I've gone to a ritual that [works] with the goddess Brigid, at Imbolc or something (...) and she wants to speak through me, I feel that she wants to speak through me. Or I feel that she wants to move me around and throw me around, or do whatever it is that she wants to do - if I'm in that really strict sort of situation, I can't do that. I have to hold it back and I have to say 'no, no, no,' so you're denying this deity what it wants to do, or I'm denying it myself. And that's just not right, I don't think.

What may be called a Queer critique of certain Paganisms' heteronormativity is given spiritual meaning - note, again, the primacy given to intuitive knowledge here. Likewise, dogma may be critiqued from a Jungian point of view, the idea being that, with excessive rules, people have a much harder time letting go, and accessing their higher selves and collective consciousness. Again, (non-)ego ideas may keep the individualist excesses of the goal in check, but also the communal excesses of methods.

Both questioning methods and intents have strong implications for beliefs and actions and relate to Miller and Lukes' ideas on unfreedom. Despite the questioning of dogma described, many of the people I talked to (freely) embrace "unfreedom" in part: even though individuality is clearly given large importance, so is a certain stepping back, and following non-ego insight. Miller and Lukes describe that these internal constraints are seen as positive if they suppress parts of the self that are valued lowly – with Jungian beliefs, a rigorous questioning of intent literally constrains the ego-heavy *lower* self, often to ensure weaving back. Mary further argued for some structure in ritual counteracting ego-heavy self-consciousness:

The people in my coven - many of them, I would say - don't have the maturity and confidence to be able to focus, and humans need little focuses, they need tools. They need help. They need just little extra things, and I think a lot of this dogma- yeah, the props and things - they're not necessary, but they help certain people, as you say.

Comparing this with the previous insight on excessive structure keeping people from "letting go" their egos, the two must be balanced to assist arrival at the higher self. In questions of cursing or binding, too, the ego's influence is sought to be minimized, be it via higher selves or external beings.

Still, unfreedom may likewise inform people to employ *less* dogma – in Jack's story about Brigid, a less structured ritual was the Goddess's wish, and the rule-abiding self was freely suppressed. Unfreedom can take all kinds of forms – question one's intent or method and/or arguing for either more individualism or communalism-environmentalism. Crucially, it is something people freely engage in – as Miller and Lukes point out, it cannot be positioned in opposition to individual freedom. This may be especially true in Pagan settings, in which this "unfreedom" is strongly connected to intuition and resulting constraints on individualism are not perceived as dogmatic. They do not originate in the ego, and neither are they universally applied across people as dogmas. Rather, they are a way to allow those parts of the self that one values to inform one's actions.

(Non-)ego beliefs have implications on environmentalist action, as will surface below – the concept of guidance and Jungian intuition help people know what specifically they can best do for the cause. Questions on the ego also connect to the last class of beliefs described here, which concern processes.

The art of the possible: beliefs on processes

As human nature beliefs describe a fundamentally positive view of humanity, process beliefs describe positive views of the future – what unites them is their tendency towards hope. Process beliefs may most obviously link the value reconciliation described with environmentalist action. Both the Aquarian theory and the Gaia hypothesis as the two process beliefs at hand have been described above, since they already apply strongly to individualism and communalism-environmentalism by themselves. However, they both sacralize the reconciliation of these values as well.

A rather brief note suffices on Aquarius: the idea is less strictly individualist as might be initially assumed. Take this Facebook comment by Nica:

Greater harmony will lift us esoterically into this new age of communication and greater understanding. Aquarius is an air sign: an increase in depth of thought and strong desire to share these ideas and connect with each other. Get 'talking' on all levels.

While Aquarius signifies individual freedom, it does not take the individual as its ultimate goal – instead, communication is increased. Penny Billington emphasized the Covid crisis, and the way it re-emphasized the value of community for her, as altering her Aquarian hopes, stating that after years of waiting for the “age of individualization,” she now looks at things with more of a “druid balance” of individualism and communalism. As described, crises tend to be seen as opportunities to learn.

