

“I Am the Gracious Goddess”: Wiccan Analytic Theology

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Abstract: To date, the theology and practices of modern pagan religions have not been critically studied using the methods of analytic theology. I discuss some of the challenges presented by these religions for the analytic theologian, and present a possible methodology to address these challenges, based on interview. I then use this methodology to examine the Wiccan practice of “Drawing Down the Moon”, comparing it in particular to the Christian doctrine of incarnation, and considering its philosophical implications.

Despite growing study of neo-pagan religions in other academic disciplines,¹ contemporary philosophers of religion have shown virtually no interest in them at all. Other than a number of papers on the reasonableness of polytheism compared to monotheism,² philosophers generally ignore pagan religion as a viable system of belief. As far as I am aware, there has been nothing akin to an analytic theology of paganism. Nobody has sought to critically examine the actual beliefs and practices of particular pagan religious traditions through a philosophical lens.³

In this paper, I want to do two things. The first is to consider why neo-pagan religions are difficult to treat philosophically and to suggest a methodology for overcoming this. The second is to use this methodology to do some actual neo-pagan

¹ The field is too large to give a representative bibliography, but Pizza and Lewis (2009) gives a good overview of its general scope and state. See also the brief survey in Pearson (2001, 61–62).

² Gall (2001); Lataster and Philipse (2017); Eric Steinhart (2012; 2013) has defended “ordinal polytheism,” but as a philosophically derived possible belief rather than in relation to any particular religious traditions.

³ The closest I know of is Constance Wise’s comparison of Feminist Wicca and process thought (2008), in which she argues that process thought offers a coherent philosophical basis for Wicca. Her methodology is quite different from that of analytic theology, however. Her focus is more on the ethical and political aspects of Feminist Wicca, rather than the doctrinal, and she develops a somewhat non-realist understanding of the Wiccan deities as “sacred conventions.” This contrasts with the approach analytic theologians have taken to Christianity over the last couple of decades, focusing on doctrinal elements and interpreting them in a realist way, which is the approach I try to apply to Wicca in this paper. Feminist Wicca, moreover, is quite distinct from the Gardnerian Wicca that I focus on in this paper, as explained below.

analytic theology, focusing on one particular practice from one particular religious tradition: the ritual of Drawing Down the Moon in initiatory Wicca.

Neo-paganism and Wicca

Broadly speaking, neo-paganism is a cluster of new religious movements that draw their inspiration from mostly European pre-Christian religions. Some practitioners regard themselves as following genuinely ancient religions, while others regard themselves as constructing new religions that are partly inspired by antiquity.⁴

Probably the most well-known neo-pagan religion is Wicca.⁵ Wicca as it is known today was founded by Gerald Gardner (1884–1964), some time between the late 1930s and early 1950s. Gardner claimed to have discovered, and been initiated into, a coven in the New Forest, which preserved an ancient pre-Christian religion. However, if this coven did exist, it had probably been founded only a couple of decades earlier. Gardner himself founded a new coven at Bricket Wood in Hertfordshire, which can be thought of as the first coven of modern Wicca. Here, Gardner and his fellow group members—particularly Doreen Valiente, the High Priestess of the coven—developed the rituals that would define the religion. Gardner’s books—the novel *High Magic’s Aid* (1949) and accounts of his supposed discovery of Wicca in *Witchcraft Today* (1954) and *The Meaning of Witchcraft* (1959)—publicised the religion and attracted considerable interest. New covens began to form.

Since then, Wicca has splintered. In the 1960s and 70s, a distinct system of Wiccan covens was established by Alex Sanders (1926–88) and his wife, Maxine Sanders. Calling himself the “king of the witches,” Alex Sanders was a highly public figure who attracted many followers, but while his form of Wicca was deeply influenced by Gardner’s, it had distinctive features of its own, particularly a stronger emphasis upon ceremonial magic.⁶ These two traditions—“Gardnerian Wicca” and “Alexandrian Wicca”—have persisted ever since.⁷ However, they should not be regarded as wholly distinct groups, like separate Christian denominations. Some practitioners, notably Vivianne Crowley, one of the most prominent Wiccan speakers and writers today, are initiated into both traditions.

Both Gardnerian and Alexandrian Wicca are initiatory religions. They are practised in “covens,” small groups of (theoretically) up to a dozen members. There is no attempt at active recruitment—new members are usually people who have

⁴ This is a point of contention between (some) neo-pagans and academics and between different neo-pagans themselves. See, for example, Hutton (2000).

⁵ One of the first studies of Wicca and related movements was Adler (1981), while the first major academic work on the subject by a non-adherent was Luhrmann (1989), though subsequent scholars and Wiccans alike have found fault with Luhrmann’s reductionist, unsympathetic stance towards the religion (Pearson 2001, 53–56). The standard work on the history and modern practice of paganism in England is Hutton (1999).

⁶ On the distinctive features of Sanders’ form of Wicca, see Hutton (1999, 331–32).

⁷ The name “Alexandrian” (as opposed to the more obvious “Sandersian”)—was chosen by Stewart Farrar (see <http://www.wicpagtimes.com/sanders.htm>) presumably in part because of the connotations of the ancient city of Alexandria and its Hermetic and neoplatonic associations.

sought out a coven on their own initiative. New covens are set up by members of existing covens who leave to establish their own. Each coven can therefore, in theory, trace its lineage back to earlier covens, with some being able to do so back to Gardner's Bricket Wood coven in the 1940s.

There are also important distinctions between British and American Wicca. The religion spread to the United States in the 1960s, where it quickly took on new forms. In particular, a version known as Feminist Wicca became popular in the 1970s, developing the (already strong) emphasis on female divinity in the religion to the point of excluding the male element altogether. Another significant development was the emergence in the 1970s and 80s of solitary Wicca, a wholly non-initiatory version of the religion.⁸

Today, it is uncertain how many Wiccans there are, partly because of terminological fluidity ("Wicca" overlaps with other neo-pagan religions), partly because phenomena such as solitary Wicca are inherently hard to quantify, and partly because of the secretive, non-proselytising nature of the religion. A global figure of somewhere in the high hundred thousands is usually given, but it is only an estimate.⁹

In this paper, I am going to focus on British-based, initiatory, Gardnerian Wicca.

Methodology

Analytic theology is the examination of religious doctrines or practices using the tools of analytic philosophy. Typically, this involves engagement with texts, broadly of two kinds: foundational texts such as scriptures or creeds that set out what the religion teaches, and theological texts that seek to expound those teachings, often using philosophical terminology or methods.

