

Part Four Humility

In his *An Animist Manifesto*, Harvey hits upon another concept central to animism: that human persons need to have some humility, in their relations with other humans, and in relation with the other-than-human persons.

Look, humans do things that apparently no other species on Earth have ever done, at least in this dimension: we use language to tell stories and communicate abstract information. We humans also manipulate the material world to a degree that no other species ever has, that we are aware of. Humans started doing this by regularly using sticks and rocks and bones as tools maybe as long as 3 million years ago, maybe much longer.

Since many other species have been observed using tools, maybe human persons weren't the first to do so—but the evidence so far is that we do so to a degree that no other species on this planet has ever done, and we've been doing so for quite a while. Which is not to say that species on other worlds haven't done this, too—just that we're really only aware right now of what's happened on this world.

But even if it is true that we are the only ones **HERE** and **NOW** to be doing these wondrous things, does that give us the right to lord it over the other-than-human persons with whom we share the world?

In fact, even if we are the **ONLY ONES IN THE ENTIRE UNIVERSE, IN ALL DIMENSIONS, EVER** to be doing these

wondrous manipulations of thought and material, would that impute some right to human persons to behave as assholes to everyone else we encounter?

I think that some WEIRD people would argue yes, or at least not argue no. Animists would definitely argue “NO.”

We have gifts that we have been granted, whether by deity or evolution or some other manner. Our abilities are ours, however they came about. We have these skills and talents and qualities...and we have responsibilities in relation to those gifts.

We need to have humility, because those abilities are not really our doing, and it can all go away.

We need to act responsibly, respectfully, and to use our gifts wisely, because there are other persons we have to live with on this Earth; we ignore them and our relationship with them at our peril.

And of course, that is a statement of values and not facts. Those are MY values, as an animist.

Hubris is apparently a common characteristic of humans.

-Some people think humans are gods, or nearly so; at the very least, specially created and intended by some deity/deities, that we are therefore special and privileged among the creatures of Earth, and maybe the universe.

- Some think that humans are powerful creatures, who can exercise control over the rest of nature at least with technology, if not with the power of their mind, or will, or spirit.

- Some think that humans are the universe's consciousness (divine or otherwise), and therefore that we are unique and special in the universe.

- Some think that humans are destined to greatness, to evolve to ever-greater levels of power and comprehension, to become deities ourselves one day, or to rise to unify with the universal Oneness.

Others, on the other hand, rather than putting humans on a metaphorical pedestal, put us at the lower end of the conceptual spectrum, as lower creatures living among the muck and the slime of the universe. They think that humans are among the weaker life forms on the planet, and perhaps in the universe (including other dimensions), that we live in a universe of Powers, and that we are small and weak among those Powers.

In that construction of our place in the cosmos, our actions always run the risk of drawing the ire of bigger and more powerful beings, including deities, who can crush us with only little effort, the way humans can crush pesky individual gnats or mosquitos.

And, of course, there are many in the middle, where humans are seen somewhere between the pinnacle and the basement. In this construction, we must also recognize that while humans have recently become a dominant player in the ecosystems of the Earth, we have always been subject to disease, illness, and even the vagaries of climate. There are known threats to our current WEIRD world-spanning civilization. Our technology and economy might save

us, but it might not. Pretty gutsy to gamble on that. And whether we survive or not, our acting without humility will end up harming lots of persons, both human and other-than-human. It already has; it is not inevitable that we continue to do so.

My understanding of animism strongly suggests that persons ought to practice humility. And by practice I do mean practice, just as I mean that persons should practice respect. For people from a WEIRD background, it doesn't come naturally, but it can be learned and cultivated.