The ostensibly very communal-environmental Gaia hypothesis, conversely, can have individualist undercurrents. The planet having a tendency towards self-healing, and environmental activists serving to facilitate this process, allows for an immense number of acceptable methods - the notion that “every single action counts” was common. Still, the hypothesis does discourage some things: As environmentalism is, effectively, the attempt to heal the planet, it can be placed under the idea of Pagan *healing*. In healing, the notion of magic as the “art of the possible” surfaces. Whether one tries to heal others, themselves, or the planet, magic is never about stopping or reversing a process, as described by AI. When one assists a dying person, intending to keep them alive is seen as ego-heavy – Pagan healing is about easing their crossing-over. Likewise, in environmentalism, while many things are accepted and encouraged, a certain unfreedom is yet again embraced when it comes to ego-heaviness. Nica said in connection to this: “Above all I 'listen' for what is possible and how best to influence universal, collective consciousness and awareness trends.” Here, questioning one’s intent is directly related to process beliefs. In a moot on environmentalism, the consensus also arose that binding or cursing individuals harming the planet is futile – the problem is too large to concentrate on that - it is better to use one’s energy working with the processes already happening. Fundamentally, still, process beliefs in environmentalism mean that many useful things are possible to do, and that the planet already does self-heal. While you may consult spirit guidance or Jungian intuition to choose from the pool of possibility and counteract the ego, the choice is ultimately up to you and your intuition.

This produces hope. Using human nature beliefs, and reminiscent of Weberian enchantment, many Pagans argue for their faith’s usefulness in guiding people back to environmentalism. Here, it is expected that, unlike pure scientific rationalism, Paganism makes people hopeful for positive change and thus inspires action. The reconciliation of

individualism and communalism-environmentalism itself, as well as the four belief classes described, help this process. These connections are described in this article's final section.

Before moving there, it is useful to recap the position the described spiritual beliefs have in this narrative: while they all describe discursive trends among my informants' which give sacralized meaning to the reconciliation of individualism with communalism-environmentalism, they likewise make this reconciliation possible in the first place: human nature and process beliefs allow for undogmatic and ego-light environmentalism, while connectedness and (non-)ego beliefs transcend the two values and then double-check this transcendence. As stated, these beliefs contribute to Pagan hope and action.

Let's not do the awfulness: hope and environmentalist action

Quickly after arriving in Totnes, I meet Mary at the 'Leechwell' whose water is believed to have healing properties by various local faith groups. Mary describes the moon rituals she and other Pagans have been performing there twice monthly since Covid: sending unwanted things out into the water – which connects to the ocean - on the dark moon, for the sea creatures to deal with, and replacing them with positive things on the full moon, sent out into the ocean to stay. 'Because of Covid,' Mary says, 'and the hope, you know, we've seen people notice nature - we realized it was so important to try and keep them thinking like that, rather than just slipping back into their old ways. This is such an opportunity. We all recognized that opportunity and thought, oh, what can we do?'

Mary's moon rituals exemplify the value *hope* has for my informants, as well as its role in motivating environmentalist action. Below, the described value reconciliation, as well as the four spiritual ideas, are explicitly considered in relation to hope as well as spiritual enchantment. Expanding on Mosurinjoh and Watts' idea of enchantment as more accurately describing faiths than macropolitical lenses can, it will be shown that Pagan enchantment, via hope as a motivator for action, can be used to *intentionally* counter the status quo, rather than merely coping with it. Enchantment is understood here as a reflection of the described value system: individually experienced but leading to communal motivation, increasing hope through spiritual means. After describing hope in Paganism as I encountered it, the environmentalist actions resulting from it are outlined, focusing on idealist change and small-scale action, which are both part of the described moon rituals as well.

Paganism and hope

Sliwinski (2012) argues that hope motivates people to put their values into action, which is reflected in Mary's description of the moon rituals above. According to Sliwinski, it depends on several factors, including *trust* in what is hoped for. As noted, Pagan spiritual ideas do not only reconcile individualism with communalism-environmentalism: trusting them also fosters hope. As will be shown, this hope, as well as the resulting environmentalist actions, bear the mark of the described Pagan value reconciliation.