This is hard to do with Wicca for three related reasons. The first is that, like most neo-pagan movements, Wicca is focused on rituals and narratives, not doctrine. A Christian theologian can consider "the doctrine of the Trinity" or "the doctrine of the Atonement" as clusters of beliefs that are held by adherents of that religion, and can consider the content of those beliefs simply as truth-claims that may or may not be true. Wicca does not have doctrines of this kind, at least not overtly. It has, instead, rituals and narratives. Wiccans have beliefs about these rituals and narratives, and about the broader metaphysical realities they reflect, but these beliefs cannot really be separated from them. There are no Wiccan "doctrines" about the central figures of the Goddess and the God, for example. Instead, there are myths and stories about them, and there are rituals that honour them. Whatever individual Wiccans believe about them emerge from these myths and stories.

The second reason is that Wicca is highly resistant to official formulation of anything, which means that whatever beliefs Wiccans may have that correspond to

⁸ On solitary Wicca, see Berger (2019).

⁹ For a breakdown of estimates based on country, see https://www.adherents.com/Na/Na_666.html#4222.

doctrines in other religions, they do not want to write them down. Margot Adler, for example, characterises this attitude like this:

If you go far enough back, all our ancestors were Pagans. They practiced religions that had few creeds or dogmas. There were no prophets. There were myths and legends, but no scriptures to be taken literally. These religions were based on the celebration of the seasonal cycles of nature. They were based on what people did, not what people believed. It is these polytheistic religions that are being revived and re-created by Neo-Pagans today. (Adler 1981, preface)

This uncodified nature is not simply a feature that neo-paganism happens to have. It is part of the ideology of neo-paganism, a deliberate way in which adherents distinguish themselves from the monotheistic religions and especially Christianity. As the Farrars note:

Wicca is . . . a natural and spontaneous religion, in which every coven is a law to itself, and rigid forms are avoided. Nothing is quite the same for two Circles running—and quite right too, or Wicca would fossilize. (Farrar and Farrar 1984, 15-16)

So there is no equivalent of a Wiccan Bible or Shahada, let alone a catechism, setting out what Wiccans are supposed to believe, and there could not be one. There is no Wiccan Augustine or Aquinas, reflecting on these doctrines and incorporating them into a philosophical system. So any prospective Wiccan analytic theologian has very little material to work with compared to her Christian or Muslim or Hindu counterparts.

The third problem, which applies to initiatory Wicca in particular, is that it is inherently secretive. It is an esoteric religion, practised only in covens, with its traditions being passed orally between members of those covens. When people join a coven, they take oaths of secrecy about what the group does. So while many Wiccan rituals and other practices are publically known, others are not. This again severely limits the material available to any non-Wiccan (such as myself) wishing to study the religion, and limits what any scholar who is herself Wiccan can say about it (Pearson 2001). Moreover, the prejudice against “witches” in much of society means that many Wiccans keep their faith entirely secret, further limiting what we can know about what Wiccans believe.

It may seem, then, as though Wicca is a set of practices without any interpretation of those practices, and each individual is left to herself to interpret them as she likes. It is a religion without a theology. To a certain extent that is true. However, there are some broad agreements among Wiccans about how to interpret their practice, which could be loosely called a sort of common theology. Moreover, there are diverging trends of interpretation within Wicca, which might be called broad schools of thought—particularly between groups based in the UK and those based in the US. But, again, these are not formal groupings. What matters for our purposes is that Wicca theology does exist, but because it is rarely explicitly

articulated, it is largely inaccessible to outsiders and philosophers have not been able to engage with it.

I decided, therefore, that the best way to engage with Wicca philosophically was by interview, inspired to some extent by the practice sometimes known as “philosophic sagacity” described by Odera Oruka. Using this method, developed to study philosophical ideas in pre-literate communities, particularly in Africa, the philosophical researcher identifies individual critical thinkers (“traditional sages”) who are not themselves philosophers, and works with them to develop clear philosophical views that can be written down and examined (Bodunrin 1981, 162). Reflecting on this, P.O. Bodunrin writes:

The product of the joint enquiry of the traditional sage and the trained philosopher is a new phenomenon. Both the traditional sage and the trained philosopher inevitably enter the dialogue with certain presuppositions. What they come out with is a new creation out of their reflections on the beliefs previously held by them. But, and this is the important point to remember, the philosopher and the sage are “doing their own thing”. (Bodunrin 1981, 168)

That is, this is not ethnography—recording people’s beliefs—but conscious philosophical reflection upon those beliefs. I decided to adapt this approach by interviewing one prominent Wiccan representative on the subject of one particular practice and the beliefs surrounding it, allowing me to keep the focus as tight as possible on the philosophical interpretation without getting drawn into broader ethnographical questions such as how other individuals and groups within Wicca may differ on this matter.

The interviewee was Dr Christina Oakley-Harrington, a High Priestess of a London-based coven. Oakley-Harrington is a former academic herself, a medieval historian, who is familiar with Christian history and doctrine as well as the history and practices of Wicca and other mystery traditions, and she is a prominent figure in the British Wiccan community. The subject we discussed was the ritual known as Drawing Down the Moon.

I had several aims in this approach:

- (1) To understand what the Drawing Down the Moon ritual consists of, how it is done, and what happens.
- (2) To understand the different views Wiccans take of what is happening in this ritual.
- (3) To understand Oakley-Harrington’s own views of what is happening in this ritual.
- (4) To discuss possible theological perspectives on the ritual, particularly Christian parallels, to understand better how the Wiccan theology relates to Christianity.
- (5) To discuss philosophical implications of the ritual, to see what kinds of philosophical commitments it implies and how receptive Oakley-Harrington would be to those commitments.

One individual's views may differ from another's, of course, and one may misinterpret another's. So one should be careful not to assume that one person speaks for the whole religion. But the same goes for a theologian of any religion. In our discussion, Oakley-Harrington was careful to distinguish between her own views and those of others, but did point out that she thought much of what she was saying to be common, if unarticulated, belief:

I'm joining up the dots of what Wiccans have always said, but it is me joining up those dots [. . .] but I don't think I'm drawing the lines too far. I feel like I'm on solid ground. But it wouldn't surprise me if you went to a lot of Wiccans and they'd say, "Well, I've never heard it put that way before. She's right, but we don't generally . . . I haven't joined that up." That's my disclaimer about me.¹⁰

In what follows, then, I will take Oakley-Harrington to be generally speaking for the particular Wiccan tradition she represents, giving her own theological and metaphysical understanding of the Drawing Down the Moon ritual, but with the caveat that it is still one person's interpretation of that tradition. The philosophical reflections I offer on this interpretation can therefore be regarded as an engagement with one particular version of Wicca. The extent to which other Wiccans find these reflections palatable might determine the extent to which they want to share the interpretation of Wicca on which they are based.

I should explain aim (4) in particular. My own expertise is in Christianity, particularly the doctrine of incarnation. Inevitably, then, I engage with doctrines of other religions by comparing them to those of Christianity. This arguably risks distorting Wiccan theology by imposing an alien framework of thought onto it.¹¹ But one might equally argue that doing analytic theology at all in the context of a non-monotheistic religion involves imposing alien categories on it. Analytic theology, as it is done today, is overwhelmingly concerned with Christianity. Analytic philosophy itself emerged from an intellectual tradition that had been almost entirely Christian for many centuries. And there is a positive reason for wanting to compare Wiccan theology to Christian. Analytic theologians have developed a wealth of resources for articulating and analysing doctrines. If we can clearly articulate how the beliefs or practices of other religions compare to those of Christianity, we can hope to adapt some of those resources to serve new purposes. This is why I chose the topic of Drawing Down the Moon, which, as we shall see, is similar in key respects to the Christian doctrine of incarnation.

¹⁰ Quotations from Christina Oakley-Harrington are taken from the otherwise unpublished interview that I conducted with her on 19 July 2019 in London.

¹¹ Note, though, that Wicca is not a pre-Christian religion, although it draws on pre-Christian religions. Modern initiatory Wicca emerged in the twentieth century, partly in conscious reaction to the dominant Christian ideology. So it has been partly shaped by a Christian context, despite the significant differences between the two religions. On the influence of Christianity upon the development of Wicca, see Pearson (2007). However, Pearson's focus in that work is on ritual and performative elements that Wicca took from some Christian groups, rather than any doctrinal influence.

In this paper I will quote extensively from the interview with Oakley-Harrington, to try to allow her voice to speak for itself, always aware that my own role in selecting which sections to quote and in interpreting them must distort what is said. But as noted above, a methodology like this one is inevitably a dialogue to which both participants contribute constructively, and this is particularly so in a case such as this when both have an academic background, even from different disciplines. So I have included not merely quotations from Oakley-Harrington alone but sections of her discussion with me, illustrating our joint roles in developing the ideas presented here. My role is not that of the ethnographer, seeking to set out an accurate, unbiased picture of what someone else believes. Rather, my role is that of the philosopher of religion, interested above all in the *ideas*, how they relate to each other, whether they can be rationally held, and what would follow if they were true. And throughout the process, I was struck by how readily Oakley-Harrington engaged with my approach to the subject. She was quite willing to consider my analyses of what she was saying and agree or disagree with them, including my comparisons to Christian doctrine. I was surprised to find that, in the course of our conversation, Wicca emerged as *more* amenable to the approach of analytic theology than I had anticipated. Despite the religion's reputation for a lack of clarity and a disavowal of anything resembling "orthodoxy," Oakley-Harrington was happy to give definitive answers to questions about what she believed, even when the terminology was overtly philosophical or Christian-influenced. That, of course, may simply reflect her interpretation, and other Wiccans might be less willing to accept these categories of thought. But one could say the same of Christianity too. The fact that there are many members of a religion either explicitly or implicitly hostile to analytic theology does not affect the legitimacy of other members' willingness to engage in it.

This relates, in my view, to a more general feature of analytic theology. In the literature on analytic theology, the focus tends to be on its role as a form of theology, as something done by religious believers and its benefits or drawbacks from a religious point of view.¹² I am inclined to focus more on its role as a form of philosophy, in particular as a method of clarifying our intuitions about philosophical topics. For example, the work of analytic theologians on the Christian doctrine of incarnation does not merely illuminate a theological doctrine. It also concerns what it means to be human, something of interest to philosophers in general. Even if nobody actually believed the doctrine of incarnation, it might still be worth considering as a sort of thought experiment to flush out our intuitions about human nature, for example.

The same applies here. In the worst-case scenario, the interpretation of the Drawing Down the Moon ritual that I present here is not an accurate reflection of what any real Wiccan actually believes but a clumsy interpretation of the religion through a distorting lens of Enlightenment rationalism and Christian doctrine. Even if that is so, the ideas themselves might still be worthy of philosophical consideration. The degree to which readers find the interpretation given here palatable may reflect the degree to which they are prepared to accept the

¹² See, for example, Crisp (2011a), Abraham (2013), Wood (2014), and Arcadi (2017).

philosophical implications it has, and that is of philosophical value whether or not they or anyone else actually believes this interpretation. We can use the account of Drawing Down the Moon as a thought-experiment: do we think that what is described is *coherent*, and what does that tell us about our philosophical intuitions?

The ritual

Drawing Down the Moon¹³ is one of the most dramatic Wiccan rituals, and it is regularly performed in initiatory covens.¹⁴ It focuses on the High Priestess and the High Priest, the two ritual leaders of the coven. Together, they perform a series of actions to invoke the Goddess to become present by entering into the body of the High Priestess. That is, the High Priestess actually becomes the Goddess, in some sense, and can interact with the other worshippers.¹⁵ In considering this ritual I will follow the usual practice of analytic theology in assuming, methodologically, the truth of the broad religious framework surrounding it. For the purposes of our discussion, the Goddess who is invoked is a real entity with objective existence, and something of metaphysical—and not merely psychological—significance occurs during the ritual. I want to see whether the notion that the High Priestess becomes the Goddess is intelligible given these assumptions, and if so, what its truth conditions might be.

As with most elements of Wicca, the exact form of the ritual varies from group to group (or individual to individual). Wiccans preserve these forms in the *Book of Shadows*, a collection of ritual material originally compiled (or written) by Gerald Gardner and his fellow coven members. But rather than having a single definitive text, this “book” is passed down in manuscript form within groups, so that each one has its own version, which may change over the years as individuals copy it.¹⁶

The “Internet Book of Shadows,” a collection of material published on bulletin boards in the 1980s and 90s, includes at least two versions of the ritual. I

¹³ It is first given this name in Gardner’s *Witchcraft Today*. The name, though not the ritual itself, is based on elements of classical religion (Hutton 1999, 245). In a classical context it has negative connotations—a magician or witch wrenches the moon from its course (Edmonds 2019, 1–2, 3–4).

¹⁴ Questions about the sources and history of this ritual, and the various written versions of it, lie outside the scope of this essay. In particular, I do not propose to delve into the question of the degree to which Gerald Gardner took it from ancient sources or devised it himself or with the aid of his coven. I propose, rather, to consider merely the ritual itself in the form in which it is presented in the available texts and its metaphysical implications.