Fundamentally, the underlying value reconciliation itself fosters hope. As noted above, the combination of individual methods toward shared goals itself leads to a "whatever works"

attitude and opens a vast array of methods to help the cause. Rosie talked about this specifically in connection to magic:

If we can offer an additional mode of (possibly) achieving material change, we help build hope, which makes it more likely more people will engage, and then it will work. In addition, of course, to the fact that magic may work too!

Magical modes for change work mundanely too, as they allow people more possibilities of environmentalist action than pure scientism could. While Rosie's quote concerns extending hope to others, this also works for oneself, and the idea of ritual re-connecting more experienced Pagans to enchantment and hope is commonly expressed in Pagan discourses.

Trust as a predictor for hope surfaces explicitly in the context of process beliefs and the notion of the “art of the possible.” Trusting the process is seen as superior to trying to stop it, which is why “ego-heavy” actions and intent are discouraged. For many other actions, it is trusted that one’s work will ultimately end up serving beneficial ends. Human nature beliefs also help here, as people fundamentally are viewed as capable of serving common goals with the right intent. Notions of crises, including the pandemic, as opportunities, even part of plans, reconnecting people to their earth-caring and communal capacities further helps this hopeful rhetoric, and Mary arguing for the Leechwell rituals as strengthening the heightened nature connection the pandemic brought is a part of this. Sliwinski noted that material changes alter values and hope, and this is certainly true for Covid. Importantly, though, the planet’s self-healing must not mean humanity’s survival, as we are merely one part of nature. However, most Pagans I talked to, reflecting human nature beliefs, see strong possibilities of changing the collective consciousness and reconnecting people to a harmonious way of living on the planet. The awareness that humanity is ultimately not of importance to Gaia is counter-acted with human nature ideas. As action (with the right intent) is not futile, the pressing need of human action is reinforced – Pagan hope clearly connects to environmentalist action via human nature and process beliefs.

Perhaps less obviously, connectedness beliefs also strengthen hope. Phoebe once described the 100th monkey effect, which is the idea that, once a certain number of individuals independently engage an idea, it will spread to the larger group. Phoebe stated that if she feels overwhelmed by the world’s problems, she works on raising her own consciousness, as it will influence the collective consciousness. Again, trust in Pagan ideas fosters hope, and in turn action.

Next to trust, Sliwinski (2012) sees dealing with conflicting information as crucial for hope. Here, (non-)ego questioning plays a role. Jack told me a story of enchantment during a protest camp, which illustrates this:

I don't know if there's video footage of it, of people protesting and these wild horses suddenly appearing. And even though it didn't stop that particular protest, it brought so much hope and heart to all the protesters (...). When you're doing magic to try to stop something from being built or being destroyed, (...) it might not be what actually is needed at that time. Maybe that road has to happen. But the power in those horses coming along made every single person that was on that protest (...) so much stronger and able to carry on and go to other protests. You know to go, 'the Gods are with us.'

Enchantment is seen as reinforcing hope, and hope leads to action. As Jack had questioned the use of stopping that road in connection to greater processes, the enchanting appearance of horses strengthened his hope, and motivated the protestors to further action. While the function of magic can also be questioned on an intellectual level, it appears to be through these sensorial and intuitive means that hope, and the according action, is most often restored, thus mirroring the intuitive focus of non-ego practices generally.

Such experiences of protest enchantment may also be consciously produced by Pagans. Rosie's story of the ritually charged ball of wool during a protest is one instance in which enchantment, and hope, is extended towards others. Whereas Mosurinjohn and Watts' (2021) enchantment in new spiritualities does not have explicit communal-environmentalist ends, instead appearing self-focused, this hopeful Pagan enchantment is closer to Bartolini et al.'s notion, who named offering hope as a key strength of political spiritualities. Adding onto Mosurinjohn and Watts' valuable insights on the topic, the present case illustrates that enchantments may consciously *counter* the status quo, rather than merely help people cope with it. Pagan enchantment, despite being individually felt, frequently fosters communal hopes—accordingly reflecting the general value system described. Further, it should never remain at the individual level, but taken to action. Tabitha, a moot member, made an interesting distinction between ritual and prayer which fits this discussion:

(...) having good intentions can certainly improve the quality of people's actions. Ritual, as I understand it, is supposed to inspire actions, rather than being sent out into the ether and left to work for itself (which is my understanding of prayer).