¹⁵ Other “drawing down” rituals also exist, allowing practitioners to invoke other divine figures in a similar way. For example, the High Priest may also “draw down” the Sun, allowing the God to become present to the coven. If both rituals are performed then the Goddess and God might be present at the same time. For simplicity’s sake I will focus primarily on Drawing Down the Moon, but I will refer to other related rituals where appropriate.

¹⁶ Heselton (2003, 273) likens the Book of Shadows to “a cookery book—and, moreover, a handwritten one where each individual puts down their favourite recipes”—an image which apparently goes back to Gardner himself (275).

give the shorter one—which allegedly goes back to Gardner’s coven in the 1940s—here:

High Priestess stands in front of Altar, assumes Goddess position (arms crossed). Magus, kneeling in front of her, draws pentacle on her body with Phallus-headed Wand, invokes, “I Invoke and beseech Thee, O mighty Mother of all life and fertility. By seed and root, by stem and bud, by leaf and flower and fruit, by Life and Love, do I invoke Thee to descend into the body of thy servant and High Priestess [name].” The Moon having been drawn down, i.e., link established, Magus and other men give Fivefold Kiss:

(kissing feet) “Blessed be thy feet, that have brought thee in these ways”;
 (kissing knees) “Blessed be thy knees, that shall kneel at the sacred altar”;
 (kissing womb) “Blessed be thy womb, without which we would not be”;
 (kissing breasts) “Blessed be thy breasts, formed in beauty and in strength”;
 (kissing lips) “Blessed be thy lips, that shall speak the sacred names.”

Women all bow.¹⁷

Another, widely-used version is found in Janet and Stewart Farrar’s *Eight Sabbats for Witches*, published in 1981.¹⁸ This ritual features lengthier prayers by the High Priest, but the overall form is the same, including the ritual kissing of the High Priestess and words spoken over the different parts of her body. In this version the words of invocation are slightly different:

“I invoke thee and call upon thee, Mighty Mother of us all, bringer of all fruitfulness; by seed and root, by bud and stem, by leaf and flower and fruit, by life and love do I invoke thee to descend upon the body of this thy servant and priestess.” (Farrar and Farrar 1984, 41)

Once this is complete, the High Priestess has (usually) entered a trance, and she is represented as having, in some sense, become the Goddess. This is made explicit in the next part of the ritual, the “Charge.” The High Priest says to the coven:

Listen to the words of the Great Mother; she who of old was also called among men Artemis, Astarte, Athene, Dione, Melusine, Aphrodite, Cerridwen, Dana, Arianrhod, Isis, Bride, and by many other names. (Farrar and Farrar 1984, 42)

The High Priestess then makes a speech—the “Charge of the Goddess”—which includes the following words:

¹⁷ <http://www.sacred-texts.com/pag/gbos/gbos01.htm>

¹⁸ This book is now out of print but was republished in 1984 as the first part of *A Witches’ Bible*, which is still widely used today. The description of the Drawing Down ritual appears on pp. 40–42 of the 1984 volume as part of the Opening Ritual.

Whenever ye have need of any thing, once in the month, and better it be when the moon is full, then shall ye assemble in some secret place and adore the spirit of me, who am Queen of all witches [. . .] I am the gracious Goddess, who gives the gift of joy unto the heart of man. Upon earth, I give the knowledge of the spirit eternal; and beyond death, I give peace, and freedom, and reunion with those who have gone before. (Farrar and Farrar 1984, 42-43)

These speeches are recited from memory. In some covens the High Priestess may also improvise speeches, sometimes including individual messages to particular coven members from the Goddess. In these cases the High Priestess, during the ceremony, is not merely the focus of Goddess worship but functions rather as an oracle of the Goddess.

The ritual concludes with the High Priest and Priestess embracing each other and releasing the presence of the Goddess back into the earth. The trance ends and the High Priestess is herself again, and the ceremony continues with her speaking and acting as herself.

The belief

Both the ritual itself, with the kissing and invocation, and the Charges that follow, make it clear that the High Priestess is identified with the Goddess. Her body parts are those of the Goddess and she speaks as the Goddess, in the first person. I asked Oakley-Harrington whether devotees believe the High Priestess is literally the Goddess at this moment, or whether it should be interpreted purely symbolically:

For us it's a metaphysical thing that is happening. Somebody who was reductive could of course explain it all [as purely figurative or imaginary], but that's not how we view it. That is absolutely not how we view it.

Q: You're not like sort of hardline Protestants who say, "It's not really the body and blood of Christ, it's merely a memorial."

OH: Right. We are totally Catholic! Yes! We are abso-totally Catholics on that.

We can restate this as the first key doctrine about the Drawing Down ritual:

(DD1) During the ritual, the Goddess is really present in the High Priestess, such that when the High Priestess speaks and acts, the Goddess is the one who speaks and acts.

When I refer to "the High Priestess" here, I mean this to be neutral on whether the High Priestess herself is still present. It could be that the Goddess is the only person there, having taken over the High Priestess's body, and the person of the High Priestess is no longer present. Some Wiccans, particularly in America, do believe

this. Jason Mankey, offering an extended reflection on the experience of participating in a ritual of this kind, writes:

When a High Priestess (or Priest) draws down the moon she literally draws the Goddess inside of herself. Once the Goddess is there, the Priestess is absent, and the Goddess speaks through her daughter and interacts with those around Her.¹⁹

He adds:

When my wife does it there's usually a moment in there when I know my wife's gone and that The Goddess is the one looking back at me. Sometimes that lasts only for a few moments, and then I look into my wife's eyes and simply see a mortal. . . .²⁰

So for Mankey, the High Priestess actually disappears and is replaced by the Goddess. It is a case of spirit possession.²¹ Cohen and Barrett have argued that trances of possession are commonly interpreted as cases of displacement in different religious traditions throughout the world because the concept reflects "basic human social-cognitive architecture" (Cohen and Barret 2008, 247). If this is so, it is unsurprising to find neo-pagans interpreting rituals of this kind in this way.

Philosophically speaking, it seems to me that displacement is straightforward to understand, at least if one is a substance dualist. One might say that the soul of the individual is temporarily disconnected from her body and replaced by the entity doing the possession, who then bears whatever relation the soul normally does to the body, moving and speaking through the body directly. However, although Drawing Down is often regarded as displacement in American Wicca, this is not the case in the UK, as Oakley-Harrington stresses:

That way of describing it [as displacement] is very new and very American, and has only arisen since the florescence of voodoo into wider culture. Just sayin'! There is another school of thought, which is the school of thought from which I come, where a lot of what I'm saying verbally is not articulated but is implicit [. . .] The central thing is that we're not displaced. We are not displaced.