Pagan enchantment works if it inspires action, changes habits and the status quo - if it is “woven back,” to use a term used earlier. As described, hope (as well as trust and dealing with conflicting information) plays a major role in this. In the last part of this article, a more detailed description of the kinds of actions that arise out of enchantment and hope, informed by the described Pagan value system, is given.

Pagan hope and environmentalist action

I encountered two trends of environmentalist action in the Pagan context: idealism and small-scale action. While they are motivated by enchantment and hope, they themselves also foster it, so that the two reinforce each other. To reiterate, almost all kinds of environmentalist action are permissible in most Pagan worldviews - generally, however, preferred Pagan action will fall under these categories and some options are discouraged, such as unproportioned cursing or binding, transcendence, or excessive dogma, as these are believed to imply excessive individualism in goal or communalism-environmentalism in method.

Idealism and small-scale action are both parts of “everyday utopias” (Sliwinski 2016) which are themselves part of the Pagan toolkit, as manifested in methods like modelling – small-scale and idealist actions cannot be separated here. However, as Pagan action as I encountered it partly goes beyond the notion of everyday utopia, especially concerning small-scale action, the topic will be outlined using the two notions separately.

1. Idealism: Idealism is taken in opposition to materialism here. However, not many Pagans I met would be content with their efforts ending with changed minds - the assumption is, of course, that this leads to a change in the world at large. Looking at Tabitha's distinction of prayer and ritual, this also includes one's own mind - here, connectedness beliefs surface. Most importantly, however, idealism is extended to others, and to a task of re-enchanting them

and offering a hopeful complementation to gloomy scientific facts on the climate crisis. Again, Pagan enchantment is a communal undertaking targeting explicit change. An exchange between Nica and Mary outlines the idealist tendency:

Nica: Ultimately by being who we are, and being more public in what we do, and sharing what we do more openly - which is something that we can do - we are actually helping people to remember their connection with the earth, and Covid has done that anyway. But I think you know it was happening before Covid. (...)

Mary: (...) I think it's a changing of minds. (...) it's more effective and more long lasting if you change people's minds than it will be for us to focus on changing something materially.

Changing minds is seen as more beneficial than changing matter. This connects to human nature beliefs, of course, with trust in the possibility for people to care about nature. Further, process beliefs play a role. Nica describes the role of Covid here while implying a process towards renewed environmentalism older than it. Process beliefs directly imply idealism, as it is deemed futile to stop or revert processes, and better to focus on dealing creatively with what cannot be changed. Rosie stated that, since we have the material means to live in harmony with the planet, what is missing is our will to do so. For that, rather than looking backwards to our hunter-gatherer ancestors, Rosie emphasized looking ahead: humanity does not want to go back to the ancient ways, because we “like it to be nice.” What must happen is redefining *what nice means*, since, if the climate crisis is not averted, things will become much less nice. This example clearly shows how beliefs in unstoppable processes, as well as fundamental human capacities for good, emphasize the use of changing one’s own mind as well as others’ - the latter manifested in Mary’s call to help people “keep thinking that way” with her moon rituals. Process and human nature beliefs, and their according hope, greatly motivate idealism.

In terms of concrete idealist measures, mundane and magical options exist. Mundane idealism relates largely to educating others on environmentalism or modelling environmental behavior. In modelling, the focus is on showing people possibilities of alternative living, thus very much embodying the idea of everyday utopia directed at public “audiences,” as well as Bartolini et al.’s idea of political spiritualities offering alternative visions. An example of this is the Landmatters permaculture community near Totnes, whose residents source a large part of their basic needs from the land. Jack’s questioning of heteronormative traditions described above is also an instance of idealism as direct education.

Next to mundane idealism, the magical method of open ritual exists, which non-Pagans can join to connect to nature. Rosie described its use as such:

If you look at climate change, it's like people are just too afraid to even open their minds to it, let alone open their hearts. (...) one of the things magical activism can offer is a sort of hope. (...) if you go and like really open yourself to the facts, it is really scary. (...) But if you go along to ritual where we're all skipping, going round, going, 'we love the earth, it is our planet, we love the earth, it is our home,' we are all singing the song - you know people will go away afterwards - and I think there is evidence of this - and they'll go away singing [that song].

Through hope, Pagan ritual is believed to offer an antidote to disregarding reality. Rosie then describes how post-ritual, participants – the “audience” - recall the song, and the community

singing it, while composting, and opt for the communal-environmental behavior. Rosie continues:

Actually, let's not do the awfulness. Let's do the hope. Let's do the hope and the joy and love and see if we can lure people in.

While mundane education is viewed as important, hope through magical enchantment as a more intuitive method is often deemed Paganism's major contribution to environmentalism, in complementation to science which often does "do the awfulness." This hope, as described by Rosie's example, produces actual behavioral change.

Born out of the described reconciliation, idealist action respects individualism. As described, helping people guide themselves back to environmental insights is often deemed more useful and longer lasting than imposing one's own insights on them. This is close to Robbins' (2016) ideas on ritual transcendence. Unlike Sage's (2009) ideas of necessary moral authoritarianism, Robbins explains how values may be fully realized in a ritual setting, and then influence the mundane realities of people without coercion. Tabitha's distinction of ritual and prayer, and Rosie's composting example, appear to agree. This view connects to non-ego beliefs, as it is in ritual that people can transcend their egos in order to access more universal ideas. Idealism respects individual ways of knowing, while discouraging dogma - or excessive communalism in method. Again, while many actions are permitted, some are generally rejected - even the moots are not to convert anyone, but to "put information in people's paths," in Rosie's words. Hope, through trust in benevolent processes and human nature, assumes that this information will be used individually towards shared goals.

Finally, while idealism is motivated by hope, it also fosters hope in return. Being able to do something, maybe especially in an overwhelming context like climate change, restores feelings of agency. In the quote above, Nica described modelling as "something they can do." This is also true for small-scale action, which is the second major trend in action, and the other main characteristic of everyday utopias. However, as will be shown, Pagan small-scale action may go beyond Sliwinski's notion in one crucial way.

2. *Small-scale action*: More than any other Pagan belief described, connectedness beliefs allow the possibility of local and individual actions carrying larger meaning - the song used in the Yule ritual exemplifies this: *let it begin with each step we take*. Again, this leads to an increased pool of possible actions, which increases hope and motivation to do these things. Small-scale action especially respects individualism in *doing* where idealism respects it in knowing. It doesn't matter how you know what to do, and what it is you do, as long as you do something for the communal-environmentalist cause. *Every single action counts*. And again, while hope motivates the action, the action in turn fosters hope, as everybody may assist the process.

It should be noted that idealist and small-scale actions are not mutually exclusive - Phoebe's use of the 100th monkey is idealist just as much as it is small-scale, as it concerns working on her own mind, and in addition to being performed in a small group, Mary's Leechwell rituals frequently concern idealist change. This section concentrates on the small-scale aspects of actions, where the previous one looked at the idealism in some of the same ones.

As idealism should not stay at changed minds only, most Pagans are likewise not content with small-scale actions producing merely small-scale effects. This especially

concerns individual actions, which may easily fall into New Age self-transcendence. As stated above, self-work should be “woven back” to actual behavior change in the mundane – but, as described in the section on individualism, self-work may well clear one’s mind for communal work. Once more evoking Tabitha’s and Robbins’ (2016) ideas on ritual, things work if they inspire action. Unlike Heelas’ gentle flows, a goal-directedness of communalism-environmentalism – or intent – is usually part of Paganism. Rosie, when asked about assumed automaticities, answered with a characteristic Pagan open-mindedness:

(...) diversity of practice is always good, each to his own, we do what works for us etc. But, having said that, "the proof of the pudding is in the eating". If contemplative work makes someone more in tune with the world, makes them a "better" person, more loving and caring and generous, then that's great. But what I've seen in some New Age circles is people who're very committed to meditating and raising their own consciousness who nevertheless continue to act in rather selfish and egotistical ways. I'd say this for all spiritual paths. It's only working if you can see the results manifesting in how people actually are in the world.

Rosie judges practice by its actual effects, and thus one should question oneself (and one’s ego). This, of course, is a limitation to ideas that *every single action counts*. Ultimately, in the domain of goals, communalism-environmentalism prevails – and if intent goes beyond the individual, effects are likely to do that as well.