For Oakley-Harrington, the High Priestess is instead transformed:

Her consciousness becomes the Goddess' consciousness. So the Priestess herself is at one and the same time in her body, speaking those words, but her consciousness is simultaneously hugely, hugely, hugely encompassing the whole of the night sky. For us the night sky is the emblematic talisman of eternity and the mystery. And the moon is a light in that night sky . . . in the

¹⁹ <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/panmankey/2012/11/drawing-down-the-moon-part-one/>

²⁰ <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/panmankey/2012/11/drawing-down-the-moon-part-two/>

²¹ On the concept of spirit possession in general, see Johnson (2011) and Cohen and Barrett (2008).

drawing down we open up—again in my experience it’s usually through the back—the whole back of my head just opens up into the night sky—the whole back of my *being* opens up into the night sky. I’m always reminded of this when I see images of the Virgin Mary wearing that blue cloak with the stars. I’m like, “It feels like that to me, you know!” And what is left of me and my consciousness is this mask that is my face and this front of me. It does feel like a mask, and I can see the eye holes. My consciousness has just gone way, way back, and I see the back of the mask of my face and I see the eye holes, and I see my mouth, and these words are coming out of it. And through those eye holes I can see the ceremony. But where I’m actually situated is so, so far back. So my self is still there, but I’m not residing up close at the front of where I’m looking at you, I’ve gone back, and it’s gone much, much, much bigger.

So where Mankey reports feeling completely absent during his trances, and lacking any memory of what has happens, Oakley-Harrington reports something more complex: she is still present, and aware of what is happening as a participant, but at the same time has an awareness of transcending her human self and being part of something much greater.

Vivianne Crowley describes the experience in a very similar way:

My awareness of the people around me faded, I felt my body grow taller . . . I was becoming the World Tree. My feet were rooted in the Earth, my arms were branches that touched the arch of heaven and around my head swirled the stars. I lost all sense of self—my body was empty, a vacuum waiting to be filled . . . I felt the power—Her power—flow through me and out into the circle. My consciousness was dissolving into unity. There was no longer any “I” and “other”—only “She”. (Crowley 1990: 60-61)

Although Crowley speaks of her body becoming “empty” here, it is clear that she does not envisage that her own consciousness has simply vacated it—rather, it has expanded to become unified with the Goddess.

Oakley-Harrington stresses that for other coven members, there is a strong sense of witnessing a transformation at the moment of Drawing Down:

[P]eople who are watching that happen, coven members and myself as a coven member as well, very, very common, not all the time, not every time, when we’re watching that happen, we’re watching the Priest invoke on the Priestess, we’re watching the Priestess transform and speak, she seems to change. Her face seems to change, to us. What we see is the face changing. And the atmosphere changes, the whole space changes. It gives us—I’m speaking now about what it’s like to experience it as someone who’s in the coven—suddenly the room feels like—you have that person who you know and love, that woman who you know and love, you hear her voice saying these amazing words, these words of tremendous wisdom and eternal truth that you love, they’re beautiful poetry, and she is at the same time everything

beyond herself. And for me it's a feeling of tremendous gratitude to that woman, to that Priestess, because she is bringing the Goddess into the room. So we do an act of adoration, an act of homage, what the Hindus would call Bhakti, you know, devotion, both to her divinity and to what she's bringing through. So we're honouring the divinity in her and also that which is completely beyond us all and humbles us. It's very . . . *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* territory.

Like most mystical experiences, this resists rational dissection. But we can safely infer at least a second key doctrine from it:

(DD2) During the Drawing Down ritual, the High Priestess remains really present and embodied.

If the Goddess and the High Priestess are both present in the same body, what is their relation to each other? The most obvious interpretation, at least to me, is that the High Priestess has simply transformed into the Goddess—that “the Goddess” is a name for the High Priestess in a certain state. That would suggest that the Goddess does not exist when this ritual is not being performed, but comes into being as she is invoked in the body of the High Priestess. But Oakley-Harrington rejects that interpretation:

It feels like—to use my own jargon—I'm connecting with the Goddess. I'm reaching back to how it felt when she and I were merged before. And it always starts from the same place, it feels like, spatially—like it's my back, the eternal night sky—and she's there, I see the moon, I feel the moon, it comes in my head, it comes in my heart, then there's the moonlight, then there's the blackness. And my breathing slows, it slows and slows, and the part of me that's here and present and conscious goes, “OK, just remember the first line”—we call those speeches “Charges.” And then . . . So if she were to speak, she would be saying, “Ah, it's you again. Hello.”

Q: So the Goddess is an objective entity who exists even when you're not [doing the ritual]?

OH: Yes.

Q: Even if no Priestess in the world were doing this, the Goddess would still be there?

OH: Yes, the Goddess would still be there. She's there all the time. I'm speaking from within the religion now. Yes, she's there all the time. And we view it as the job of the Wicca—it is our job to bring her into this world. And one of the ways that we do that is by drawing her into our bodies, merging our consciousness with hers, and manifesting her towards this plane.

For Oakley-Harrington, then, the ritual should be interpreted not as the High Priestess being straightforwardly transformed into the Goddess but as uniting with the Goddess. In initiatory Wicca, this is possible in part because all human beings are regarded as divine in their own right, which means that there is no great gulf between the divine and the human to start with. Moreover, the High Priestess has a special status in addition to this:

[The High Priestess] has had a transmission of energy happen in the ceremony that elevated her to that higher rank. So she has had an influx of some ineffable energy that we never over-define—we call it “power”, almost an electrical current of energy—from the guardians of the tradition and the gods.

Q: So that’s something she has just sort of permanently?

OH: She has that permanently.

Q: And that’s not just a sort of rank, like being a bishop as opposed to a priest? It’s actually metaphysical in nature?

OH: It’s metaphysical in nature. We call it having had the power passed to her. And that passing of power happens through the initiations, and it happens both from the inner planes and from her initiators. So we have a belief that again we don’t over-articulate, but we understand that when we give somebody that higher rank they’re ready to handle that energy.

This leads to a subtle tension. On the one hand, something special and distinct occurs during the Drawing Down ritual, when the Goddess becomes present in a way in which she is not normally present. On the other hand, the divine is always present in the High Priestess, partly due to her nature as a human being and partly due to the power she has received at her initiation. So although Oakley-Harrington is keen to stress the unusually real presence of the Goddess during the ritual, she is more reluctant to consider her relative absence at other times:

Q: When you are in the Drawing Down state, would you say that you *are* the Goddess? That you are one and the same person?

OH: Yes.

Q: But at other times you’re not?

OH: [long pause] . . . correct.