Beyond Sliwinski’s idealist understanding of everyday utopias, there are small-scale actions within Paganism which do not require an audience. Phoebe’s use of the 100th monkey effect, for example, can be done entirely in private, as can things like cooking or knitting, if they are conceptualized as magic. Of course, rituals, such as the ones at the Leechwell, rarely require those they shall influence present as an “audience” (though audience-based “ceremonies” exist, and ritual may, as described, be intended to influence non-Pagan participants). Similar to this works the concept of integrity, which assumes that magic is made by one’s true will, and not acting in accordance with it undermines one’s magic. Rosie puts it as such:

(...) we make magic via our True Will, and if we're not acting in the mundane world in accordance with our magical intent then we risk undermining our magic. And of course on a mundane level too, if we're shouting our support for XR then flying halfway round the world for our holidays, we're not exactly setting up a good role model that people could follow.

Rosie outlines both audience-based education, but also magical integrity as parts of small-scale action. It is seen as magically important to know one’s true will and embody it in daily life. Importantly, as outlined previously, the true will, unlike Mosurinjohn and Watts’ notion, is assumed to be communal-environmentalist. Rosie further touched upon the notion of “el mundo bueno” - if people start living in “the good world” within the status quo, it will be strengthened against “el mundo malo.” This is a direct formulation of audience-less everyday utopias.

Likewise, the idea of external beings giving people specific paths to follow emphasizes small-scale action without needing an audience. Dragon talked about getting guidance on what to do to help Gaia’s processes, while Pagan teacher Josephine McCarthy, in a YouTube talk, emphasized “unglamorous” acts like picking up branches in a forest before a storm as the kind

of action resulting out of connections to spirits of place. Both beliefs in guidance and integrity are further manifestations of unfreedom – less valued parts of the self are freely suppressed in favor of the greater good. It seems that, with Pagan beliefs, idealism is not the only way to go, and change can happen in more hidden ways, too. Sliwinski’s ideas on everyday utopias are expanded on by this, allowing for even more possibilities, and accordingly action, arising out of hope and enchantment.

To recap, the preferred environmentalist actions are motivated by the hopeful rhetoric of the described value system and informed by its balancing of individualism and communalism-environmentalism for my informants. These actions also further reinforce the hope that motivated them, as many – though not all – options are seen as beneficial in combatting the climate crisis. They further go beyond Sliwinski’s idea of everyday utopia as they do not require audiences to influence the wider world.

Conclusion

This article looked at the apparent paradox - and its reconciliation - of the described Pagan value system, as well as its implications for environmentalist action and hope. Using Robbins’ idea of stable pluralism, the sacralized values of individualism and communalism-environmentalism are reconciled by relegating them to environmentalist method and goals, respectively. While existing literature overwhelmingly focuses on new spiritualities’ individualism, this study found a way to reconcile individualism with intentional communalism-environmentalism, as well as expanding the category of new spiritualities towards intentional communalism-environmentalism – beyond transcendence – in the first place.

In my informants’ Paganism, this reconciliation is reflected in and made possible by four kinds of spiritual beliefs: those on human nature, connectedness, the (non-)ego, and processes. These beliefs and general reconciliation allow many possible methods to meet relatively universal goals, which in turn leads to environmentalist *hope*. Following Sliwinski, this hope motivates action, with two trends in environmental action – idealism and small-scale action – predominating. These ideas also lead to a Pagan enchantment as a spiritual cause for hope, which has an explicit communal-environmentalist bent. This expands on Mosurinjohn and Watts’ more individualist understanding of the concept, as it strives to change the status quo rather than merely cope with it. As individual enchantment, via hope, motivates actions supporting shared goals, it reflects the reconciliation of individualism and communalism-environmentalism, and links it to hope and action. Through these insights, countering the present state of knowledge based on interaction with a specific group of people, this study’s anthropological perspectives surface most explicitly.