Q: But you’re hesitant about saying that?

OH: I am! I am. Um . . . I am. [laughs] I think the relationship between the individual and the Goddess is like the relationship between being fully awake

and fully asleep. There's a lot of in between states. And are you ever fully awake and are you ever fully asleep? [..]

Q: Maybe you could say that it's one thing to be divine, and it's another thing, a distinct thing, though not totally different, to be the Goddess?

OH: Yes. Yes!

Q: So normally you're divine . . .

OH: Yes. Me and everybody else!

Q: Everyone's divine, but at certain moments you temporarily become identical with the Goddess.

OH: Yes. Yes, that is true.

This gives us our third key doctrine:

(DD3) During the Drawing Down ritual, the High Priestess and the Goddess are identical, constituting one and the same person.

Drawing Down and incarnation

I have identified three key beliefs articulated by Oakley-Harrington:

(DD1) During the ritual, the Goddess is really present in the High Priestess, such that when the High Priestess speaks and acts, the Goddess is the one who speaks and acts.

(DD2) During the Drawing Down ritual, the High Priestess remains really present and embodied.

(DD3) During the Drawing Down ritual, the High Priestess and the Goddess are identical, constituting one and the same person.

There is an obvious parallel to the Christian doctrine of incarnation. Christian orthodoxy insists that Christ is really divine; Christ is really human; and that Christ is only one person, who is both Jesus and the Son. So the High Priestess and the Goddess are analogues, to some degree, of the human Jesus and the divine Son. The parallel has not gone unnoticed: Gardner himself wrote that in this ritual "the High Priestess is regarded as the incarnation of the goddess" (1954, 24). Gardner could hardly have been unaware of the Christian overtones of the term "incarnation." Ronald Hutton, similarly, describes the ritual as signifying "the union of human and divine feminine" (1999, 245). Apart from the word "feminine," this phrase could be a classic statement of the Christian doctrine of incarnation. For these writers, the

Wiccan ritual is understood at least partly and implicitly by reference to Christian doctrine.²²

Analytic theologians have spent much time examining the doctrine of incarnation and articulating ways in which it could be true that Christ is fully divine, fully human, and a single person.²³ It is tempting to carry these straight over to the Drawing Down ritual. But there are key differences between Christian incarnation and Wiccan Drawing Down.

First, the incarnation is permanent, but the union in Drawing Down is temporary. Second, the incarnation is unique, but the union in Drawing Down occurs multiple times, both with the same individual and with others.²⁴ These two differences need not be too fundamental. Not all Christian authors think that the incarnation is necessarily permanent, for example.²⁵ And not all think that the Son could not have become incarnate multiple times had he so chosen (Le Poidevin 2011).

But there are more serious differences as well. The third one is that the incarnation is a union between a pre-existing individual (the Son) and a non-pre-existing individual (Christ's human nature), but the union in Drawing Down is between two individuals who both pre-exist (the Goddess and the High Priestess).

These differences preclude some models of incarnation from being viably applied to Drawing Down. Some philosophers and analytic theologians have conceived of incarnation as a matter of the Son's being transformed into a human being—whether that be a human soul (Swinburne 1994, 192–200) or a living human body (Merricks 2007, 294–99), depending on one's view of what a human being actually is. If Christ's human nature does not exist before the union, it is at least coherent to suppose that the way it comes into existence is by the Son's being transformed into it (though there may of course be other issues with such a notion). But in the case of Drawing Down, it is clearly incoherent to suppose that the Goddess is transformed into the High Priestess, since the High Priestess already exists, and the notion of something being transformed into something else that already exists is absurd.

If any model of incarnation could be applied to Drawing Down, then, it would have to be a compositionalist model, according to which Christ's human nature is a concrete particular which is *distinct from* the Son but *united to* him in such a way that the Son can be called human. Christ is thus conceived as a composite, with a divine part and a human part.²⁶ Something similar could occur with Drawing Down.

²² To my knowledge, however, no-one has compared Drawing Down to the Christian doctrine of incarnation beyond this use of the word. Joanne Pearson describes the Drawing Down ritual in her study of the influence of Christianity upon Wicca (2007, 71–73), but even she does not consider its similarities to Christian incarnation, instead relating it to Schleiermacher's emphasis on the role of the experience of the divine.

²³ I have given an overview of these in Hill (2011).

²⁴ In these respects, Drawing Down resembles the Eucharist more than it does incarnation. But there is no space here to develop this parallel further.

²⁵ See Swinburne (1994, 236), for example. I have argued, though, that a permanent incarnation makes much more sense (Hill 2012, 6–8).

²⁶ For examples of this approach in contemporary analytic theology, see among others Leftow (2002), Senor (2007), Le Poidevin (2009), Crisp (2011b), and Flint (2011).

The pre-existent Goddess could unite the High Priestess to herself temporarily, and this would not preclude her from doing so on multiple occasions or from uniting other High Priestesses to herself, possibly at the same time. Oakley-Harrington agreed with me that compositionality is, in some respects, an appropriate model for Drawing Down, precisely because it respects the true humanity and distinctive personality of the High Priestess:

. . . [In Drawing Down] there is something absolutely divine which is absolutely in the body and there is something absolutely individual and absolutely beyond the individual happening in a nugget, in a coming together.

Q: So in that respect it's very similar [to compositionalist models of incarnation].

OH: In that respect it is very similar, because we have a body, we have a person, we have a recognisable person. We don't say the Priestess has transcended her personality. So it's not like Indian guru territory. We're not saying, "Oh, she's so evolved that she can incarnate the Goddess and when she speaks the divine is speaking."²⁷

But the manner of this union must be different from that posited by Christian compositionality. Under compositionality, Christ's human nature is, in its intrinsic properties, no different from any human being (if it were, then Christ would not be truly human). It would seem, then, that Christ's human nature should simply *be* a human being. But orthodoxy resists this, because then the human nature would be a person distinct from the Person of the Son, and that is the Nestorian heresy. A common solution is to say that what prevents the human nature from counting as a human person in its own right is that it exists in a state of union with the Son, whose personhood overrides any potential rival personhood within the union (e.g., Leftow 2002, 280–82; Crisp 2011b, 56–60).

Orthodox Christian theologians also generally hold that it follows from this that there can never have been a time when Christ's human nature was not united to the Son. If there had been such a time, then at that time there would have been nothing blocking the human nature from being a human person just like everyone else—it is only the union with the Son that does that. And that means that when this pre-existent human nature did become united to the Son, either there would have been two persons in the incarnation (which is the Nestorian heresy) or the human nature would have to cease being a person at this point.²⁸ But for something that is a person to cease being a person is for a person to go out of existence. That would effectively mean that Jesus was killed when the Son became incarnate in him—

²⁷ Of course, an orthodox Christian would say that when Christ speaks, the divine *is* speaking. I take Oakley-Harrington's meaning here to be that Wiccans do not think that the Goddess simply swamps the High Priestess such that the High Priestess's humanity and distinctive personality are lost.

²⁸ Thomas Aquinas makes effectively this point at *Summa Theologiae* III q. 4 a. 2; also q. 6 a. 3, where he argues that Christ's soul could not have existed before the union, on similar grounds.

obviously an unthinkable conclusion (Leftow 2002, 280). Therefore, the union must have begun at the precise moment when Christ's human nature came into existence. It began to exist *as* united to the Son, presumably at conception.

This leads us to the fourth difference between incarnation and Drawing Down: the incarnation is a union between a person (the Son) and something that is not and never was a person (the human nature), but the union in Drawing Down is between two persons. This presents us with a problem that is distinctive to Drawing Down, and not found in incarnation.

Personhood and split minds

Consider the following claims about the High Priestess (HP) and the Goddess (G):

- (1) Before, during, and after the ritual, HP is a person.
- (2) Before, during, and after the ritual, G is a person.
- (3) Before and after the ritual, HP and G are different persons.
- (4) During the ritual, HP and G are the same person.
- (5) During the ritual, neither HP nor G ceases to exist.
- (6) After the ritual, no person ceases to exist.
- (7) If two persons unite to become a single person, one of them must cease to be a person.

This is an inconsistent set of claims. (7) rules out the possibility that (1), (2), (4), and (5) can all be true. But a Wiccan—at least one who interprets the ritual as Oakley-Harrington does—is committed to (1)–(6). It seems, then, that she must reject (7).

But (7) underlies the logic behind the Christian doctrine that Christ's human nature never existed before the union. As we saw above, that reasoning assumes that, if it had, then *either* it would have continued to be a person during the union *or* it would cease to be a person during the union—neither of which is acceptable. Consider, for example, Aquinas' argument:

Now a person in human nature is not presupposed to assumption; rather, it is the term of the assumption, as was said [III q. 3 a.2]. For if it were presupposed, it must either have been corrupted—in which case it was useless; or it remains after the union—and thus there would be two persons, one assuming and the other assumed, which is false . . . (ST III q. 4 a. 2)

Neither Aquinas nor anyone else who relies on this argument entertains the possibility that Christ's human nature might exist before the union as a person and

then join with the divine nature to constitute a single person without either of them ceasing to be a person. But that is exactly what is supposed to happen in Drawing Down.

So it looks like the Wiccan is committed to a rather different view of personhood from the Christian, one which allows for the denial of (7). The doctrine of incarnation developed with a classical concept of persons as substances: that is, discrete concrete individuals. To say that Christ is a single person, for example, is to say that he is a single individual substance of a certain kind. And two substances of the same kind cannot unite to become a single substance of that same kind without at least one of them ceasing to belong to that kind, which is the general principle underlying (7).

But the Wiccan claims (1)–(6) rule out (7) and the principle of persons-as-classical-substances that underlies it. They envisage the possibility of persons *merging* without ceasing to exist: two persons can exist quite distinctly, then merge into one, and then separate again. That would require either a non-classical understanding of substances or a denial that persons are substances. Oakley-Harrington agreed with me that this was quite a distinctive way of thinking about persons, and one which she accepted:

Q: During the ceremony, like you said, you feel you have united with a pre-existing person and become a single person together. So at that moment, if it's gone as well as it can go, there's only one person there. There isn't the Priestess and the Goddess.

OH: Yes. We are . . . but I'm not killed.

Q: Exactly, you're not killed! You don't cease to exist.

OH: I don't cease to exist! Yes, there's been a merging. The raindrop has merged with the ocean. But the raindrop doesn't exist as a separate thing. But the water . . . the only thing that's gone is the separation.

Q: Right. The molecules of that drop are still there. They're just not separated any more.

OH: Yes, yes.

Q: So it's an interesting philosophical thought experiment. If you accept that, then you're kind of committing to quite a fluid view of what persons are.

OH: Yes!

Q: And the idea that two persons could sort of merge, without either of them ceasing to exist, they kind of become a greater whole or something like that—and then they can split off again.

OH: Yes! Oh yes, yes. Absolutely. I'm totally with that.

If we take the water analogy seriously, we can distinguish between a *person* and the *constituents* of that person, just as we can distinguish between a volume of water and the tiny particles of water that constitute it. The constituents of person A can be incorporated into person B and come to constitute B together with the original constituents of B. But what are these constituents? Not physical, presumably. We could think instead in terms of *mental* constituents, and here the work of analytic theologians on the doctrine of incarnation again gives us resources to draw on.

According to many Christian theologians, Christ had a divine mind and a distinct human mind as well. There are different ways of articulating the relation between them, but one way is to appeal to “containment”: the divine mind “contains” the human mind. This means different things to different writers. For some, “containment” is an accessing relation: it means that the divine mind can access the contents of the human mind, but not vice versa.²⁹ For others, it is a mereological relation: the human mind is a proper part of the divine mind.³⁰

Suppose we apply the mereological version of the two-minds theory to Drawing Down. We could say that during the ceremony, the mind of the High Priestess becomes part of the mind of the Goddess, such that the High Priestess's thoughts and other mental furniture are the Goddess's. When the High Priestess thinks, the Goddess thinks. However, there is a crucial difference. In discussions of incarnation, the two-minds theory is always used to stress a phenomenological gap between Christ's human consciousness and his divine one. In classical accounts, Christ's human knowledge is distinct from his divine knowledge, and there are some things that, as man, Jesus does not know—although he knows everything humanly possible. In modern accounts, the divide is typically wider still, with Jesus being limited in his human knowledge to what any ordinary person in the first century might have known, and perhaps also believing many falsehoods.³¹ So although there is unity of person in Christ, there is disunity of consciousness, if one accepts the two-minds theory.

This does not apply to Drawing Down. As we have seen, Oakley-Harrington and others stress the *continuity* of consciousness between the human and divine. When the High Priestess unites with the Goddess, she is aware of the Goddess's consciousness and experiences it as her own. If, then, the High Priestess's mind has become a proper part of the Goddess's, it must be in a way that does not insulate the other parts of the Goddess's mind off from it. The totality of the Goddess's experience is available to the High Priestess—or, at least, more of it than just her own human part.