Two limitations should be discussed. First, as mentioned, a micropolitical way of looking at religion was employed here considering the general macropolitical trends in analyzing new spiritualities. Still, following Graeber, it would be interesting for another study to consider political-economic processes, however. For instance, I encountered interesting discussions on “New Age capitalism,” Pagan markets, and whether “ethical” consumer behavior is part of environmentalist integrity or not. Further, the presented ideas on hope could be more explicitly explored through a macro-political lens of agency, considering the sometimes-overwhelming hopelessness of climate change. Though interesting, these ideas were beyond this study’s scope.

Second, it should be emphasized that modern Paganism is extremely eclectic, and the presented findings can certainly not be generalized beyond the presented group. On one hand, most of my informants are largely influenced by Celtic beliefs, meaning that their understandings

cannot be extended to other faiths labelled Pagan, such as those derived from Norse or non-European traditions. It would be interesting for another study to consider a different kind of environmentally concerned Paganism and its value system. Of course, even within my pool of informants, none of my findings apply in the same way to everyone, as they concern discursive and spiritual trends, and are not set in stone.

Despite these limitations, this study manages to solve the paradox of a new spirituality with explicit values beyond the individual in explaining the presented value system. Using Sliwinski's ideas, its insights on hope combine Robbins' ideas on value with action. In these ways – explaining the sacralizing of *intentional* communalism-environmentalism and its reconciliation with individualism, as well as implications for hope and action – this study expands the notions of “new spiritualities.” Beyond scholarly relevance, the importance of hope as an antidote to disillusionment in environmentalism, as told by my informants, may not apply to Pagans only. Instead, it could inspire ways to combat activist burnout and increase motivation to act for everyone, working in tandem with, not opposition to, scientific fact. Spiritual enchantment is a major catalyst for hope to my informants, but the hope resulting out of Pagan ideas – for instance of a human potential for harmony with nature and a real possibility to affect positive change – do not necessitate belief in the supernatural, and can, in true Pagan fashion, take any manifestation that suits one.

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Popular Summary

In anthropological literature, so-called new spiritualities – often called New Age in everyday language – are mostly seen as largely self-focused, offering spiritual awakening to individuals. This study, however, looked at a faith which, next to this typical individualism, has explicit communal and environmentalist values. There is an apparent paradox about this – for instance, can you convince others to care for the planet while rejecting dogma on individualist grounds?

This study argues that the values of individualism and communalism-environmentalism are reconciled here by relegating individualism to environmentalist method, and communalism-environmentalism to goals. This means that many different *methods* are believed to lead to the same shared *goals*. As a result, while it tolerates many different environmentalist actions, excessive communalism in method – such as dogma – and excessive individualism in goals – such as “transcending” oneself out of the climate crisis – are discouraged.

This reconciliation is further manifested in four spiritual beliefs. First, human nature beliefs assume a general human potential to care for others and the planet, meaning that explicit dogma is not necessary in fostering environmentally conscious behavior in others. Second, connectedness beliefs assume that work on the self carries effects for the wider world, and vice versa. This means that many individual environmentalist methods, with the right magical intent, work towards shared goals, and questions the opposition of individualism and communalism-environmentalism in itself. Third, (non-)ego beliefs assume the existence of insight beyond the ordinary self – through external spirit guides or the internal “higher” self – which may be used to question one’s intent and method. These beliefs essentially test action arising from connectedness beliefs, and ensure communalism-environmentalism in goal and individualism in method. Fourth, process beliefs assume that magic is not about stopping or reverting processes, but assisting beneficial ones and dealing with others creatively. Here, Gaia beliefs state that the planet is already self-healing. Again, a large number of methods towards assisting these set goals is allowed.

As these beliefs increase the possibilities of environmentalist action, they also foster hope in practitioners. This hopeful rhetoric is believed to set Paganism apart from scientific environmentalism, which is seen as important, but possibly scaring people off even engaging with the climate crisis. Hope instead motivates action, and manifests spiritually as “enchantment,” which is extended beyond the individual towards communal-environmentalist work. The preferred actions motivated by this hope are informed by the four beliefs and the underlying value reconciliation: broadly, they usually fall under small-scale (local and individual) action and idealism, the latter meaning changing minds rather than matter first. Idealism is used in ritual, as well as mundane education or modelling behavior, and can be seen as extending hope and enchantment to others. The relative ease of engaging in these actions again fosters hope, which once again leads to action.