A natural way of fleshing this out might be to appeal to a bundle theory of the self, like that of David Hume. For Hume, the “self” consists of a bundle of perceptions, and nothing else—there is no additional “self” that “has” those

²⁹ Morris (1986, 102–07) implies such a relation; Sturch (2003) endorses it explicitly.

³⁰ Bayne (2001) interprets it like this, but argues that such a model is incoherent.

³¹ See, for example, Oliver Crisp's “kryptic” account (2007, 147–53).

perceptions. Then one might see the merging of persons fairly straightforwardly as the subsuming of one bundle into another.

However, when I put this to Oakley-Harrington, she rejected it:

I would say no to that [Humean bundle theory].

Q: Why?

OH: Because there is a consciousness that inhabits every individuated bundle. And that consciousness is going to zoom out into the Goddess, or the God, or something, maybe it's beyond gender. But I'm a cisgender woman so I'm going to speak as I experience. I can't universalise beyond myself with that. So I'm going to go back into the Goddess. So there's going to be something that has a sense of "I-ness" in another incarnation. So I believe in individual consciousness, but that it merges into a collective consciousness that is sacred and divine and is somehow the Goddess. So in that sense, me having this conversation and worrying about the dog and worrying about dinner time and blah blah blah, the trains to Woolwich and all that, and my beautiful philosophical thoughts, is not just a bundle of experiences. There is something with agency, something which I experience as a self, and you experience as your self, but at a certain point . . . I get that from Drawing Down, partly from just having general mystical experiences—I think everybody has mystical experiences that sense of seeing, and aliveness—the individuated part of it is temporary but the fact of it is not.

Q: So the self must be porous in a sort of way. Selves can merge and split . . .

OH: Yes, yes, yes.

Q: It's not like a discrete substance like Descartes thought.

OH: No, no. But there is something with agency, that survives and that we merge back into and that will re-individuate lots and lots. In that sense I am speaking as a Wiccan, not just as myself. That is pretty much all through our theology implicitly.

Q: The not-discreteness of persons?

OH: Yes, the non-discreteness of persons, for sure.

Oakley-Harrington's emphasis on *agency* as the criterion of personhood is striking. Orthodox Christianity states that although Christ is a single person, he has two centres of agency, or wills. The reasoning is that if he had only a single one, it would be divine, and he would lack a human will and therefore not be fully human.

However, I do not think that this would be compatible with the account of Drawing Down that Oakley-Harrington gives. The two-will account of Christ—

dyotheletism—is coherent because it rests upon the view that Christ’s two minds are quite distinct and can therefore contain two distinct wills. That is, one cannot hold a containment-as-mereology account of the two minds while also holding dyotheletism. If one did, then Christ’s divine mind would contain two wills—its own divine will, and the human will that is part of his human mind, which on this account is itself part of the divine mind—and that seems to me to be incoherent. I cannot make sense of the claim that one mind contains two wills. To be orthodox, then, a Christian theologian needs to reject the containment-as-mereology account.

But I have suggested that containment-as-mereology *is* suitable for Drawing Down: we can suppose that the High Priestess’s mind becomes part of the Goddess’s mind. If this is so, then there cannot be two centres of action—one in the High Priestess’s human mind and one in the Goddess’s mind. But the High Priestess must retain agency or she would not be a person at all throughout this process, which would contradict our claim (5) above. How can this be?

One possible answer would be to adopt an account of agency according to which it emerges from other mental phenomena and events. On this view, there is no such thing as “the will” conceived as a distinct mental faculty that makes choices. Rather, we have certain desires and certain perceptions, and the combination of these determines what we choose. If I wish to achieve a goal, and I perceive that a certain course of action is the best way (in whatever sense of “best” most appeals to me), there is really nothing more to deciding to take it. That perception determines my decision—or perhaps, more simply still, it *is* my decision. I have argued elsewhere, in quite a different context, that an account of decision-making along these lines can fulfill Donald Davidson’s widely accepted criteria for legitimately saying that a person performed an act for a reason (1963), and that consequently one can meaningfully speak of *my* actions or *your* actions. One can go further and provide a reasons-responsive account of moral responsibility that can explain why I am genuinely responsible for my actions, and you are for yours, without having to invoke a distinct faculty called “the will” to account for those actions.³² On this view, I am morally responsible for my actions to the degree to which they are caused by a process which is reasons-responsive—that is, that process would not have brought about the action in question had I not had the reasons I did have for doing it.

A theory of action and moral responsibility of this kind is compatibilist: it is intended to explain how we can be morally responsible for our actions even if those actions are wholly determined by prior events. But it seems to me to be very well suited to a fluid view of personhood. It is hard to maintain a belief in a distinct faculty of will—or any distinct mental faculties—if one thinks of persons as able to fragment, split, and merge, without losing their personhood. Yet Wiccans, like most religious people, want to believe that persons are morally responsible agents.³³ An

³² On reasons-responsive theories, see Fischer and Ravizza (1998). I have argued for the coherence of this account of moral responsibility elsewhere in a different context (Hill 2019, 188–99).

³³ Wiccan ethical teaching revolves around the “Wiccan rede,” a simple moral rule, which takes various forms but is typically quoted as: “An ye harm none, do as ye will.” It was probably formulated by Doreen Valiente, who first articulated it publicly in 1964 (Holzer 1971, 128).

account like this allows them to do so while preserving the distinctively fluid understanding of persons that their theology demands.

Conclusion

Space constraints mean that this attempt at Wiccan analytic theology has to remain very preliminary. But I have argued that there are key similarities between the ritual of Drawing Down the Moon and the Christian doctrine of incarnation, which would allow Wiccan analytic theologians to draw upon the resources that Christian analytic theologians have developed in order to formulate an account of their own belief. At the same time, though, there are important differences, leading to distinctive issues arising from the Wiccan practice. I have argued that the *way* in which the union of the High Priestess to the Goddess is conceived—as a temporary expansion of the former’s consciousness—is best allied to a fundamentally bundle-based account of personhood and a reasons-responsive account of moral responsibility. This is not to say that it *requires* such accounts, but they seem to me to fit most easily with Wiccan theology.

I hope that this preliminary sketch has, at the very least, demonstrated the viability of doing philosophical theology with the Wiccan tradition, especially in the dialogic form I have used here, and that it will encourage others to develop Wiccan philosophical theology further.³⁴

³⁴ I would like to thank colleagues who commented on a version of this paper presented at the University of Exeter in 2019. I would also like to thank the organisers of the “Diversifying Analytic Theology” competition for their encouragement of developing our sub-discipline in new directions of this kind. And most of all, of course, I would like to thank Christina Oakley-Harrington for being so generous with her time and expertise, and everyone at Treadwell’s for their friendship and instruction over many years.

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